



## Social Challenges Screening Questionnaire (SCSQ) Project

### Frequently Asked Questions

The following are questions that other community members have already asked, and responses have been prepared to deepen your knowledge of the project.

#### **What is/Who is SARRC?**

The Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC) is an internationally recognized nonprofit that conducts innovative research, provides evidence-based treatments, and through education builds inclusive (or supportive) communities for people with autism.

Learn more at: <https://www.autismcenter.org/>

#### **What is SARRC's relationship to GH?**

SARRC and Great Hearts often work together in support of the Great Hearts community, specifically work aimed at improving Great Hearts' skill at working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). SARRC has been called on by various GH academies to provide general training to GH teachers and staff and offer specific support for particular students.

Additionally, Archway Classical Academy Veritas and Archway Classical Academy Chandler participated in the original research that led to the development of the Social Challenges Screening Questionnaire (SCSQ). At this time, Great Hearts is stepping up to assist SARRC directly in another research project which is focused on the positive impact of universal screening for social challenges in public schools. SARRC, for their part, is stepping up tremendously to provide a broad menu of free training and professional development for Great Hearts teachers so that we can serve all students better.

#### **What is the SCSQ? What kinds of questions does it ask? Can I see a copy?**

The SCSQ is the "Social Challenges Screening Questionnaire," and it is a 15-question survey that your child's teacher will complete. SARRC developed this questionnaire through the course of their research on early identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in connection with how children who experience social challenges are at-risk for mental health problems in adolescence and adulthood.

The SCSQ asks straightforward, "yes" or "no" questions about observable behaviors that SARRC has identified as differences shared by 80% of the sample population of students with ASD.

Please contact [tdoebler@greatheartsaz.org](mailto:tdoebler@greatheartsaz.org) if you'd like to see a copy of the screening form.

### **How many “yes” answers on the SCSQ mean my child is “flagged”?**

Six or more.

### **This sounds like you are screening all students for Autism. Explain how that’s not the case.**

Actually, that’s pretty much the idea. The SCSQ is not a diagnostic tool and cannot diagnose any disorder. However, the ADOS could be used to diagnose Autism in a school setting only, but not a clinical setting. However, this is not the goal of this project.

The goal of this project is to ensure that kids with social challenges do not slip through the cracks because the current tools at a school’s disposal are not sensitive enough. It is important to remember that ASD is a spectrum disorder characterized by social communication issues in combination with behavioral indicators, and that individuals fall all over the spectrum in terms of functioning. It is also important to remember that the issues with social communication and the behavioral indicators are only clinically classified as a “disorder” when they impair a person’s functioning.

There are children who may have challenges with social communication yet who do not struggle to the extent that they would be clinically “disordered.” Research suggests that early intervention with these children (i.e. basic instruction in specific strategies for interpersonal social interaction) can help prevent more significant issues later in life, including and especially mental health issues like anxiety and depression. This is why we’re partnering with SARRC. Their knowledge and resources will be put to good use to train our teachers to intervene early, and in authentic ways.

We know that this screening could lead to a child being assessed for and clinically diagnosed with ASD. We simply do not feel that is a problem; we’d rather know this about our students so that we know how to help them flourish.

### **How is confidentiality maintained?**

The results of the screening are collected via a form that is internal to Great Hearts. Parent consent is required before any information about a student’s screening is released to SARRC.

### **Explain exactly what happens after a child is “flagged” by the screening.**

All the responses to the questionnaires completed by the teachers will be reviewed by an administrator, similar to the 45-day screening. For the SCSQ project, this person is the SCSQ Project Manager. They will identify any student who has six or more “yes” responses and compile them into a list. Then, someone from the school or Great Hearts will reach out to the parents of each child who was flagged by the screening to share the results and next steps. If the parents choose to participate in the study, a representative from SARRC will follow up with the parents to discuss next steps and schedule the ADOS, and a professional from SARRC will come to the school to administer the ADOS to each child for whom permission is obtained.

Over the past four years that we have worked with SARRC, fewer than 4% of students screened were flagged by the SCSQ. Of that 4%, even fewer had not already been identified by Great

Hearts as students with educational needs. Great Hearts already has federally required programs in place to ensure we identify and evaluate students who struggle to the extent that they demonstrate a need for support. This work with SARRC has only reinforced the quality of our process.

### **What is the ADOS? How long does it take?**

The Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) is a formal assessment. Students interact with an experienced examiner who uses standardized play-based and interview scenarios that provide excellent opportunities for students to demonstrate their social communication. The ADOS is a standardized assessment that is only one part of the gold-standard evaluation for autism and should not be confused with a full clinical diagnostic evaluation for autism. When used alone it provides an excellent method to measure age-appropriate social functioning.

The ADOS takes 30-45 minutes to administer and requires parent consent prior to administration. Neither Great Hearts nor SARRC will proceed with administering this assessment without obtaining parent consent.

### **Explain exactly what happens after the ADOS is administered.**

The results of the ADOS will be shared with the parents and the school, and ESS faculty will follow up with the teachers of the student to determine the appropriate next steps. Next steps could include recommendations to parents and teachers for what might assist the student informally, referral to the Student Study Team (SST) to discuss a more formal intervention plan, referral to the 504 Coordinator for a possible 504 plan, or referral to evaluation for special education. Next steps are determined in conversation between the ESS Regional Coordinator, the classroom teacher, and any other person whose input is valuable, especially the child's parents; the central question is about whether there seems to be an educational impact on the child relative to the questions flagged, and what the child might need to navigate their educational experience in the school environment.

Additionally, SARRC has offered to provide an *optional* free assessment for any student who is flagged through this screening, regardless of the next steps recommended by the student's teacher.

Again, over the past four years that we have worked with SARRC, fewer than 4% of students screened were flagged by the SCSQ. Of that 4%, even fewer had not already been identified by Great Hearts as students with educational needs.

### **Why is Great Hearts doing this?**

In short, we believe that it is the right thing to do.

In more detail, we see the following as benefits to our schools, our communities, and most importantly, our students:

- The project raises these issues for discussion, and in a way (and with the resources) to make real change in our ability to serve all kids.

- The project will help our teachers understand their students better, especially those with autism and other related challenges
- The project brings our academies in closer partnership with SARRC, and helps us learn from top to bottom how to help our communities be more inclusive
- The project may help our schools identify and help specific students who have real social struggles, before their challenges cause real, lasting impact on their flourishing.

### **Will my child know they are being screened?**

No. This screening is a questionnaire completed by the teacher, much like the 45-day screening that all public schools are required to complete for incoming students.

### **What if I do not want my child screened?**

Participating in the screening is not mandatory, so please contact the school if you do not want your child screened. We do encourage you to allow participation, though. The results will give the school information on the direction or needed changes, if any, we should take to help our students be successful in navigating social situations.

### **Who is spearheading this initiative at Great Hearts? Who “owns” it?**

Currently, this initiative is spearheaded by the Great Hearts Exceptional Student Services team, which is responsible for the management of early intervention programs (SST), Section 504 programs, Special Education, and English Language Learner programs at Great Hearts.

### **Why did you choose these grade levels?**

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades in the lower school were selected because developmentally the social demands on children increase/shift around these age groups. Additionally, all students are screened on the 45 Day Screening in Kindergarten. Another rationale for choosing 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade was to ensure that students who were not identified previously were recognized before moving up to middle school or high school where the social demands increase.

Eighth grade students will be screened by teachers chosen by the academy to ensure the students’ social behavior has been able to be observed informally in the classroom.

### **How is GH/your academy preparing teachers who are being asked to respond to the questionnaire?**

Great Hearts will be providing training to all teachers who will be responsible for completing the SCSQ. This training will happen close to the time that they will be asked to complete the screening questionnaire. Because the screener was designed so that any lay person should be able to respond to it without guidance, the training will focus on the logistical process for completing the online screening for an entire class. The training will provide an opportunity to ask questions about any of the terminology if necessary (for example “unusual speech/facial expressions”), but this is not the focus of the training, as we are not expecting teachers to “look for” these behaviors in their students. The behaviors should be obvious enough that teachers

can recognize them when they read the question and consider their observations relative to the descriptions on the SCSQ.

**What kinds of training is SARRC providing to the teachers?**

SARRC is offering the following training as options for the academies participating in the research project:

- Broad all-staff training on working with kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder and more robust orientation and training on the screener for those teachers completing it
- Individualized consultation and training for teachers for specific students flagged by the screener and the ADOS (even if they were already identified by the school!)
- Optional training on a variety of more narrow topics related to teaching children with Autism

**Are there other Great Hearts schools participating in this project?**

Yes. There are currently fourteen academies participating in this project.