

A Case Study of Harmony Third Edition Across Four Districts

Chapter 4: Units, Lessons, & Activities

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Introduction: Units, Lessons, & Activities

A primary goal of Harmony Academy is to leverage social and emotional competencies (SECs), relationship-oriented skills, and features of the school and classroom environments to promote healthy relationships and social harmony (Hanish et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2017). As a complement to the Everyday Practices (see Chapter 2), the Units, Lessons, & Activities help build foundational knowledge, skills, and mindsets that students need to foster meaningful relationships (Martin et al., 2017). They are further structured in a way that helps students get to know each other as classmates and form a classroom identity; build students' abilities to recognize emotions, connect thoughts, feelings, and actions; and stand up to stereotypes and bullying behaviors; and learn effective communication, conflict resolution strategies, and teamwork skills (Martin et al., 2017).

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

- Educators' Experience of Harmony Third Edition—Units, Lessons, & Activities (research question 1)
- Units, Lessons, & Activities to Meet the Needs of All Students (research question 2)

First, we provide an update on the refresh of the Units, Lessons, & Activities, 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 Units, Lessons, & Activities along with the perceived needs met through implementing the Units, Lessons, & Activities.

Refreshed Units, Lessons, & Activities

In Harmony Third Edition, the Units, Lessons, & Activities were enhanced based on educator feedback, review of the literature on social and emotional learning SEL including Harmony Academy, and a critical review of the program by expert reviewers (see Yoder, 2022). In this section, we describe the enhancements in the unit content and structure, the revised lesson structure, and the strategies in the lessons designed to meet students' needs.

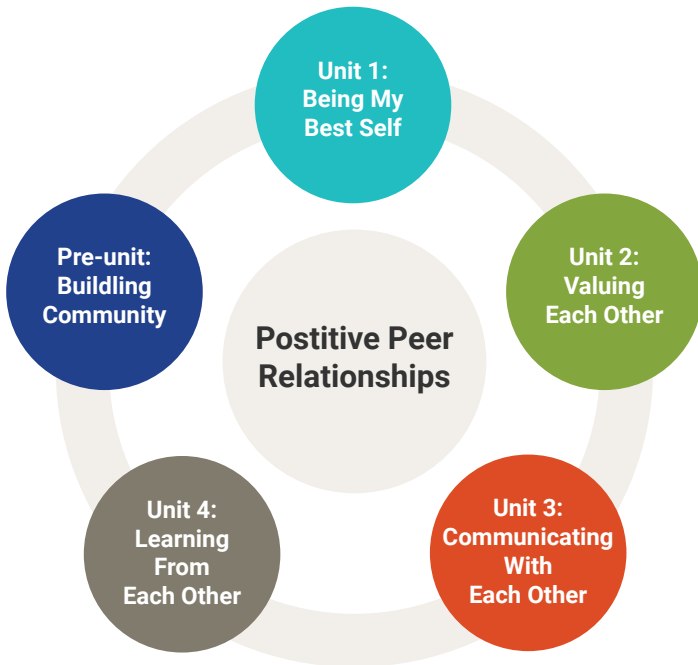
Unit content and structure. Experts and practitioners alike felt that units from Harmony Second Edition were not always coherent, were redundant, and gaps existed for critical social and emotional competencies (SECs) (Jodl et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021). They also agreed that Harmony needed to align more fully to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) definition of SEL, including their competencies and sub-competencies (CASEL, 2020). Further, an analysis of Harmony revealed that Harmony Second Edition was strong in the social domain but could use more lessons focused on the emotion domain (e.g., recognizing and expressing emotions) and cognitive domain (e.g., directing behaviors toward goals) (Jones et al., 2021).

To meet these demands, Harmony staff refreshed the unit structure, keeping over 80% of the content from the original five units in Harmony Second Edition (see Figure 1 for new unit structure). Harmony developed a pre-unit, Building Community: The First

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.

10 Days of Harmony SEL, which provides educators a way to introduce Everyday Practices within the first 10 days, and additionally provides mini lessons to help build classroom community. The first unit now focuses on understanding self (including more skills from the emotion domain) Units 2, 3, and 4 focus on building skills to promote meaningful relationships with others. In addition, lessons throughout the units have a stronger focus on students using goal-directed behavior. Along with content changes, the unit structure is now parallel across grades, with each unit including an introductory lesson and five additional lessons, for a total of 24 lessons per grade Pre-K to Grade 6.

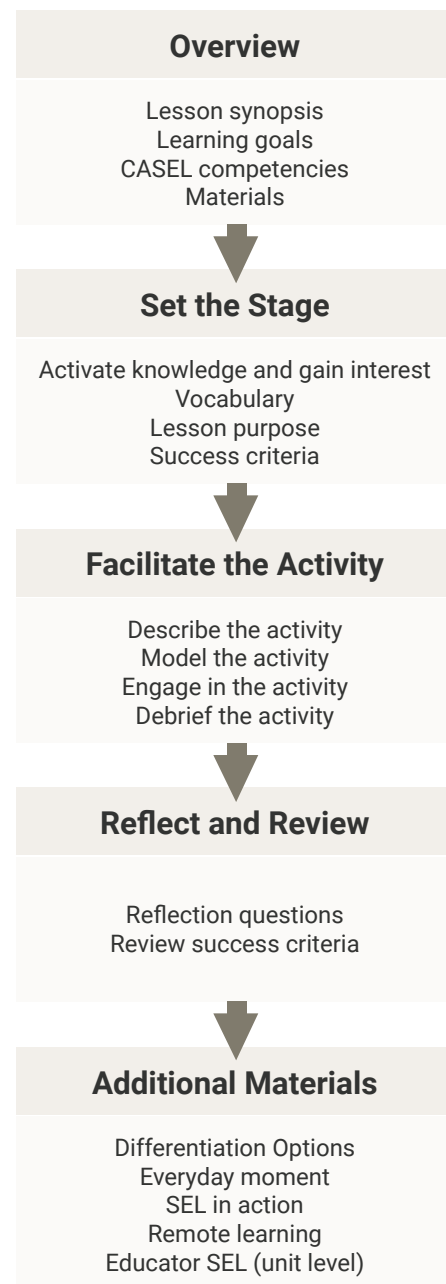
Figure 1. Harmony Third Edition Unit Structure



Lesson structure. The Harmony refresh maintained most of the lesson structure from Harmony Second Edition. Harmony Third Edition now includes four primary sections, an Overview for the educator to understand what is in the lesson, Set the Stage to help build or connect to student background, Facilitate the Lesson for students to learn about and apply the SECs, a Reflect and Review to help students reflect on what they learned and transfer the SECs to other areas of their lives, and Additional Materials to help the educator learn more about the SECs or differentiate activities (see Figure 2 for Harmony Third Edition lesson structure).

Harmony lessons have always included play- and peer-based activities, games, music, stories, movement, and art (in Pre-K to Grade 2); and role-plays, hands-on activities, discussions, and interactive games (in Grades 3–6) (Martin et al., 2017). In the Third Edition, Harmony lessons include these instructional methods and diversifies the instructional methods as Harmony moved from grade-banded to grade-specific lessons. Harmony lessons also vary in group type (buddies, small group, or whole group), and incorporate more student voice and choice.

Figure 2. Lesson Structure



As noted, Harmony staff developed an introductory lesson to help introduce unit concepts and facilitate student creation of unit-specific Personal Harmony Goals. Lessons also remain divided into three sections: Set the Stage, Facilitate the Activity, and Reflect and Review. Because of the important content within the program, Harmony kept lessons at 45-50 minutes, but ensured each of the three sections were more consistent and could fit within 10-20-minute segments educators could implement across three days or in one longer session. Based on feedback from the case study, Harmony staff ensured that all necessary content fit within the 20-minute Facilitate the Activity section, making the other two sections extension activities.

Strategies to meet student needs. To ensure that all students could access the curriculum, Harmony staff incorporated five strategies to improve access, including (a) a vocabulary section to ensure students had the language needed to really engage with the content; (b) a differentiation section for those students who needed additional support and those who needed to be challenged; (c) a remote learning option for guidance on adapting the lessons for virtual instruction; (d) example scenarios that educators can adjust to be more relevant to their students; and (e) an educator SEL section that helps educators reflect on their own competencies and strategies to ensure they are meeting the needs of all students.

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 the Units, Lessons, & Activities:

- 1. Become familiar with the program.** As educators engage more deeply with Harmony and the overarching goals and principles, they are more likely to understand the active ingredients of the Units, Lessons, & Activities, acquire the knowledge and skills that students learn during the program, help students participate in a more well-rounded Harmony experience, and improve student outcomes.
- 2. Find time to embed Harmony principles with academics.** Students benefit when they can use Harmony materials or concepts within academic instruction; for example, using the vocabulary for instruction, the role-plays to promote speaking and listening standards, and script writing for writing instruction.
- 3. Make sure to use the Facilitate the Activity section of Lessons & Activities.** The Facilitate the Activity section was written in a way that educators and students would not have to engage in the other two pieces if they do not have the time

to do the full lesson. The Set the Stage is intended to build and connect to students' background knowledge, and the Review and Reflect is to help students transfer the SECs to other aspects of their lives. Thus, they are important pieces to engage in with your students, but those portions can be adapted.

- 4. Differentiate the lessons to meet your students' needs.** There are multiple ways in which you can differentiate the lessons to meet student needs, including the differentiation and remote learning options. Educators can also differentiate the scenarios and examples to align with the localized context.
- 5. Embed other modalities.** In the case-study schools, educators would often embed content onto a PowerPoint presentation to help facilitate the activity. Further, educators can (and are encouraged to) differentiate the modality of the activities—for example, role plays, writing, acting, and poems to both provide more choice and voice and to meet students' diverse needs. The goal is for students to deepen their understanding and engage in activities that help them to meet the success criteria.

6. Keep to the point. It can be easy to veer off into other interesting conversations or activities based on the discussion prompts and activities. It is also possible to extend each of the discussion prompts or scenarios. Educators should try to avoid this temptation and stay on topic. The goal

is to facilitate quick, short lessons, discussions, and activities. If educators want to use Harmony to further extend conversations later or include it in Buddy Up, that is okay, but try to keep these lessons brief.

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 Second Edition; 93% of educators in the survey (strongly) agreed that the content in Harmony Third Edition was recognizable compared to the 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, 95% of educators (strongly) agreed that Harmony Third Edition aligns well to CASEL competencies

and skills. Further, educators reported in the survey that the Third Edition incorporated learning activities that allowed students to recognize and build on their strengths (93% [strongly] agreed), and that allowed students to connect to their lives outside of school (93% [strongly] agreed). Educators also agreed that Harmony Third Edition helped meet multiple social, emotional, and academic outcomes (see Chapter 2: Student Outcomes for more information).

Based on survey and focus group results, and anecdotal observation notes, educators and students responded favorably to the aspects that remained the same and those new components in Units, Lessons, & Activities that were new. In the following section, we provide an overview of how the Units, Lessons, & Activities 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.

Unit Structure and Content

According to the focus groups, educators responded favorably to the new unit structure—even though they only had access to two of the units. For example, a first-grade teacher commented, “I can pull what best relates to my class. I like that there are so many options.” She continued by explaining that she utilized Unit 3: Communicating with Each Other because the lessons aligned to the behaviors she was noticing with her students. “I am hoping to see not as many bad behaviors and would like to see my students work on friendships.” A second-grade teacher noted that she appreciated the increase in reproducible materials with Harmony Third Edition. “The more printables, the better!”

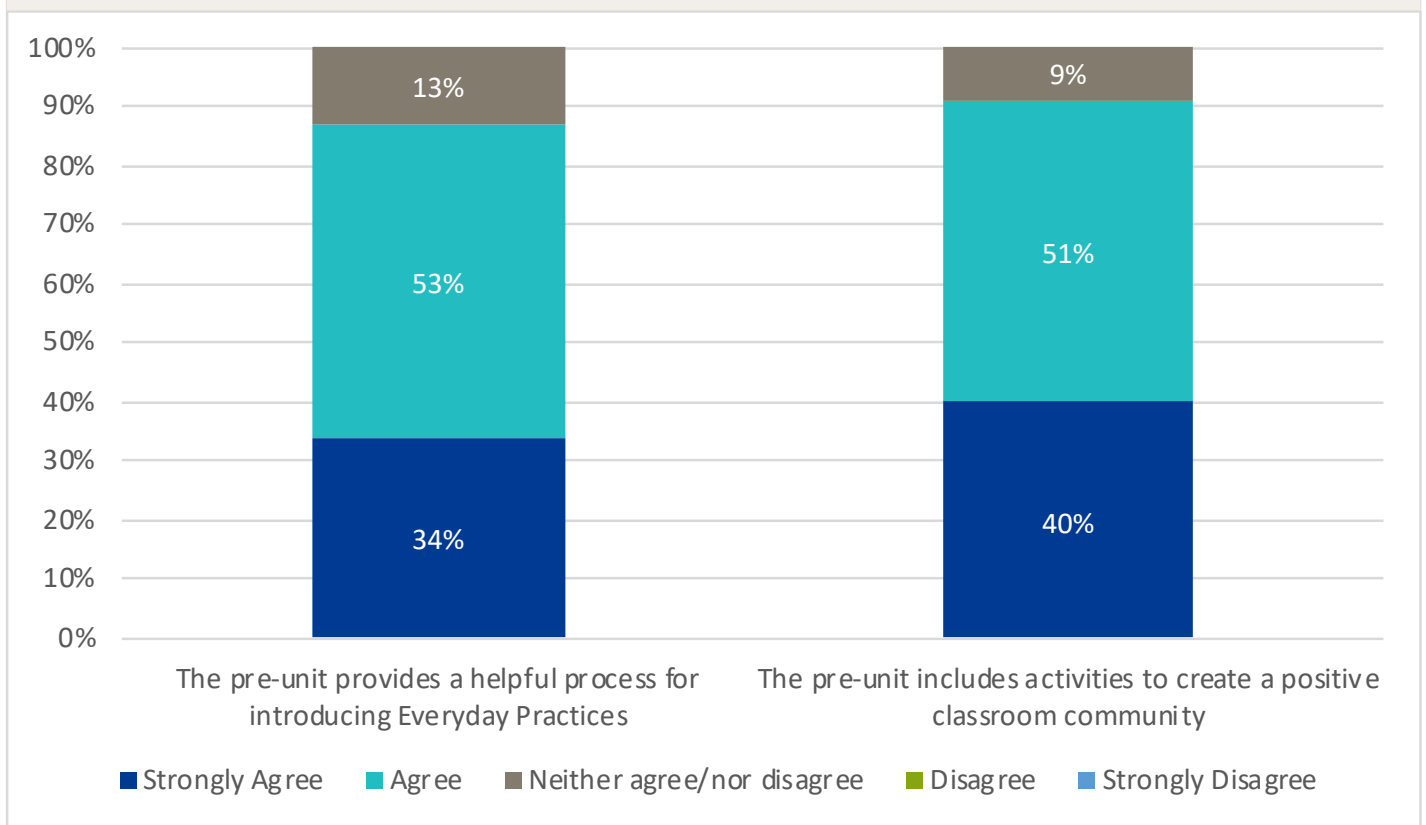
Building Community, Pre-Unit

Harmony staff created the Building Community pre-unit to introduce the Harmony Everyday Practices and provide lessons and activities that facilitate students getting to know each other more intentionally at the beginning of the school year. In the surveys, 87% of

educators⁵ (strongly) agreed that the pre-unit provided a helpful step-by-step process to introduce Everyday Practices. Further, 91% of educators (strongly) agreed that the Building Community pre-unit includes activities that create a positive classroom climate (see Figure 3). In the focus groups, a teacher expressed that she liked the layout and organization of the pre-unit. “I like how it’s mapped out throughout the 10 days, and you don’t have to feel like you have to do it in one day. Even if you miss a day, you can just continue on with the next day of the plan.” A third-grade teacher found that his students greatly benefited from the goal-setting sessions. “It’s easy to implement Class Harmony Goals, but Personal Harmony Goals requires a lot of reflection from my students.” Further, although many educators noted that they did not get a chance to use the Building Community pre-unit given the time of year, educators noted that they planned to use it at the beginning of the next school year. For instance, a sixth-grade teacher shared, “We look forward to starting the year with Harmony [Third Edition] next year!”

5 Only 53 educators used the Pre-Unit.

Figure 3. Educators’ Perceptions of the Building Community Pre-Unit



Lesson Structure and Components

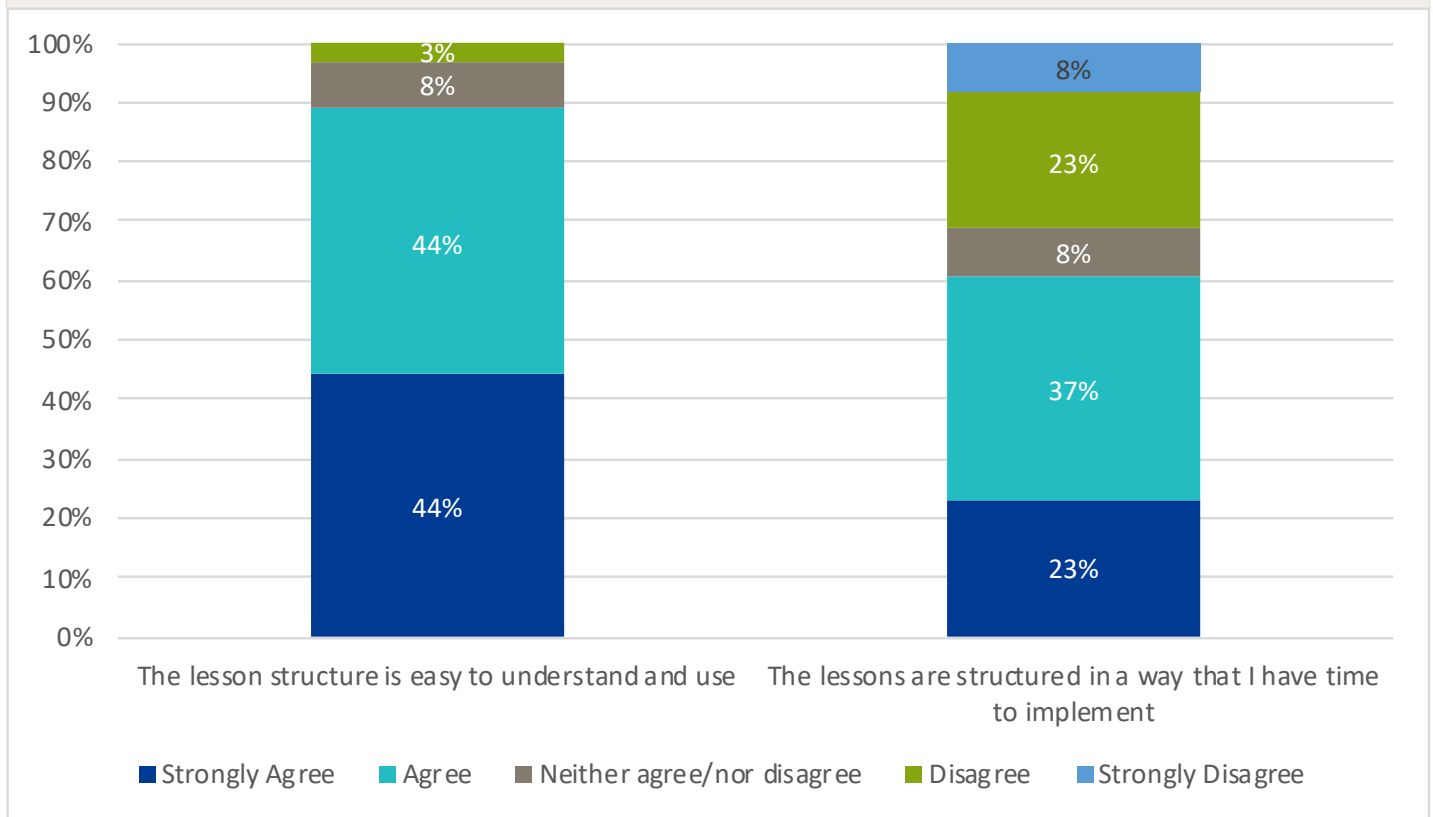
Based on the surveys, focus groups, and observations, educators enjoyed implementing the lessons and activities with their students. Educators generally found the three-part structure—Set the Stage, Facilitate the Activity, and Review and Reflect—helpful to guide the lessons. For instance, in surveys, 88% of educators (strongly) agreed that the lesson structure was easy to understand and use; while 60% of educators (strongly) agreed that the lessons were structured in such a way that they have time to implement them in their classrooms (see Figure 4).

In the focus groups, educators generally agreed with their reports in the surveys. They felt that the three sections were helpful for students. A sixth-grade teacher said, “In terms of planning and preparing for a lesson, [Harmony Third Edition] was wonderful. The layout and the structure were very easy to follow. It is so very user-friendly.” Further, educators found the scripts helpful to use during the lessons to stay on topic. A teacher added, “[Harmony Third Edition] is a total guide for teachers to use. It has everything

there—from the discussions to the lessons. I can click on a lesson, or I can skip ahead if I feel my class needs that.” A second-grade teacher echoed these feelings and said, “I like how user-friendly it is. It is very intuitive, and easy to search and find materials.”

When observing lessons and activities, observers also noticed that educators took steps to prepare for the lesson. Some educators took minor steps, like printing and highlighting lessons. Others took an additional step, albeit not required, and added content to their PowerPoint decks to help facilitate the activities with their students. This generally helped educators stay on track and maintain a consistent flow with the lessons. Observers also noticed some educators who would go off-topic or deviate substantially from the script. In these instances, it was difficult for educators to get through the lesson or stay focused on the success criteria for the lesson. This suggests that although Harmony lessons are generally easy to implement, it does take some prep work for educators to review the lesson to ensure that they understand the core pieces of the lesson.

Figure 4. Educators’ Perceptions of Lesson Structure and Components



Educators also mentioned that it was difficult to complete a full lesson in one sitting; however, educators provided multiple solutions to adapt the lessons to meet their student needs within their given time constraints. One educator, for instance, shared that sometimes her kindergarten students take longer to complete tasks that are in the program. To mitigate this, she used the refreshed three-part lesson structure to extend the lessons throughout the week to ensure she can support her students’ development. She explained, “We’ll do the Set the Stage on Monday, Facilitate the Activity on Tuesday—which we love. We like breaking it down through the whole week and then just keep reviewing throughout the month.” However, another teacher was concerned that if she were to break the lessons into multiple days, her students might lose something. She suggested more flexibility in facilitating lessons (e.g., expanded or condensed versions). Yet another educator explained that she truncated the lessons because she can only spend about 35 minutes a week [on Harmony Third Edition].

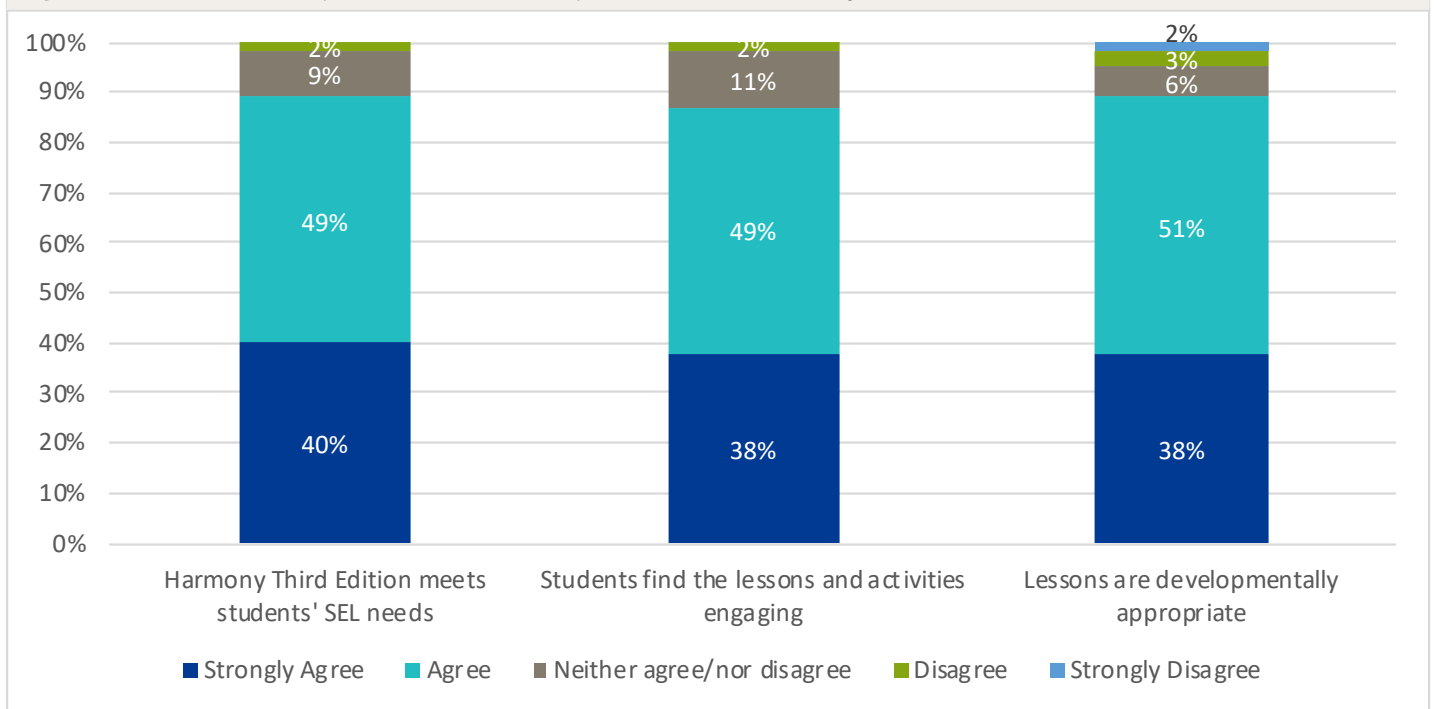
Observers also noted the difficulty for educators in completing the lessons within one time period. When observing lessons and activities, oftentimes, the educators would complete only one section

(classrooms usually got through Set the Stage or Facilitate the Activity) and rarely completed all three sections. When a full lesson was completed (all three sections), students and the educator began to lose stamina, particularly when the educator provided more than the allotted time for various sections. Thus, observers also noticed the importance of helping educators find strategies to complete lessons in shorter time periods. One solution identified as part of this case study was to ensure that the Facilitate the Activity part could be implemented without the other two parts to ensure the lesson could be completed within 20 minutes. In other words, Facilitate the Activity provided sufficient background information and debrief to allow students to successfully engage with the success criteria, and the Set the Stage and Reflect and Review sections could be used more as extension activities.

Meeting Student Needs

Educators thought Harmony Third Edition was a useful tool for their classroom, with 89% of educators (strongly) agreeing that Harmony Third Edition met student needs, in part because students found them engaging. For instance, 87% of educators (strongly)

Figure 5. Educators’ Perceptions of Students’ Experiences with Harmony Third Edition



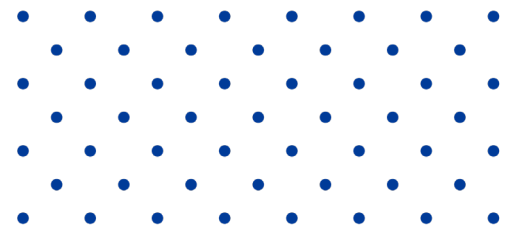
agreed that students found the lessons and activities engaging (see Figure 5). In focus groups, educators mentioned what they thought students would say about Harmony SEL. Educators thought students would say that Harmony is fun and engaging. For instance, a kindergarten teacher shared, “My kids are really engaged with the lessons—they love Z.” A third-grade teacher acknowledged that “any time you can get commitments and goals from the kids is good, no matter how you do it. Making a commitment each day and evaluating how they did personally and as a class, things became clearer for them.”

Educators also noted that the lessons helped address in-the-moment concerns or issues that were arising in class. For instance, educators at times selected lessons based on their students’ needs in the moment. One sixth grade educator stated, “If the kids are having trouble making friendships, we sit and do lessons on that as needed.” A fifth-grade teacher shared that her students were working on a lesson about conflict and communication, and they directly applied their new skills when working in small groups. A fifth-grade teacher noted that the scripts from the lessons and activities helped simulate a group work activity for his students and that they now use it as a model for other subjects throughout the day.

Further, educators felt that lessons and activities met students’ needs because they helped address grade-

level needs; 89% of educators (strongly) agreed that the lessons were developmentally appropriate (see Figure 5). A fifth-grade teacher shared, “My kids really enjoyed a lot of the activities; like today, they built a tower out of paper (Unit 3. Lesson 5), and they had to cooperate. They also liked the Communication Boosters and Bloopers lesson (Unit 3. Lesson 3).” Another fifth-grade teacher noted, “Previously (Harmony Second Edition) the students felt like it was too silly for them, but now they are more engaged.” In focus groups, educators did note that, at times, they had to differentiate Harmony Third Edition activities based on students’ academic needs. For example, a fourth-grade teacher shared that her students lacked writing stamina, so she alternated between script writing and role-playing.

Based on the surveys, focus groups, and observations, educators thought that the aspects of Units, Lessons, & Activities that Harmony SEL kept, and the enhancements provided, helped meet diverse students’ needs. They also felt that Harmony Third Edition provided sufficient adaptability in structure and content to meet students where they are at developmentally. Additional work needs to be done to ensure that students’ social, emotional, and academic needs are met; but Harmony Third Edition provides a robust tool and resource to help educators as they support their students.



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