

A Case Study of Harmony Third Edition Across Four Districts

Chapter 3: Everyday Practices — Meet Up, Buddy Up, and Harmony Goals

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Introduction: Everyday Practices

Arguably Harmony Academy’s most important attributes—flexibility and adaptability—are primary motivators for educators to select, use, and implement the program (Johns Hopkins University (JHU), 2020; Jodl et al., 2020). The Harmony Everyday Practices of Meet Up and Buddy Up—inclusive of Harmony Goals and Quick Connection Cards—are a critical piece of the multi-method approach (along with Units, Lessons, & Activities, and Storybooks—see Chapters 4 & 5, respectively) to promote positive relationships among peers of diverse backgrounds and create an inclusive learning environment (Martin et al., 2017). Harmony Everyday Practices are intended to be a schoolwide practice that educators can embed within the everyday schedule of classrooms to ensure that a consistent routine exists to practice the development and use of relationship skills (Martin et al., 2017).

In the Everyday Practices chapter, we provide high-level findings from the Harmony Third Edition case study about how educators perceived and implemented the refreshed Everyday Practices. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the following:

- Educators’ Experience of Harmony Third Edition—Everyday Practices (research question 1)
- Everyday Practices to Meet the Needs of All Students (research question 2)

First, we provide an update on the refresh of the Everyday Practices, as well as concrete recommendations based on the findings. Following, we provide an overview of the methods of the project. Finally, we explore the data to discuss educators’ experiences of

the Everyday Practices along with the perceived needs met through implementing the Everyday Practices.

Refreshed Harmony Everyday Practices

In Harmony Third Edition, the Everyday Practices that educators know and love stayed the same, with enhanced practices and increased resources and supports. In this section, we describe the enhancements in Everyday Practices in Harmony Third Edition—Meet Up (including Harmony Goals) and Buddy Up.

Everyday Practices: Meet Up continues to include all four steps—Greeting, Sharing and Responding, Checking In, and Connecting. Meet Up’s primary goal is to create a daily routine for students to share about themselves, learn about their peers, exchange ideas, celebrate successes, and solve any problems that may occur in the classroom (Martin et al., 2017). The first step, Greeting, remains the same and continues to be important because it allows every student to be acknowledged and welcomed. Harmony staff created a new resource, [Ways to Welcome](#), to support the Greeting activity. Sharing and Responding also remains the same. This step allows two or three students to share something important, and then allow other students to ask deeper questions about what was shared. Harmony staff created a [Ways to Respond](#) handout to help students ask those deeper questions.

The third step, Checking In, allows students to check in with the community (review of Class Harmony Goals) or check in with self (review of Personal Harmony Goals as a new sub-step). [Class Harmony Goals](#) have

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.

always been a core piece of Harmony, in which the class co-creates group goals about the ways in which they want to interact with each other throughout the year. The goals are followed throughout the day, while being reviewed and discussed during Meet Up. This aspect of Harmony Goals remains the same.

Research also suggests that personal goal setting is a critical social and emotional competency for students to develop (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). For the refresh, Harmony staff developed [Personal Harmony Goals](#), which are individual, relationship-driven, and/or social and emotional learning (SEL) goals. Students have an opportunity to develop Personal Harmony Goals at the beginning of the year when introducing Meet Up and at the beginning of each Unit. During Meet Up or at the end of a lesson, students are invited to reflect on progress towards accomplishing their Personal Harmony Goals, providing them greater ownership and voice over their social and emotional development.

The fourth step, Connecting, is meant to provide an energizing activity to prepare students to engage in academic tasks. Connecting now offers two sub-steps: connecting with community and connecting with self. To connect with community, the educator

and students use a Community Builder [Quick Connection Card \(QCC\)](#) (which has also been a core piece of Harmony). To support connecting with self and to develop important self-regulation strategies (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2013), the students can use the new sub-step (and related resource), [Mindful Minute](#), to participate in a mindfulness activity.

Everyday Practices: Buddy Up remained the same in Harmony Third Edition. The goal of Buddy Up is for all classmates to create meaningful connections with one another, specifically getting to know peers with whom they might not normally interact (Hanish et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2017). Educators will continue to provide new buddies each week, facilitating activities by selecting a [Quick Connection Card \(QCC\)](#) or through other buddy activities and academic tasks. During Buddy Up, educators will also reinforce social and emotional competencies (SECs) and facilitate buddies connecting with each other. QCCs will also continue to be a resource for Buddy Up (Conversation or Collaboration cards) and Meet Up (Community Builder Cards). During the refresh, Harmony expanded the deck by 92 cards for a total of 490 cards (243 Early Childhood and 247 Upper Grade)

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 Everyday Practices:

1. Prioritize students' social and emotional development and well-being. Educators and students need time to be able to build relationships, get to know one another, and apply their social and emotional competencies (SECs). Students benefit when they get opportunities to connect and have Harmony Academy be a part of their routine, in which Everyday Practices help to create those short routines that build relationships and create a supportive learning environment.

2. Be sure to implement the core pieces of Meet Up. Meet Up includes a specific process to ensure all students are seen and heard, solve problems in classrooms, and get ready to participate in the next activity. To get through each step, there are important things to remember: (a) during the Greeting, make sure each students' name is said; (b) during Sharing and Responding, ensure only 2-4 students share out so others can respond to them and ask them questions; and (c) during Checking-In, make sure to have students name the highs or things going well related to Harmony Goals to acknowledge their group successes, as well as problem-solve any concerns so that students are involved in the plans for improvement.

3. Let students know the importance of Buddy Up.

As educators engage in Buddy Up, ensure that they help students process why they engage in these conversations and activities, including reinforcing SECs they use throughout the process. To help with this, make sure to have your Buddy Up Boards up so students can visually see who their Buddy is and how they change each week.

4. Find time to embed Harmony principles with academics.

Students benefit when they can use Harmony materials or concepts within academic instruction; for example, using Buddy Up pairs during instructional tasks, using the Checking In portion of Meet Up to discuss helpful or unhelpful collaborative learning strategies, or having students reflect on how Personal Harmony Goals also promote academic learning.

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).

Key Findings

The first research question asked was, “How do educators experience Harmony Third Edition?” Because the case study focused on the refresh, Harmony wanted to ensure that the program felt recognizable. In fact, from survey responses, educators recognized most of the content from Harmony Second Edition; 93% of educators in the survey (strongly) agreed that the content in Harmony Third Edition was recognizable compared to Harmony Second Edition.

The second research question asked, “To what extent do educators report that Harmony Third Edition meets the needs of all students?” Educators across surveys and focus groups responded favorably that Harmony Third Edition met their students’ social, emotional, and academic needs. For example, from surveys, 89%

of educators (strongly) agreed that Third Edition met their students’ SEL needs. Further, educators reported in the survey that they perceived Third Edition was very or somewhat effective in promoting emotion and behavior management (86%) and solving problems that arise in the classroom (92%), among many other outcomes (see Chapter 2: Student Outcomes for more information).

In the following section, we provide an overview of how the Harmony Everyday Practices of Meet Up and Buddy Up were experienced by educators and students (research question 1) and how they each met the needs of students (research question 2).

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.

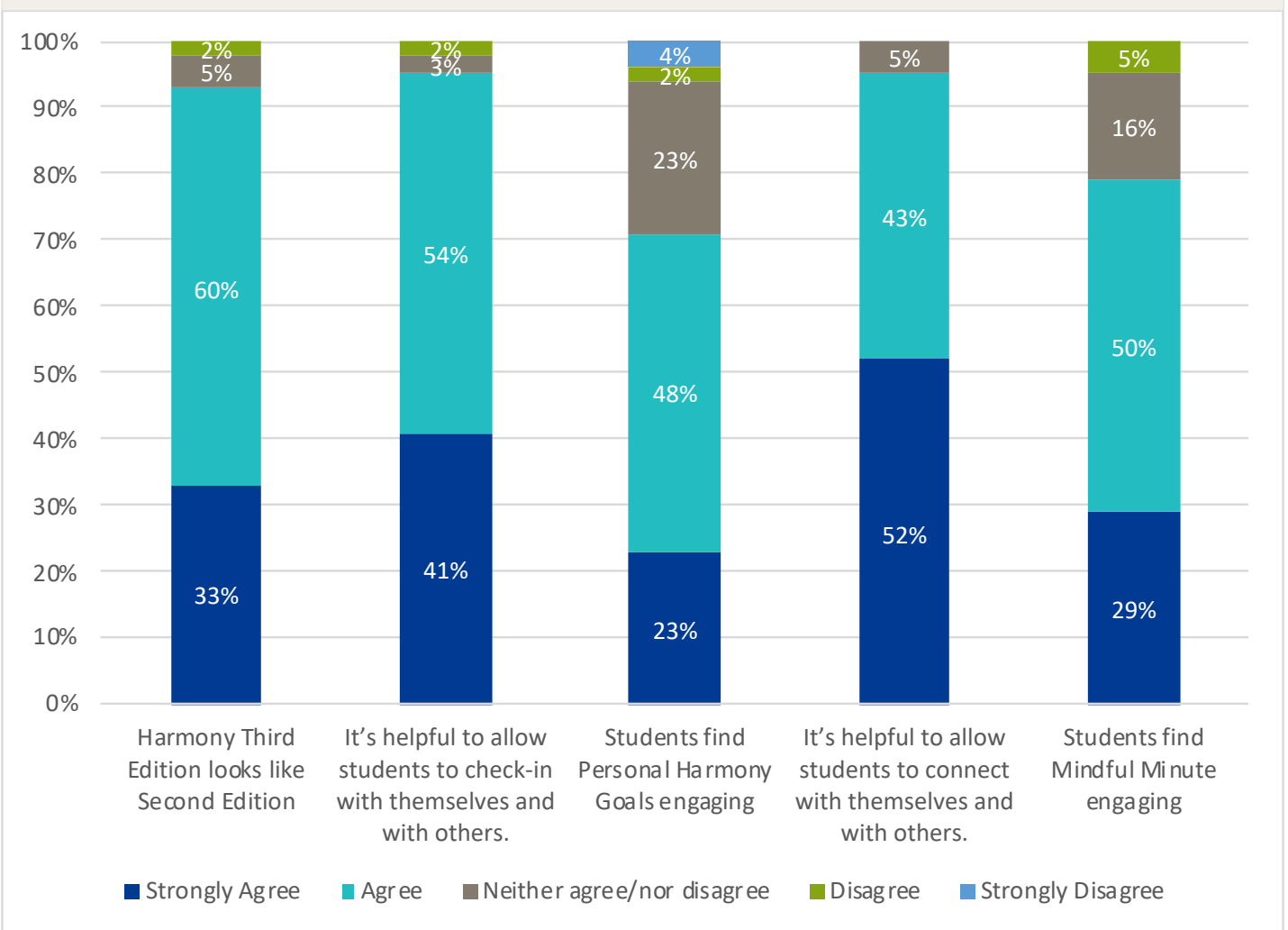
Meet Up and Harmony Goals

Based on survey and focus group results, and anecdotal observation notes, educators and students responded favorably to Meet Up. In the focus groups, educators noted that they were more intentional about using Meet Up consistently because it can be easily infused into their daily routines. One teacher shared, “In the morning, we do our Meet Up and students do their sharing and responding. Then we quickly do the Mindful Minute to get them focused and ready for the day.” Another teacher added, “I like the different parts of Meet Up where we can incorporate different things throughout the day; it doesn’t just necessarily have to be in the morning.” Teachers also continued to see the value of Class Harmony Goals. A teacher explained, “The easiest thing about Harmony [Third Edition] was

us being able to develop our own classroom rules. I think that was probably the most important thing for us—it caused students to take ownership of what our classroom looks like.”

In focus groups, educators generally agreed that they liked Meet Up and implemented the various pieces; however, classroom observations demonstrated greater variability in implementation. Some educators implemented each piece of Meet Up, while others varied or adapted it. In classrooms where they implemented Meet Up the way in which it was intended, students appeared to be engaged, oftentimes because Meet Up went more quickly and smoothly. There were times that educators added pieces, for example, classroom announcements or agendas for the day, and those also appeared to keep

Figure 1. Educators’ Perspectives of Harmony Everyday Practices



students engaged. However, observers further noted some deviations. For example, not all student names were used during the greeting, and other times, students did not have a chance to respond after a student shared during the Sharing and Responding portion. Each of these pieces is critical not only for students' social and emotional development, but also for building connections and nurturing relationships in the classroom.

Educators also discussed the various steps of Meet Up the new sub-steps of Harmony Third Edition (Personal Harmony Goals and Mindful Minute). In the surveys, about the Checking-In step, educators (strongly) agreed that allowing students to check in with themselves or with others was helpful (92%). Educators further (strongly) agreed that Personal Harmony Goals (71%) was engaging for their students (see Figure 1). Educators corroborated these findings in the focus groups. When considering the Personal Harmony Goals, a fifth-grade teacher shared, "They [the students] seemed very receptive to the Personal Goals. We did all the Class Goals first before we did the personal ones. I was pleased with what they chose. We talked about being realistic and they did a good job." Another teacher noted that using Personal Harmony Goals helped her students to be more accountable. She explained, "When something might go wrong in the class, we refer back to our Harmony Goals."

In the surveys about the Connecting step, 95% of educators (strongly) agreed that allowing students to connect with themselves and with others was helpful. A majority (79%) of educators also (strongly) agreed that Mindful Minute was engaging for their students. A teacher explained that her students really appreciated the Mindful Minute. She stated, "I find that when there is a conflict or some things arising, [my students] are using their strategies."

Educators also acknowledged that using Meet Up supported their students' relationships and social and emotional growth. For example, a second-grade teacher described an interaction in which one of her students shared that his parents were separating during a Meet Up, and another student went up to him to ask if he was okay and to offer some support. She reflected on this interaction and said, "I feel like if they

[the students] don't feel safe here, they're not going to do anything here. So, [Meet Up] has really, really helped us." Further, a second-grade teacher noted that her students appreciated the regularity of using Meet Up and shared, "They rely on Meet Up and ask for it—they expect it."

Buddy Up

In the focus groups, educators described Buddy Up as an engaging activity for their students that helped build connections and provided space for students to enjoy their peers. For example, a fourth-grade teacher said, "My kids like to buddy up and partner and talk together." A third-grade teacher shared, "[Buddy Up] builds your classroom community and just helps other kids be more social and kind of get out of their own little box." Another teacher explained:

"My students' favorite part is Buddy Up; they always ask if they're going to be able to do it today. They really like that opportunity to speak to their peers. They want to do it all the time now. It's like 'when are we going to get a chance to speak to our buddy' and they just kind of want to do it throughout the day."

Educators also found that Buddy Up helped students throughout the instructional day by increasing instructional time and as an easy-to-use strategy during instruction. For example, one educator described that her use of Buddy Up daily and throughout the day has allowed more time for peer-tutoring among her students. A kindergarten teacher shared that her class uses the Buddy Up system throughout the day, for example, directing her students to group together with their buddies during math or English Language Arts. Another teacher explained that she likes to use Buddy Up with her students to help students resettle into learning. She explained "[I use Buddy Up] to gather them back in when they come in from recess or from lunch."

Observers also found that Buddy Up, when implemented well, created engagement and excitement in learning. Whether students participated in Conversation or Collaboration QCCs, students expressed enjoyment, excitement, and energy in the classroom when they fully participated with their peers. Students

appeared to enjoy learning more about one another, or successfully completing a short, fun activity together. Further, students appeared even more engaged when the educator helped students recognize the importance of the conversation prompt or the activity and reinforced helpful relational skills during Buddy Up time. Some educators even extended the activity and helped students reflect on and process the activity together.

Based on the surveys, focus groups, and observations, educators are generally pleased with the aspects of Harmony Everyday Practices that Harmony retained as well as the additional enhancements provided. There is still additional work to do to support effective implementation to ensure that all students are seen and heard and can continue to connect with their peers in meaningful ways.

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