

Overview of the Classroom Sensory Cart Initiative

The Classroom Sensory Cart brings sensory supports directly into instructional spaces to promote regulation, focus, engagement, and well-being. Designed for use by both students and instructors, the cart offers tactile, visual, and cultural sensory tools that promote comfort, belonging, and academic engagement while helping normalize sensory support in the classroom.



How Instructors Participate

Prior to the start of each semester, instructors may apply to use a Classroom Sensory Cart for the full term in their in-person class(es). The application asks instructors to describe how they plan to use the cart to support teaching and student learning, such as reducing anxiety, improving focus, or facilitating breaks. Instructors also share their anticipated schedule of use, storage and maintenance plan, and agreement to distribute student surveys throughout the semester and complete an instructor feedback survey at the end of the term. This process helps ensure that carts are used intentionally, maintained responsibly, and continuously improved through student and instructor feedback.

About This Guide

This guide is intended to help instructors understand the Classroom Sensory Cart initiative, review student and instructor feedback, and identify practical strategies for introducing sensory supports in their classes. The first sections summarize feedback from previous semesters; the later sections provide implementation strategies, sample facilitation language, and item descriptions.

What's Included in the Cart

The Classroom Sensory Cart includes sensory tools such as calm strips, breathing cards, various fidgets, gum drops, stretchy strings, sensory bottles, liquid tiles, coloring supplies, and cultural sensory supports.

You can view the full [inventory](#) with item descriptions.

What Students Are Telling Us

Student feedback (n = 129) from Fall 2025 and Spring 2026 provides insight into how students experienced the Classroom Sensory Cart in their in-person classes.

Student Perceptions of Classroom Sensory Supports

The chart below summarizes student responses collected across Fall 2025 and Spring 2026. Most respondents rated sensory supports as “extremely” or “very” helpful in supporting their ability to feel calm, focused, safe, and motivated in the classroom.

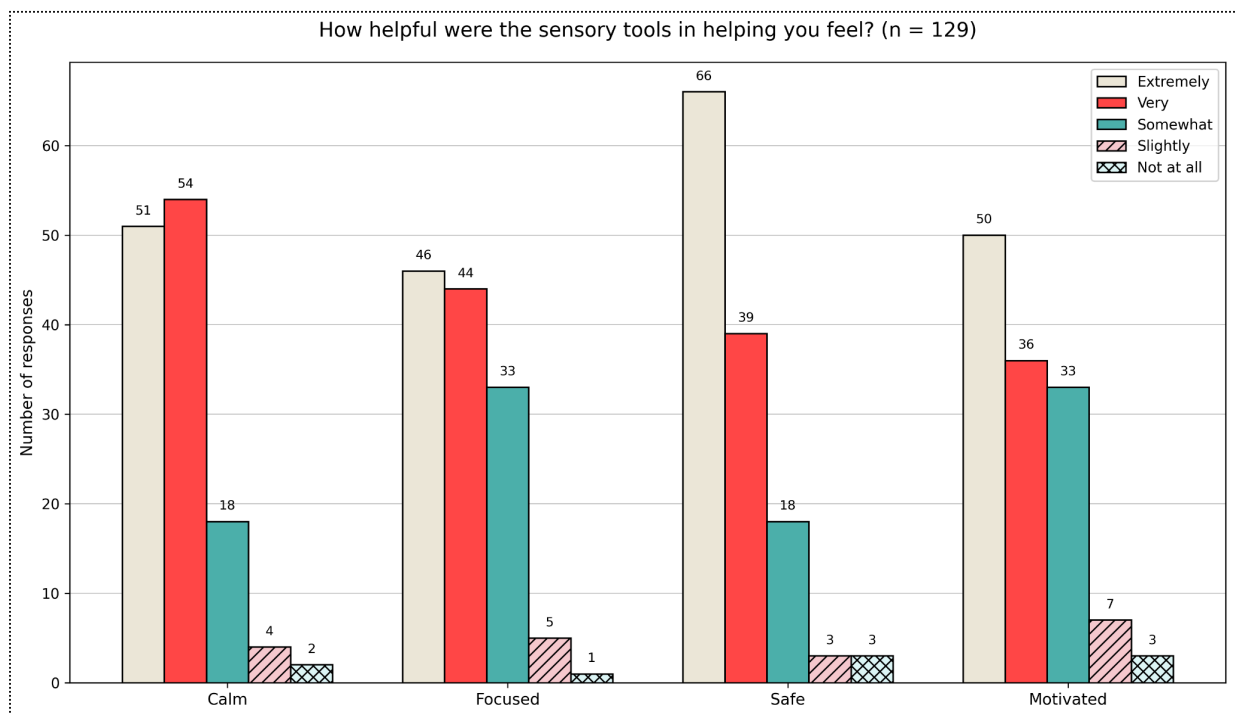


Figure 1. Most student respondents rated sensory supports as “extremely” or “very” helpful in supporting calm, focus, safety, and motivation.

Most Frequently Used Sensory Tools

Student responses also highlighted which sensory tools were used most frequently. Gum Drops, Chill Cubes, Sensory Bottles, and Stretchy Strings were consistently among the most frequently selected items.

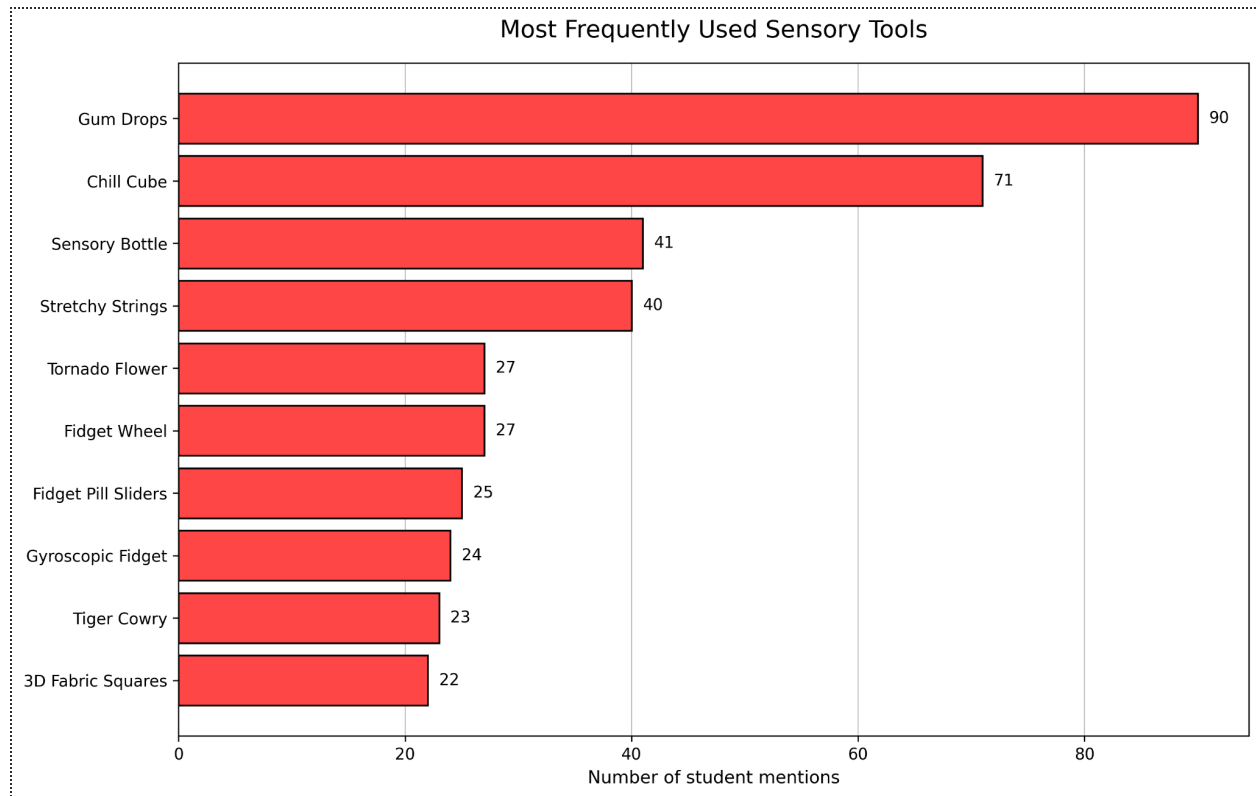


Figure 2. Gum Drops and Chill Cubes were the most frequently selected sensory tools, followed by Sensory Bottles and Stretchy Strings.

Student Feedback Highlights

Students described the sensory supports as helpful for staying engaged, focusing during instruction, and feeling more comfortable in the classroom.

- “The sensory items are very helpful and allow me to focus and concentrate in a more effective and efficient way.”
- “They’re very useful to keep my hands busy so that I am not distracting myself in class and can focus fully on the professor and their lessons.”
- One student shared that the sensory supports helped them stay focused and avoid using their phone during class.
- “Totally helpful for students that are fidgety like me!”
- “They are amazing. I love them!”

What Instructors Are Telling Us

Instructor feedback (n = 12) provides insight into how the Classroom Sensory Cart functioned in real classroom settings.

Common Themes in Instructor Feedback

Instructors described the cart as a flexible support for student focus, stress reduction, classroom connection, and overall engagement.

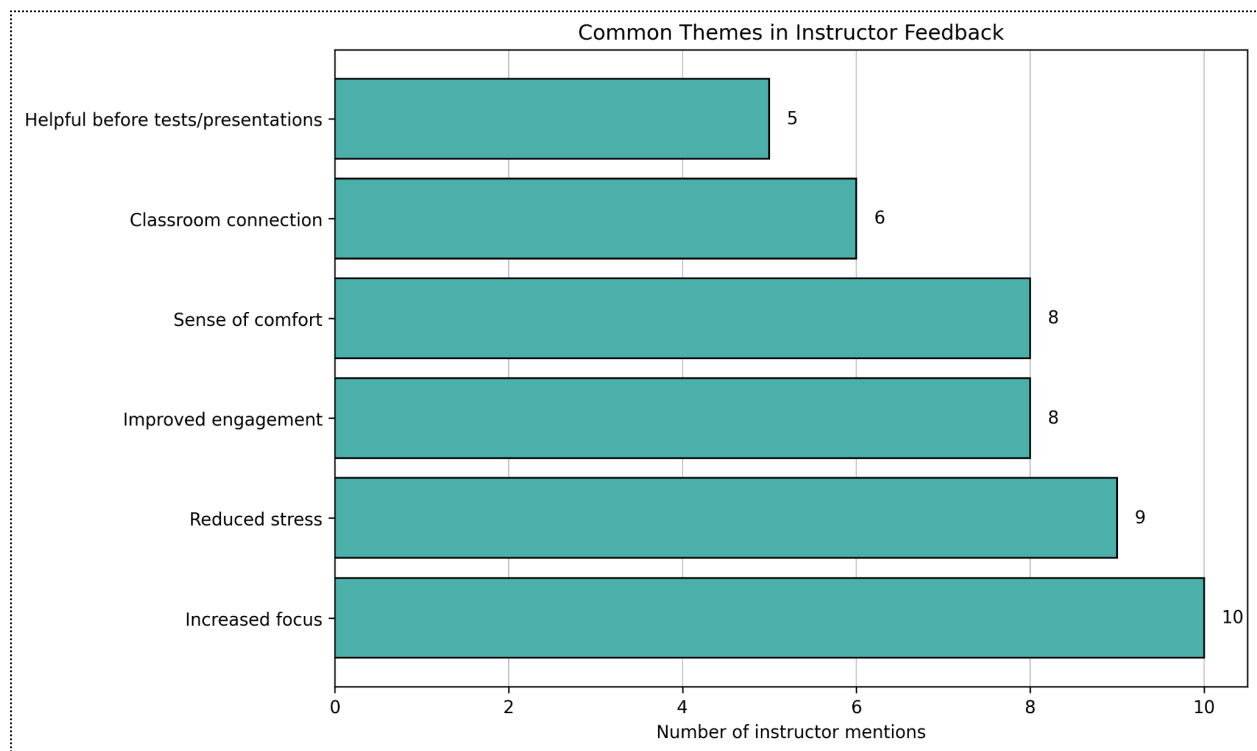


Figure 3. Instructor feedback most often emphasized increased focus, reduced stress, improved engagement, student comfort, and classroom connection.

Note: Themes were coded from open-ended instructor feedback responses. One response may include more than one theme.

Increased Student Comfort and Focus

Many instructors observed that students appeared more comfortable, focused, and at ease when sensory supports were available.

- “Students seemed more engaged, focused, and at ease during and after using the

sensory items. I observed students using them before quizzes or presentations.”

- “Students were generally more focused and felt more positively about the classroom experience. They felt supported. Generally, students didn’t use the sensory toys for more than 10 minutes at the start of class, but having them nearby provided a sense of comfort and stress reduction.”

Improved Classroom Climate and Connection

Instructors also described the cart as supporting a more welcoming classroom environment and helping normalize stress, regulation, and coping strategies.

- “Stress reduction and fostering a classroom where students felt cared for.”
- “I think it helped with connection to students and made the classroom feel more friendly.”
- “They helped me connect with students, normalize the stress and anxiety students may feel, and support students in practicing coping strategies to calm their nervous systems.”

Sensory Supports as Teaching Tools

Instructor feedback suggests that sensory supports were especially useful during activities that can require sustained attention or increase stress, including:

- presentations and speeches
- tests and quizzes
- independent work time
- lecture-heavy or concept-heavy class sessions
- other stress-inducing classroom activities

Some instructors also noted that the sensory supports benefited kinesthetic learners and students who needed tactile input to maintain engagement.



Strategies That Worked Well

Instructor feedback highlighted several practical strategies for introducing and using the Classroom Sensory Cart in ways that felt natural, supportive, and sustainable. These strategies are not meant to be prescriptive; instead, they reflect approaches instructors found helpful in their own teaching contexts.

1 – Introduce the Cart Early

Students may feel more comfortable using sensory supports when instructors introduce the cart at the beginning of the semester and explain its purpose.

Suggested Approaches:

- Explain that the cart is available to support focus, regulation, comfort, and engagement.
- Normalize sensory support as something many people use in different ways.
- Invite students to explore the sensory tools without pressure.
- Establish shared expectations for respectful and non-disruptive use.

Example Language: “Everyone focuses and regulates differently. These sensory tools are available to support comfort, focus, and engagement during class. You are welcome to explore them and use what works best for you.”

2 – Make the Cart Consistently Available

Instructor feedback suggests that students were more likely to use sensory supports when they were visible, accessible, and consistently available.

Suggested Approaches:

- Place selected sensory tools out at the beginning of class.
- Use the basket or designated area so students can access tools without needing to ask.
- Remind students that tools are available before presentations, quizzes, tests, or discussion-heavy activities.
- Keep quieter tools available during lecture or independent work.

Example Language: “The sensory tools will be available throughout class. You are welcome to use them when they support your focus, regulation, or comfort, as long as they are used

in ways that are respectful and not distracting to others.”

3 – Model and Normalize Use

Instructors can help reduce stigma by modeling sensory support as a normal part of learning, teaching, and well-being.

Suggested Approaches:

- Hold a fidget while teaching or facilitating discussion.
- Use a breathing card before presentations, exams, or transitions.
- Name that stress, anxiety, and distraction are common experiences.
- Frame sensory tools as supports for anyone who finds them helpful.

Example Language: “These tools are available for anyone who would like to use them. Different supports work for different people, and there is no right or wrong way to regulate. I prefer [sensory item] because [your reasons].”

4 – Support Student Choice

Different sensory tools support different needs. Students may prefer different textures, movements, weights, or levels of visual input.

Suggested Approaches:

- Allow students to try multiple sensory tools.
- Encourage students to notice which tools help them focus, calm, or engage.
- Avoid assigning specific tools to individual students unless requested.
- Recognize that preferences may change depending on the class activity or stress level.

Example Language: “You may find that different tools are helpful at different times. Feel free to try different sensory supports and use what helps you stay focused and engaged.”

5 – Connect Use to Classroom Activities

Sensory supports may be especially helpful when paired intentionally with class moments that require focus, regulation, or emotional readiness.

Suggested Approaches:

Make sensory tools available:

- before presentations or speeches

- before or during tests and quizzes
- during independent work
- during lecture-heavy or concept-heavy lessons
- during transitions, breaks, or reflection activities

Example Language: “If it would help, feel free to grab a sensory item before we begin. Some students find that having something tactile to hold can help with focus or nervous energy.”



Common Challenges and Recommendations

Instructor feedback also identified several implementation considerations.

Potential Distractions

A small number of instructors noted that some sensory items could become distracting if they were noisy or used in ways that disrupted learning.

Suggested Considerations:

- Set shared classroom expectations
- Encourage quieter sensory tools during lectures
- Reserve noisier or movement-based items for appropriate contexts

Students May Need Guidance

Some students were initially unsure how to use certain sensory tools, particularly cultural sensory supports.

Suggestions from Instructors Included:

- Providing brief descriptions or labels for items
- Explaining possible uses and sensory benefits
- Offering demonstrations or examples
- Inviting conversation about sensory preferences and regulation

Conclusion

The Classroom Sensory Cart initiative demonstrates how relatively small environmental supports can contribute to more welcoming, inclusive, and student-centered classrooms.

Across student and instructor feedback, several consistent themes emerged:

- Students felt calmer, more focused, and more supported
- Instructors observed increased engagement and comfort
- Sensory supports helped normalize regulation and well-being
- Classroom climate and connection improved
- Consistent and intentional implementation matters

Thank you for supporting inclusive, student-centered learning environments.

Classroom Sensory Cart Inventory List

Each Classroom Sensory Cart includes a basket and three pencil cases for organizing sensory tools. When relevant, tools are labeled as **Silent**, **Noisy**, or **Depends** to help instructors decide which tools may be appropriate for different classroom activities.

Depends indicates that the sound level may vary depending on how the tool is used or the specific variation of the tool.

Storage		
Cart (1)	Basket (1)	Pencil Cases (3)
 A mobile storage cart used to transport and organize sensory support materials for classroom use.	 A portable container that can be placed on a table or passed around so students can access items easily.	 Small storage cases used to organize sensory tools.

Items and Quantity in Pencil Case #1

Calm Strips (6)



Silent ▾

Textured adhesive strips that provide quiet tactile input. Students can rub or touch them.

Breathing Cards (6)



Silent ▾

Visual prompts that guide slow, intentional breathing. These can be used before presentations, tests, discussions, or other stressful moments.

Gyroscopic Fidget (1)



Silent ▾

A handheld fidget with rotating or spinning motion that provides visual and tactile sensory input.

3D Fabric Squares (2)



Silent ▾

Lightweight textured fabric pieces that provide tactile input. Students can hold, squeeze, or rub them as a quiet grounding tool.

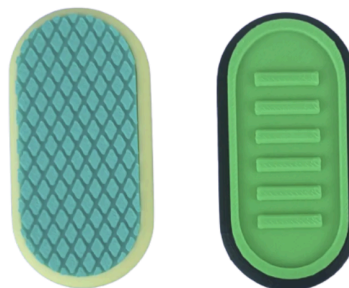
Fidget Wheels (2)



Depends ▾

Handheld fidgets with rotating or movable parts. These provide tactile input and repetitive motion. (There are noisy and silent variations.)

Fidget Pill Sliders (2)



Depends ▾

Small sliding fidgets that provide repetitive tactile movement. (There are noisy and silent variations.)

Items and Quantity in Pencil Case #2

'Ili'ili (4)



Depends ▾

Smooth stones traditionally used in Hawaiian cultural practices, including hula. They can serve as grounding objects that provide weight and texture. (Noisy if hit together or on something; silent if rubbed or held.)

Puniu Ka Lauhala (1)



Silent ▾

A natural-material sensory item connected to Hawaiian cultural practice. It offers tactile input through texture, shape, and handling.

Puniu Ka Jute (2)



Silent ▾

A tactile cultural sensory item made with jute material. It provides texture and hand-based sensory input.

Tornado Flower (1)



Noisy ▾

A flexible, expanding fidget that can be manipulated in the hands. It provides tactile and visual input through movement and shape change.

Liquid Tiles (2)



Silent ▾

Small visual sensory tiles filled with shifting liquid color. Students can press or observe them for visual regulation and calming input.

Items and Quantity in Pencil Case #3

Calm Corner Square (1)



Silent ▾

A soft, textured square that can be used as a grounding object or tactile support. It includes a marble embedded with a maze.

Tiger Cowry (4)



Depends ▾

A smooth shell that provides natural texture, shape, and weight. (Noisy if hit together or on something; silent if rubbed or held.)

Additional Items

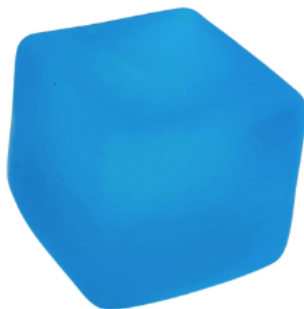
Gum Drops (3)



Silent ▾

Soft, squeezable tactile tools that provide hand pressure and resistance. These were among the most frequently used items by students.

Chill Cube (1)



Silent ▾

A handheld sensory tool that provides tactile input through its shape, texture, and squeezable form. Students may use it to support focus or reduce nervous energy.

Colored Pencils Pack (1)



Creative tools that support quiet, low-stakes visual and tactile engagement through drawing, coloring, or reflective activities.

Wooden Bowl (1)



A storage or presentation item that can be used to hold selected sensory tools and make them accessible in the classroom.

Sensory Bottles (2)



Silent ▾

Visual sensory tools filled with moving liquid, glitter, or other materials. Students can watch the movement as a calming or grounding strategy.

Stretchy Strings (6)



Silent ▾

Flexible tactile tools that can be stretched, twisted, or manipulated.

Coloring Books (2)



Silent ▾

Visual and creative regulation tools that support quiet engagement, focus, and calming through coloring.

Cleaner (1)



A cleaning supply included to help maintain shared sensory tools and support hygiene between uses.