

A Case Study of Harmony Third Edition Across Four Districts

Chapter 2: Student Outcomes

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Introduction: Student Outcomes

Harmony Academy has a strong theoretical, research, and practice foundation (Hanish et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017; Yoder, 2022). With the initial development and in the refresh of the Harmony Curriculum, known as Harmony Third Edition, the developers used intergroup contact theory and sociocognitive theories of development to create and refine Harmony program materials. Intergroup contact theory suggests that when people of diverse backgrounds and interests engage in purposeful activities and interactions, they form more positive peer relationships (Martin et al., 2017); and social-cognitive approaches suggest that student actions are guided by the intersection of cognition, emotion, and environment (Miller et al., 2017). Together, the goals of Harmony include building harmonious peer relationships, creating classroom environments that center the whole child (socially, emotionally, and cognitively), and nurturing core social and emotional competencies (SECs). The targeted SECs within Harmony support students as they build and maintain relationships (e.g., communication, collaboration, problem solving), and direct their emotions, thoughts, and actions toward purposeful action (e.g., emotion management, goal setting, growth mindset) (Hanish et al., 2016).

The research on Harmony Academy demonstrates participation in Harmony produces helpful outcomes for youth from diverse populations, including improvements in students' academic achievement and empathy, as well as a decrease in aggression and stereotyping. Specifically, researchers found that engagement in Harmony improved students' relationships, students' connection to school,

development of friendships among peers of diverse backgrounds, and academic achievement, in addition to decreased aggressive behavior compared to those students who did not participate in Harmony (DeLay et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2017). In additional mixed-methods studies, researchers found variability in the implementation of Harmony; however, they found that those who engaged more with the program through training and implementation were more favorable of the program and believed it had a greater effect on students (Morrison et al., 2019).

In the Student Outcomes chapter, we provide high-level findings from the Harmony Third Edition case study about how educators thought students experienced Harmony, perceived student outcomes, and the relationship between educator perceptions of Harmony Third Edition and student outcomes. Specifically, the Student Outcomes chapter focuses on the following:

- Student Perceptions and Experiences with Harmony Third Edition (research question 2)
- Educators' Perception of Harmony Third Edition and Student Outcomes (research question 3)

First, we provide recommendations about how to use Harmony to support student outcomes. Then, we provide an overview of the methods of the project. Following, we explore students' experiences and outcomes from using Harmony Third Edition and discuss the relationship between Harmony Third Edition and student outcomes.

¹ This report is a series of papers that provide critical insights into how Harmony Third Edition has been used across four districts. The series of papers includes: (1) Executive Summary, (2) Getting Started with Harmony, (3) Student Outcomes, (4) Everyday Practices—Meet Up and Buddy Up, (5) Units, Lessons, & Activities, (6) Storybooks, and (7) Appendix. We want to thank the educators, students, and district leaders who participated in piloting Harmony Third Edition, as well as the Harmony staff and partners who worked on supporting the refresh of the program.

Recommendations

Through the surveys, focus groups, and observations, we were able to revise the program in real time. We were also able to determine key recommendations for educators and administrators on how to use Harmony Third Edition materials to support student outcomes.

- 1. Understand students’ needs and apply those aspects of the program.** Educators recognize that Harmony Third Edition influences multiple student outcomes, including specific social and emotional competencies, peer relationships and community, and academic achievement. Educators further noted that the various program components of Harmony Third Edition influence student outcomes differently. Educators should prioritize those aspects of the program that align with students’ needs.
- 2. Ask students how they perceive Harmony and their needs.** Educators found the question, “What would your students say about Harmony Third Edition?” particularly interesting. It is important for educators to understand how their students perceive and engage in Harmony Third Edition. It further helps educators to understand what they think their students’ needs are to help ensure that their voices are heard.

- 3. Adapt aspects of the lessons when needed.** Harmony Third Edition provides multiple opportunities for students to apply their academic skills, particularly reading, writing, and vocabulary instruction, to accomplish tasks; however, these skills should not necessarily be barriers to implementation. Educators should feel empowered to read to students; allow them to draw, dictate, discuss, or role-play rather than write; and incorporate additional vocabulary instruction.
- 4. Use Harmony skills across academic subjects.** Educators noted that Harmony Third Edition helps students develop skills that cut across academic subjects, including, for example, communication, collaboration, problem solving and emotion management. Educators should identify when students may need to use these skills within academic instruction and use Harmony Third Edition as pre-lessons or reinforce Harmony skills during these aspects of academic instruction.

Methods

As part of the Harmony Third Edition development process, Harmony partnered with four districts² that received early access to the refreshed Everyday Practices (Meet Up and Buddy Up) and two units of the Units, Lessons, & Activities, and Storybooks. Educators received two site-based trainings—one on the refreshed Everyday Practices and one on the Units, Lessons, & Activities. Most participating educators across the four districts offered feedback

on their experiences with Third Edition through surveys (n=61³) and focus groups (n=51) in April and June 2022; and 34 educators participated in classroom observations (in-person or video) in April and May 2022⁴ (see the Case Study Appendix for a more detailed description of the methods).

2 Harmony partnered with 3-6 schools per district, for a total of 17 schools and 88 educator volunteers (from Arizona, Iowa, Texas, and Wisconsin).
 3 61 educators completed the full survey; 63 educators completed part of the survey; n=number.
 4 Only high-level notes and feedback are provided from the classroom observations that are relevant to research question 1; this data was not systematically analyzed, but rather used to understand how Harmony was operating in classrooms and to make revisions to the Harmony Curriculum and implementation rubric.

Key Findings

Student Perceptions and Outcomes with Harmony Third Edition

A primary research question from the Harmony Third Edition Case Study asked, “To what extent do educators report that Harmony Third Edition meets the needs of all students?” To explore this question, we asked educators what they thought students might say about the Harmony Third Edition materials. Second, we asked educators about the perceived student outcomes of participation in Harmony Third Edition.

Student Perceptions

What might students say about Harmony Third Edition? In focus groups, we asked educators what they thought students would say about the program. Overwhelmingly, educators thought that students would say Harmony Third Edition supports their skills to nurture peer relationships. Educators also described that their students are better equipped to share their feelings with their peers. For example, an educator explained, “[Harmony Third Edition] has allowed them to be more social and emotionally engaged in the classroom and be more mindful of other students’ feelings.”

Students, according to educators, also favored the program due to their excitement about Z. For example, one educator stated, “They would say they love Z and they love hearing Z’s stories, because Z teaches them how to get along with people who are different . . .” A kindergarten teacher echoed these sentiments and explained, “My kids are always really engaged with the lessons; they love Z. That’s probably the biggest thing for them. It’s easy to connect with Z.”

Harmony also provides consistent routines and structures that students enjoy and come to expect. Educators believed that students enjoy the many opportunities to connect with one another, learn more about each other, and find time to explore new concepts with their peers. For example, an educator shared that her students look forward to

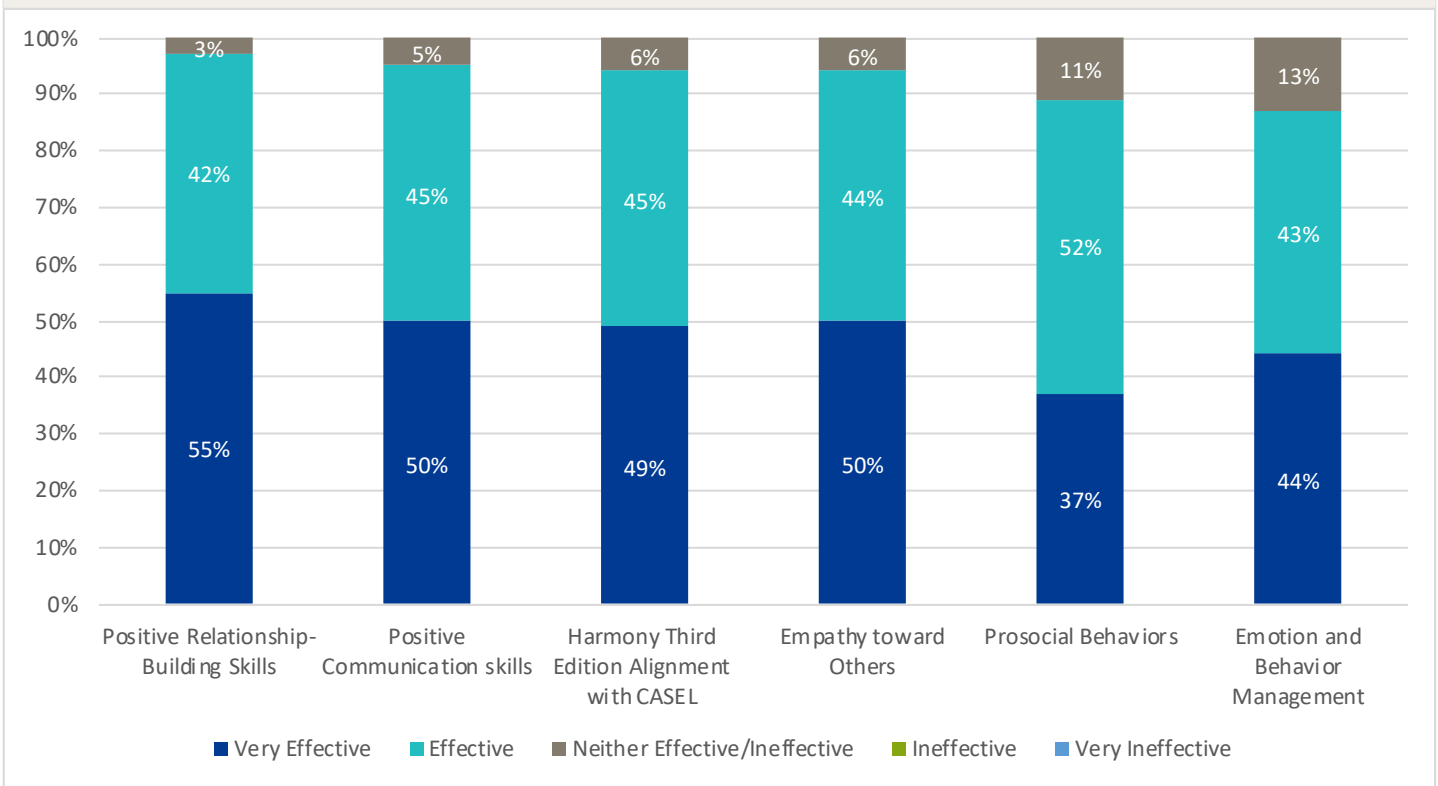
using Harmony Third Edition on a daily basis. She explained, “They (Students) are telling us that it’s time to do Harmony [Third Edition]. I think that’s the most important thing; they want to do it because they’re comfortable with their classmates. They love it.”

Student Outcomes

In the refresh, Harmony staff wanted to ensure that the Third Edition continued to nurture supportive relationships and to support student development of the updated definition of SEL and related SECs and sub-competencies outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Educators agreed; in the survey, 94% (strongly) agreed that the refresh aligned with CASEL competencies. Educators (as reported in surveys and focus groups) overwhelmingly thought that Harmony Third Edition helped support a variety of students’ social and emotional competencies and peer relationships. In addition, educators found Harmony Third Edition supported the development of a variety of academic skills, although at times some educators felt they had to adapt materials to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students, which we explore next.

Social and emotional competencies. Educators believed Harmony Third Edition provided students opportunities to develop their SECs, overall (95% of educators (strongly) agreed. Educators also reported positive changes in a variety of students’ SECs including, for example, working in groups, communicating with peers, and controlling their feelings. Specifically, educators reported in the survey that Harmony Third Edition was very or somewhat effective in promoting the following outcomes: building positive relationship skills (97%), positive communication skills (94%), being empathetic toward others (94%), prosocial behaviors (87%), and emotion and behavior management (86%) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Perceived Student Social and Emotional Competency Outcomes



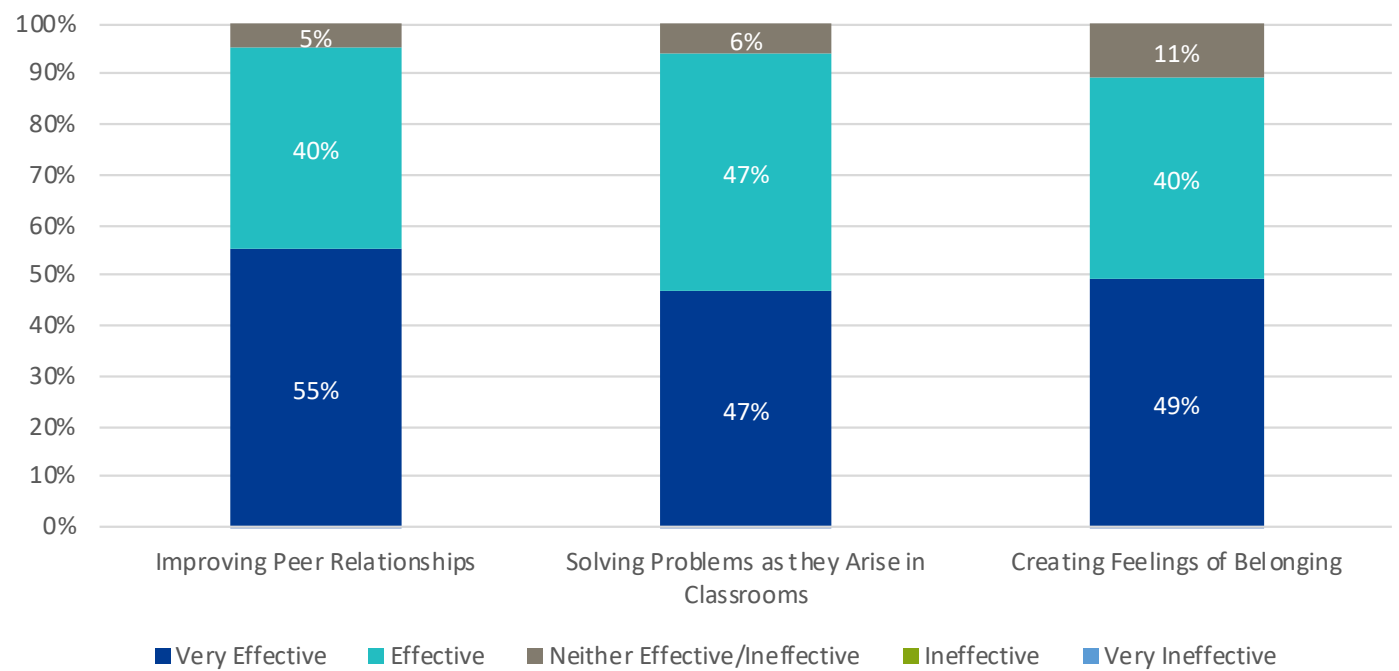
In focus groups, educators corroborated their survey responses. For example, a Positive Behavioral Intervention Specialist (PBIS) recounted how students expressed that talking about conflict and learning to manage emotions helps them to know what to do when they are experiencing their feelings. A third-grade teacher explained that prior to using Harmony Third Edition, her students “. . . really struggled with group work, talking to others, communicating, and controlling their own feelings;” while another third-grade teacher noted that Harmony helped her students learn how to collaborate more effectively with each other.

Educators found various components within Harmony Third Edition as helpful in developing students’ SECs; more specifically, they found that Units, Lessons, & Activities push students to learn and apply interpersonal skills (e.g., listening and responding with encouragement or empathy, and negotiating breakdowns in communications). For example, an educator shared, “My kids are very competitive; but to see them cheer when one of their

classmates does something good is huge.” Similarly, educators found Z and the Storybooks as proactive ways to support students’ social and emotional development. Educators thought that Z’s experiences and challenges depicted real-life situations that are relatable to younger students.

Peer relationships and community. Educators recognized noticeable changes in their students’ abilities to develop peer relationships and form a classroom community. In the surveys, educators reported that Harmony Third Edition was very or somewhat effective in improving peer relationships (95%), solving problems that arise in the classroom (94%), and creating feelings of belonging amongst students (89%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Perceived Relationship-Oriented Outcomes



In the focus groups, Harmony educators acknowledged an improvement in their students' interactions with each other and an increase in the overall classroom community based on their experiences with Harmony Third Edition. A kindergarten teacher shared that it is "... fun and [helps with] everything about building this community with my classroom. I think it is working wonderfully." Another educator shared that her students feel comfortable sharing with their peers because they, "... don't feel pressured compared to if we're asking them questions about what we're teaching or something in class."

Educators attributed the improvement in peer interactions and classroom community to a variety of Harmony program materials. Buddy Up, for example, was commonly mentioned by educators as a key strategy to build harmonious relationships and classrooms. For example, a third-grade teacher expressed that, "[Buddy Up] helps build classroom community and helps other kids be more social and get out of their own little box." One reason educators believed that Buddy Up improved classroom community is because it reduced pressure and stress on students who do not normally get selected during group work because they do not have to

choose a partner. A sixth-grade teacher further stated, "[In Buddy Up], they work with someone they don't normally work with, and it's helped create new friendships and reinforce that [the students] are on the same team. It reduces differences and separations with[in] the class."

Educators also shared that Meet Up provided opportunities for students to connect and catch up with each other and to solve problems that arise in the classroom. For example, a pre-kindergarten teacher relied on Meet Up to model interpersonal communication skills with her students. She explained, "They love sharing with everyone and they like to talk about themselves. So, we're trying to get them to ask questions about what they're [all] sharing about." Educators also found value in using Quick Connection Cards during Meet Up to deepen the students' conversations. For example, an educator shared, "It lets them think more because it's not normal questions they would think of or speak [about] with their friends on their own."

Other educators noted that the storybooks and Z helped build peer relationships and community. For instance, a kindergarten teacher shared that her students were always highly engaged with the

lessons and especially loved Z because, “. . . Z teaches them how to get along with people who are different.” Educators noted that their students appreciated the diverse group of Clubhouse Friends. For example, a kindergarten teacher explained that her students enjoyed the diversity represented in the characters. A special education teacher noted that her students could, “. . . find themselves in the characters.”

Connection to academics. In the surveys and focus groups, educators also commented on the connection between Harmony and academics. For example, in the survey, 94% of educators reported that Harmony was (very) effective at improving student academic achievement. Educators further noted why they believed they could see carryover effects of Harmony Third Edition throughout academic subjects, particularly English/Language Arts (ELA). For instance, a first-grade teacher explained that her students wrote three sentences about what it looks like and means to be a friend during their ELA block as an extension activity. A fourth-grade teacher appreciated that there was an increased focus on vocabulary within the units. She explained that she uses the vocabulary terms as the words of the week during her morning meetings with her students. A second-grade teacher expressed that she was able to discuss the targeted SECs within Harmony Third Edition when she taught characterization lessons about the skills the Clubhouse Friends used in the stories.

Educators also mentioned that students were able to use the skills targeted in Harmony Third Edition during academic lessons. For example, a fifth-grade teacher explained that his students are more aware of how to interact with one another after engaging in communication-based lessons. He stated, “In all the academic areas that we work in, we do group or collaborative work every time, and now they’re able to use those communication skills.” A third-grade gifted teacher noticed improvements in her students’ ability to attend to tasks throughout the day, saying “They are able to focus more on academic things when they’re getting along and able to solve those problems quickly and build those relationships. It allows them to

focus more on the academic content being taught in the classroom.”

Educators also described some frustration with academic aspects found within Harmony Third Edition, particularly the writing aspects of the lessons. For example, the PBIS specialist suggested that educators should be able to differentiate lessons to help mitigate unwanted student behaviors, especially during writing when they appear to exhibit heightened frustration. She suggested a more intentional balance between different activities (e.g., script writing and role-playing) across the units. Likewise, a fifth-grade teacher noted similar frustrations, but modified the reading and writing tasks to be more accessible to her students, extending the differentiation tips presently available within the lessons and activities.

Observations. Observers also noted variations in how students engaged with Harmony Third Edition. In classrooms, particularly with those educators who were implementing the program as intended and demonstrated excitement in their use of Harmony Third Edition, students were highly engaged with one another, responded to each other, and collaborated (either in whole group, small groups, or buddy pairs) with each other to participate in the activities. When educators felt rushed or were not as excited about Harmony Third Edition, there was a notable difference in student engagement. For example, during Meet Up, when all students “shared” an answer to a question, students would get distracted going around the entire circle. However, when one or two students were able to “share” and other students responded, they felt appreciated and were more likely to develop the communication skills targeted in this aspect of the activity. Further, when educators used multiple Buddy Up questions at one time and Buddies switched during one period, the classroom felt more distracted and not focused on building relationships with one student. Compared to educators who focused on one Conversation or Collaboration Prompt with one Buddy, observers noted stronger connections and relationships with buddies.

Educators' Perception of Harmony Third Edition and Student Outcomes

We were also curious about the research question, “What is the relationship between educators’ perception of Harmony Third Edition and perception of students’ outcomes?” In other words, we wondered if there were specific aspects of Harmony Third Edition that correlated with educators’ perception of student outcomes. We found that, for example, educators’ perception that Harmony Third Edition provided opportunities to build healthy relationships significantly correlated with most perceived outcomes including, for example, developing SECs ($r^5=.89$), positive relationship-building skills ($r=.70$), improving peer relationships ($r=.69$), and creating feelings of belonging ($r=.62$) (see Table 1). In other words, educators who perceived Harmony Third Edition to help build relationships, perceived also that Harmony Third Edition promoted a variety of student outcomes.

Similarly, educators’ perception that Harmony Third Edition provided activities that allowed students to connect to their lives outside of school correlated with perceived outcomes, such as prosocial behaviors ($r=.59$), feelings of belonging ($r=.53$), improving peer relationships ($r=.50$), positive communication skills ($r=.40$), and solving problems in classrooms ($r=.40$). Educators in the focus groups expounded on how they made this connection. For example, when reflecting on her students’ experiences using Harmony Third Edition, a fifth-grade teacher stated, “I do think any time we can give them skills for the future they appreciate it—whether they know it or not.” A special education teacher also described how using Harmony Third Edition with her students made her more mindful of their experiences outside of school, saying “It’s given me a really good insight to their home lives, and I think it’s helped create community in my classroom.”

Similarly, perceiving Harmony Third Edition as trauma-informed is significantly correlated with perceived emotion and behavior management (.40); and perceiving Harmony Third Edition as culturally

responsive is significantly correlated with perceived outcomes, such as feelings of belonging (.47), academic achievement (.47), and improving peer relationships (.46). In the focus groups, educators further described how they made these connections. For example, an educator described how her students are more self aware of the feelings of others, stating, “[Harmony Third Edition] has allowed them to be more social and emotionally engaged in the classroom and more mindful of other students’ feelings. Because sometimes we have a tendency of just blurting stuff out and not thinking about what we’re saying before we say it.” A second-grade teacher also described how her students responded to learning that one of their classmates would be moving to a new school, saying, “Everybody was just so expressive and kind, and it’s because of Harmony Third Edition that we’ve built such a nice classroom community, that we’ve had so many thoughtful discussions, and [that] we just treat each other very well.”

Correlational data revealed that there is a moderate relationship between educators’ perceptions of the program and various perceived student outcomes. But why might educators’ perceptions about Harmony Third Edition relate to the perceived student outcomes? Educators’ perceptions about how Harmony Third Edition meets student needs may help. From the surveys, 89% of educators (strongly) agreed that Harmony Third Edition met their SEL needs. A fifth-grade teacher shared, “With Harmony, we’re doing more than activities; it provides students with tools and steps to move through life. It’s the hope that we will see them [apply those tools] during the day and at home.” The PBIS specialist noted students’ engagement during instructional periods using Harmony Third Edition and acknowledged they were actively applying new skills throughout the day, stating, “Watching them talk to each other and use the language that they’ve been learning shows that they’re processing all of this.” As these quotes demonstrate, educators believe that various components of Harmony Third Edition allow them to target social and emotional competencies and support them in creating a supportive and safe classroom climate.

5 r =correlation coefficient, where .50-.75 is a moderate correlation; and >.75 is a strong correlation.

Figure 3. Educators' Perceptions of Student Outcomes*

	Educators' perception that Harmony provided opportunities to build healthy relationships	Educators' perception that Harmony Third Edition provided activities that allowed students to connect to their lives outside of school	Educators' perception that the program is culturally responsive	Educators' perception that the program is trauma informed
	<i>Pearson's Correlation Coefficient</i>			
Develop SECs	.89			
Positive Relationship-building Skills	.70			
Improving Peer Relationships	.69	.50	.46	
Creating Feelings of Belonging	.62	.53	.47	
Personal Strengths and Assets	.62			
Positive Communication Skills	.59	.40		
Using Prosocial Behaviors	.52	.59		
Emotion and Behavior Management	.43			.40
Solving Problems in the Classroom	.43	.40		
Academic Achievement			.47	

*Note: .50-.75 is a moderate correlation; and >.75 is a strong correlation.

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