

SEL Classroom Observation Data

Insights Report

Full Year · 2025–2026 · 5 Program Managers · 25 Schools

Purpose of This Report

This document synthesizes classroom observation data collected across UA's network during the 2025–2026 school year. Observations were conducted by five program managers across 25 schools using two distinct rubrics: the SEL Positive Interactions rubric and the SEL Best Practices rubric. Together, they capture both the relational quality of classrooms and the degree to which SEL is being deliberately embedded in instruction.

All scores in this report are expressed as percentage of observable domains — that is, scored points divided by the number of domains actually observed, multiplied by the domain maximum. Observations where fewer than 5 of 8 domains were scored are flagged as limited observations and excluded from school and PM averages, as N/A reflects what could not be observed in a given lesson context, not a gap in teacher practice.

Data Overview

134 Positive Interactions observations 107 full · 27 limited	55.7% Positive Interactions network avg % of observable domains	63 SEL Best Practices observations 62 with 2+ domains scored	32.6% SEL Best Practices network avg % of possible score
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Observations were distributed across the year from October 2025 through June 2026. Grant Ave accounts for the largest share of SEL Positive Interaction observations (34), followed by SDC (15) and SLJ (7). AFL, GLO, SPA have the highest average scores on both rubrics; Grant Ave, AMS, PS 28 has the widest range.

The Two Rubrics

SEL Positive Interactions (8 domains, max 56)

Captures the relational and interactive quality of the classroom environment. Each of 8 dimensions is scored 0–7. Dimensions include Ease & Enjoyment, Problem Solving, Autonomy/Leadership, Peer Interactions, Feedback Loops, Student Responses, Encouragement/Affirmation, and Distributed Talk.

SEL Best Practices (3 domains, max 17)

Captures the degree to which SEL is deliberately embedded in instruction. Three dimensions are scored: Language/Modeling (0–9), Feedback & Reinforcement (0–4), and Lesson Integration (0–4). This rubric measures intentional instructional design, not just classroom climate.

Key distinction

Positive Interactions measures whether the classroom environment is productive and students and teachers are engaging with one another. Best Practices measures whether the teacher is using SEL on purpose. A school can score well on one and poorly on the other — and most do. The 23 percentage point gap between the two rubrics (55.7% vs. 32.6%) is the defining finding of this dataset.

SEL Positive Interactions

Dimension Averages

Across all 107 full observations, Ease & Enjoyment is the strongest dimension at 70% of its maximum. Peer Interactions is consistently the weakest at 48%.

Dimension	Avg (of 7)	% of Max
Ease & Enjoyment	4.89	70%
Feedback Loops	4.01	57%
Autonomy/Leadership	3.94	56%
Distributed Talk	3.89	56%
Encouragement/Affirmation	3.69	53%
Problem Solving	3.68	53%
Student Responses	3.65	52%
Peer Interactions	3.37	48%

Strength

Ease & Enjoyment (70%) signals that teachers across the network are creating positive, emotionally safe classrooms. This is the relational foundation that makes all other SEL work possible.

Coaching implication:

Schools are not starting from zero. They have real relational foundation. The next layer of work is about what happens *inside* that positive climate: are students talking to each other, solving problems together, making choices, and responding in substantive ways? PD and coaching should shift from building warmth, which is clearly present, to building structures that activate student agency and peer learning within warm classrooms

Areas for Improvement

Classroom observation is one of the most powerful tools available for understanding how SEL is actually being implemented, not just how schools describe it. Across this year's observations, a consistent pattern emerged: schools broadly affirm SEL as a priority, but observable, consistent practice across classrooms remains a work in progress. This data gives schools something concrete to work with — a mirror, not a judgment, showing which practices are taking hold and where intentional support is still needed.

This year we were able to observe 79% of our partner schools. As we enter the 2026–2027 school year, establishing a clear baseline of observable SEL practices across every partner school is the essential first step. Without it, we cannot measure growth, target coaching, or hold ourselves accountable to meaningful change. The goal is not to evaluate schools against an external standard, but to create a shared picture of current practice and build a concrete plan, together with each school, for deepening implementation throughout the year.

Explaining the significant gap between Ease and Enjoyment and all other dimensions

While teachers across the network are consistently creating warm, welcoming environments, the dimensions that follow — Problem Solving, Autonomy, Peer Interactions, Student Responses — all require teachers to release control, ownership and at times authority in the classroom and allow their students to control the conversation, own their thinking and the outcome that comes from that.

The gap suggests the network's classrooms feel good but may still be teacher-centered. Students are comfortable, but comfort is not the same as agency. The data points to a pattern where positive climate has been established without the corresponding shift toward student-driven learning and peer-to-peer interaction.

Three specific insights to consider:

First, **Peer Interactions at 48% is the floor** and it's the dimension most structurally dependent on teachers designing for it. Students don't naturally collaborate in academically productive ways without deliberate structures. Low Peer Interactions scores in high Ease & Enjoyment classrooms suggest teachers are warm and approachable but may not yet be building in structured peer learning routines.

Second, **Student Responses at 52% alongside high Ease & Enjoyment** suggests students feel safe enough to participate, but may not be doing so in deep or extended ways. The quality and depth of student talk, not just its presence is likely what's missing.

Third, **the gap may reflect an observation calibration issue worth exploring**. Ease & Enjoyment is the most visible, ambient dimension. It is present or absent the moment you walk into a room. The other dimensions require more deliberate observation over time within a lesson. If observers are more confident scoring Ease & Enjoyment than the more nuanced dimensions, scores on those dimensions may be systematically compressed. As a program team, we will need to re-examine and refine our observation practices to ensure we are spending sufficient time in classrooms to observe the domains we want to see.

School Results — Positive Interactions

Schools with 2 or more full observations (5+ domains scored), sorted by average percentage.

School	Full Obs (n)	Avg %	Note
AFL	3	76%	Consistently strong; top school network-wide
MAK	3	74%	Strong advisory practice
SDC	12	71%	Most-observed high-performing school
GLO	9	68%	Strong ELA and science classrooms
SLJ	5	65%	Consistent across subjects
SLE	2	63%	Stronger on SEL Practices — see gap analysis
A&T	7	62%	Missing data in some domains
SPA	5	61%	Strong interactions; low SEL Practices
UAI	5	57%	
PS 274	2	52%	Limited observations
Grant Ave	25	48%	Wide teacher-level variance (see below)
IS 229	4	46%	Uniform, flat scores — limited range
18K581	4	46%	
PS 132	2	41%	
Ps 256	3	37%	New partnership; developing
AMS	6	36%	Needs targeted support
PS 28	4	34%	New partnership; lowest Positive Interaction

Grant Ave — internal variance

Grant Ave has 25 full observations — the most in the network — but hides dramatic teacher-level variance. Rivera/Guerrero and Sena average above 60%; Tuitt/Bridgett and Bell consistently score below 40%. The school is not uniformly struggling: it has internal models of strong practice that are not yet spreading. Coaching should focus on teacher-to-teacher transfer, not school-level interventions.

SEL Best Practices

Domain Averages

The overall average of 32.6% reflects a network that is in early stages of intentional SEL integration. Language/Modeling is the most developed area; Feedback & Reinforcement is critically underdeveloped.

Domain	Max Score	Network Avg	% of Max
Language / Modeling	9	3.55	39%
Lesson Integration	4	1.26	32%
Feedback & Reinforcement	4	0.83	21%
Total	17	5.51	32%

Areas for Improvement

The original goal was to observe SEL practices in at least 80% of classrooms within each partner school. Given the significant variation in school size and the fact that this was the program team's first year conducting this type of structured observation, the target was adjusted to a minimum of ten classrooms per school. Even with that adjustment, no school met the ten-classroom threshold, and SEL Best Practices observations were completed in only 67% of partner schools, a notably lower reach than the Positive Interactions observations.

This gap is instructive. Conducting two separate observation protocols across a full school caseload proved difficult to sustain at scale, and collecting incomplete data at some schools limits what can be said with confidence about those sites. For 2026–2027, the priority should be integrating both observation types into a single, streamlined protocol so that interaction and best practices data are collected simultaneously, reducing observer burden while ensuring every school begins the year with a complete baseline picture of where SEL is and is not present in classrooms.

Feedback & Reinforcement is the lowest-scoring domain across the network, averaging just 21% of its possible score. At first glance, this suggests teachers are rarely using student behavior and responses as real-time opportunities to reinforce SEL skills — and that remains a genuine growth area. However, closer analysis of the rubric reveals an important design limitation: several behaviors in this domain are only observable when students engage in challenging or off-task behavior that requires redirection. This creates a ceiling problem — classrooms with strong SEL climates may score lower precisely because the behaviors the rubric is looking for are less likely to occur there.

This is a rubric validity issue, not just a practice gap. For the coming year, the Feedback & Reinforcement indicators will need to be revised to include behaviors observable in any classroom, regardless of whether challenging behavior is present. Revised indicators might capture how teachers respond to academic struggle, affirm student effort and risk-taking, or

use transitions and routines as SEL reinforcement moments — practices that reflect strong SEL integration without requiring a behavioral incident to prompt them.

Lesson Integration emerging but inconsistent

Despite the smaller sample, the data collected is directionally meaningful. Two patterns emerge consistently across schools: SEL practices are more visible in ELA and advisory settings than in math and science classrooms, and the practices most frequently observed are language and modeling — teachers naming emotions, using SEL vocabulary, and demonstrating positive communication. What is far less common is direct skill instruction: structured opportunities for students to practice empathy, perspective-taking, and decision-making in the moment. These patterns, even from a partial dataset, point clearly toward where coaching energy should be directed in the year ahead.

Lesson Integration averages 32% across the network, higher than Feedback & Reinforcement, but still far from consistent. The variation across classrooms tells an important story: SEL is showing up deliberately in some lessons, which means the capacity exists in the network. What is missing is the shared language, structures, and expectation that make it a reliable practice rather than an individual choice.

Integrating SEL into daily instruction is a distinct professional skill. It requires teachers to see their content not just as a subject to teach, but as a context for developing students' social and emotional competencies. That skill is not built through awareness alone. For 2026–2027, professional development should move beyond SEL as a concept and focus concretely on the instructional moves that make SEL visible in a lesson. Examples such as: how to frame a warm-up around self-awareness, how to use a discussion protocol that builds perspective-taking, how to close a class in a way that reinforces emotional regulation. The goal is to make SEL integration something teachers know how to do not just something they are asked to do.

School Results — SEL Best Practices

Schools with 2 or more observations, sorted by average percentage. Network average: 32.6%.

School	Obs (n)	Avg %	Strongest Domain
PS 35	2	82%	Language + Lesson Integration
AFL	3	73%	Language/Modeling
SLE	2	65%	Language/Modeling
Casimir Pulaski	2	56%	Language + Lesson Integration
GLO	6	52%	Language/Modeling
SDC	3	37%	Language/Modeling
MAK	6	33%	Lesson Integration (bulletin board)
Cedar Place	3	31%	Language/Modeling

PS 191	2	29%	Language + Lesson Integration
UAI	3	26%	Lesson Integration
SPA	4	25%	Language/Modeling
Restoration	2	24%	Language/Modeling
Hart	5	17%	All dimensions low
Ps 54	4	16%	Language/Modeling only
PS 399	5	15%	All dimensions low
IS 229	4	15%	Language/Modeling only
Ps 67	2	0%	No domains observed/scored

Hart, Ps 54, PS 399, IS 229 — immediate support needed

These four schools average below 17% and show near-zero scores on Feedback & Reinforcement and Lesson Integration. These sites require intensive coaching cycles and may benefit from a structured foundational SEL curriculum before the full rubric is applicable.

School Gap Analysis: Interactions vs. Best Practices

For the 13 schools observed on both rubrics, the gap between Positive Interaction and SEL Best Practice scores reveals which schools have relational foundations not yet converted into instructional SEL practice.

School	S1 %	S2 %	Gap (pp)	Interpretation
AFL	76%	73%	4	Balanced — strong on both
SLE	63%	65%	-2	Best Practices > Interaction — SEL embedded in instruction
GLO	68%	52%	16	Strong interactions; good Best Practices
Cloonan	51%	29%	22	Moderate gap
Restoration	53%	24%	30	Foundation present; embedding needed
UAI	57%	26%	31	Foundation present; embedding needed
IS 229	46%	15%	32	Low on both; different support needed
A&T	62%	29%	32	Strong interactions; needs Best Practices coaching
SPA	61%	25%	36	Strong interactions; needs Best Practices coaching
SDC	71%	37%	34	Strong interactions; needs Best Practices coaching
MAK	74%	33%	41	Large gap; high priority for Best Practices PD
Cedar Place	81%	31%	50	Largest gap in network
Ps 67	65%	0%	65	Best Practices data incomplete; return visit needed

AFL positioned as a potential showcase school

AFL is the only school scoring above 70% on both rubrics — 76% on Positive Interactions and 73% on Best Practices. Strong relationships and deliberate SEL instruction coexist here. It is important to observe in social studies, science and math classrooms to see if the high quality observed in ELA exists in other content areas as well. AFL should be positioned as a site visit and peer-learning destination for other teachers at AFL as well as program managers and educators from other schools.

SLE's negative gap is an important signal

SLE is the only school scoring higher on Best Practices than Positive Interactions— a rare profile that suggests intentional SEL instructional design is outpacing visible classroom interaction dynamics. Advisories at SLE are the likely driver. Worth exploring whether SEL practices in advisory are transferring into content classes.

The bridging group: SDC, MAK, SPA, Cedar Place, A&T

These schools score reasonably well on Positive Interactions (61–81%) but have Best Practice gaps of 33–50 points. They already have the relational foundation. The coaching move they need is specific: how to translate good relationships into deliberate SEL instructional design. This is a distinct skill from building climate and requires targeted PD, not more of the same.

Language & Modeling Domain — Behavior-Level Analysis

The Language/Modeling domain of SEL Best Practices was further analyzed at the individual behavior level. 116 instances of 9 specific behaviors were observed across the network during the year. These data reflect a single collection period (behaviors were not tracked as separate before/after periods).

Behavior	Obs	% of Total	Theme
Positive communication (active listening, using names, paraphrasing)	25	22%	Climate
Emotion check-ins & routines	14	12%	Climate
SEL vocabulary	13	11%	Modeling
Models positive self-talk & restorative dialogue	12	10%	Modeling
Encourages reflection on choices & consequences	12	10%	Student Application
Names emotions in self and students	11	9%	Modeling
Decision-making language	11	9%	Student Application
Perspective-taking / role-play	10	9%	Student Application
Explicitly asks students to practice empathy	8	7%	Student Application

Three themes — roughly balanced at baseline

Behaviors cluster into three themes: Teacher Modeling (36 obs, 31%), Classroom Climate & Connection (39 obs, 34%), and Student SEL Application (41 obs, 35%). The near-equal split is a healthy baseline profile — teachers are not only performing SEL but beginning to facilitate student practice.

Empathy and perspective-taking are the thinnest behaviors

The two behaviors that require structured interpersonal student practice — explicitly asking students to practice empathy (8 obs) and facilitating perspective-taking or role-play (10 obs) — are the least observed. These are also the hardest to implement in content classes. Coaching should help teachers identify low-lift entry points for these practices across subject areas.

Classroom Type Analysis

By Subject Area

ELA/Literacy and Advisory classrooms consistently outperform other subject areas on both rubrics. Math and Science are consistently below average on Sheet 2 even when acceptable on Sheet 1.

Subject	S1 Avg %	S2 Avg %	Pattern
ELA/Literacy	58%	59%	Strongest content area on both rubrics
Advisory	54%	52%	SEL natural fit; highest Best Practices among all types
Social Studies	56%	41%	Moderate on both
Science	55%	22%	Large gap; SEL integration low
Arts/Elective	38%	34%	Inconsistent; teacher-dependent
Math	48%	19%	Lowest Best Practices of any content area
Elementary	36%	17%	New partnerships; rubric fit may be limited

Advisory is the SEL sweet spot — by design

Advisory classrooms score 85% higher than content classes on Best Practices (52% vs. 28%). This is structurally expected — advisory is built for relational and SEL work. The strategic question is how to transfer advisory SEL habits into content instruction, where the vast majority of student contact time occurs.

Math and Science need a subject-specific PD track

Math averages 19% on Best Practices and Science 22% — the lowest of any content areas. These teachers may lack both the PD exposure and the curriculum hooks to integrate SEL language naturally into procedural or lab-based instruction. A subject-specific coaching approach is needed, not a generic SEL overlay.

Elementary rubric fit may be limited

The current rubrics appear designed primarily for secondary classroom contexts. Several elementary behaviors that represent strong developmental SEL practice (morning meetings, emotion wheels, classroom jobs, movement breaks) do not map cleanly onto the existing dimensions. UA should consider whether the rubrics need elementary-specific adaptations or companion tools.

Recommendations

1. Differentiate coaching by school profile

Three distinct coaching tracks are indicated by the data:

- Foundation track (AMS, PS 28, Ps 256, Hart, IS 229): Schools scoring below 40% on Positive Interaction. Focus on basic SEL climate, relational trust, and positive communication before addressing instructional integration.
- Bridge track (SDC, MAK, SPA, Cedar Place, A&T): Schools scoring 60%+ on Positive Interaction but below 35% on Best Practices. These schools have the relational foundation. Coaching should focus specifically on the instructional move from good climate to deliberate SEL design.
- Sustain and deepen track (AFL, GLO, SLE): Schools performing well on both rubrics. Focus on consistency across all teachers, peer-to-peer learning, and expanding SEL integration to all subject areas.

3. Use AFL as a network learning site

AFL is the only school scoring above 70% on both rubrics. It should be positioned as a site visit/showcase school. The teachers from the Advisory and ELA classes could lead PD for their colleagues on how to integrate SEL into their classrooms or have peers observe their classes.

4. Implement specific PD for Math and Science

Math (19%) and Science (22%) teachers are not currently integrating SEL into instruction at meaningful levels. Recommend schools implement our coaching module specifically designed for procedural and lab-based classrooms — with concrete examples of decision-making language, emotion check-ins, and peer collaboration in STEM contexts — is the highest-leverage PD investment for these teachers.

5. Address observation protocol gaps

- PMs establish baseline at the start of the year with all schools as a requirement
- Streamline observation rubrics to capture best practice and interactions simultaneously
- Record why a domain is N/A: distinguish between 'not applicable to this lesson type' and 'did not observe in the time window.' These are meaningfully different for coaching purposes.
- Aim for at least 2 visits per teacher across different lesson types to build a complete profile. A single observation — especially of a single lesson type — cannot capture the full range of a teacher's SEL practice.

6. Develop elementary-specific observation tools

Review current observation rubrics to ensure indicators are appropriate for each grade level and adjust for elementary vs secondary where appropriate

7. Establish the next observation cycle as a true comparison period

This is the first year of complete data collection. The network now has a baseline. To make this data actionable for trend analysis, the next observation cycle should use the same rubrics with the same protocol, target the same schools and teachers where possible, and be analyzed against this year's figures. Without a second data point, the current scores cannot tell us whether the network is improving, holding, or declining.