

A Case Study of Harmony Third Edition Across Four Districts

Executive Summary

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Introduction: Executive Summary

Harmony Academy is a Pre-K–Grade-6 program centered on building student social and emotional competencies (SECs) through relationship-driven strategies (Hanish et al., 2016). Initially developed at Arizona State University in 2008 (Martin et al., 2017), and transitioning to National University in 2014, Harmony supports 50,000 schools and organizations, influencing 15,000,000 students throughout the country. Recognizing the need to ensure the impact of the program is sustained, amplified, and reaches millions more students, Harmony refreshed the program with expanded content and improvements to the user experience—Harmony Third Edition. The Third Edition provides educators (teachers, counselors, and out-of-school instructors) a set of refreshed, familiar resources (Everyday Practices and Units, Lessons, & Activities) for students to have an integrated, relevant, and comprehensive social and emotional learning (SEL) experience. With a range of refinements and updates that reflect the latest research on SEL practices along with suggestions from users, the program refresh includes SEL concepts and instructional models designed to improve the effectiveness and enhance the relevance of Harmony for all students (Yoder, 2022).

As part of the Harmony Third Edition development process, Harmony partnered with four districts²—two midsize districts in the Midwest, one midsize district in the South, and one midsize district in the Southwest—to receive early access to the refreshed Everyday Practices (Meet Up and Buddy Up) and to Units 3 and

4 of the Units, Lessons, & Activities and Storybooks. Educators received two district-specific trainings—January 2022 focused on the refreshed Everyday Practices, and February/March 2022 focused on the Lessons & Activities. Educators had opportunities across five months (January through May 2022) to pilot Harmony Third Edition.

Most participating educators across the four districts offered feedback on their experience 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 2022 to help Harmony understand how educators implemented Harmony Third Edition.⁴ In the executive summary, we provide high-level findings from the case study for the four research questions as well as recommendations for educators and administrators as they implement the program. Specifically, this executive summary focuses on the following:

- Educator’s Experience of Harmony Third Edition (research question 1)
- Meeting the Needs of All Students (research question 2)
- Perceptions of Student Outcomes and Harmony Third Edition (research question 3)
- Educators’ Perceptions of Harmony Third Edition and Future Usage (research question 4)

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.

2 Harmony partnered with 3-6 schools per district, for a total of 17 schools and 88 educator volunteers.

3 61 educators completed the full survey; 63 educators completed part of the survey.

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.

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 program materials.

- 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 be a part of their routine.
- 2. 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, understand the knowledge and skills that students learn during the program, help students participate in a more well-rounded Harmony experience, and improve student outcomes.
- 3. Find time to embed Harmony principles with academics.** Students benefit when they can use Harmony materials or concepts within academic instruction; for example, using Storybooks and Z for vocabulary instruction, using Buddy Up partners during instructional tasks, and using Harmony lessons prior to academic tasks (e.g., problem solving).

- 4. Make certain 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 piece, it is important to ensure each student’s name is said during the greeting, and that a small number of students share per day so other students can respond and ask questions regarding their share. Doing so will provide opportunities for students to solve problems or talk about achievements related to Harmony Goals.
- 5. Let students know the importance of Buddy Up.** As educators engage in the Buddy Up process, ensure that they help students process why they engage in these conversations and activities, including reinforcing SECs they use throughout the process.
- 6. Make sure to use the Facilitate the Activity section of Lessons and 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 student 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 these portions are adaptable.

Key Findings

Educators’ Experience of Harmony Third Edition

The first research question asked, “How do educators experience Harmony Third Edition?” In this section we explore educators’ experiences with the program overall in addition to specific Harmony Program Practices (Meet Up, Buddy Up, Lessons, & Activities, and Storybooks).

Overall

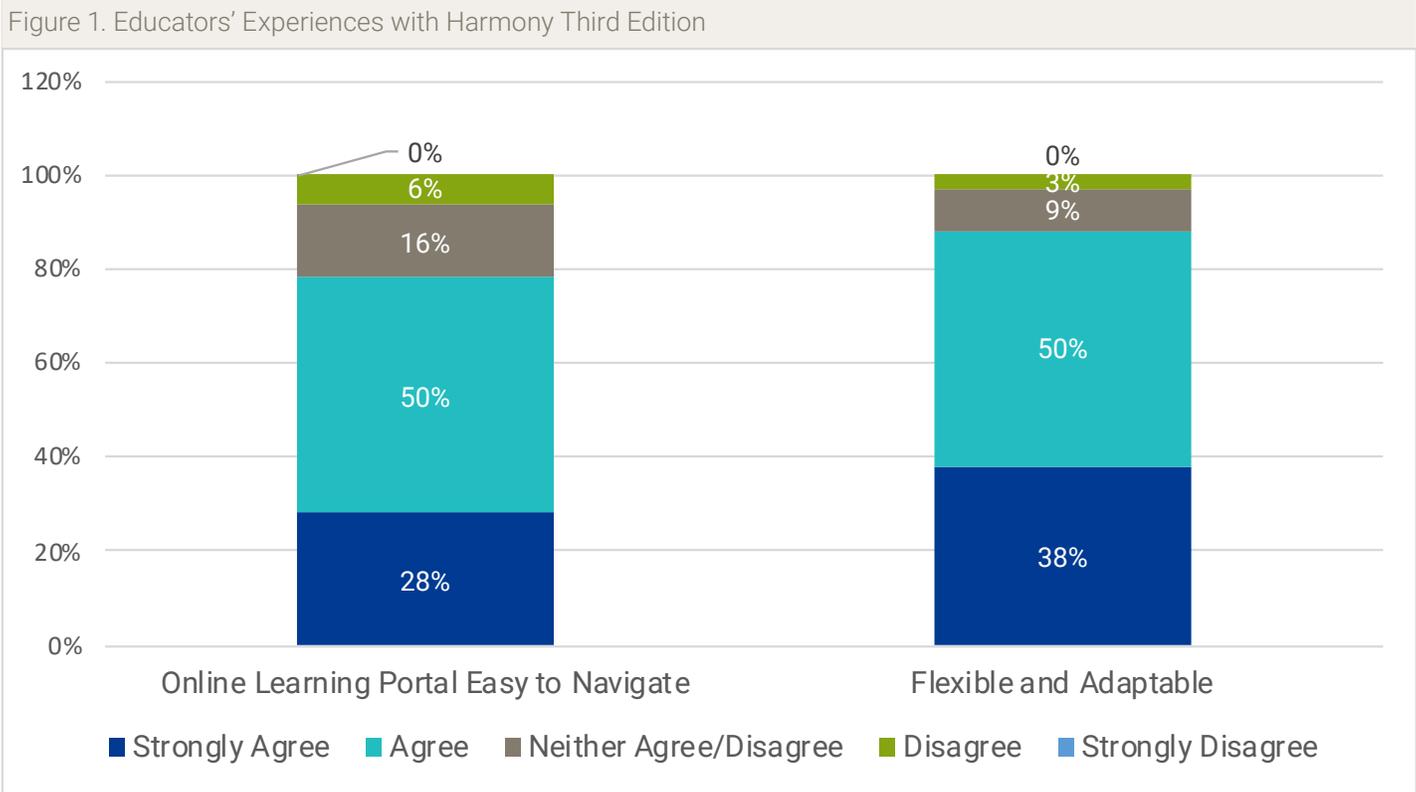
In both the survey and the focus groups, **educators responded favorably** about their experience with Third Edition. In the survey 86% of educators said they were (very) satisfied with the program, whereas 11% neither agreed/disagreed, and 3% did not agree. Further, 78% of educators (strongly) agreed the online portal was

easy to navigate, and 88% thought the program was flexible and adaptable (see Figure 1).

Focus group responses substantiated the survey results. For example, focus group participants stated that the lesson structure was easy to understand and to use in their respective classroom environments. **Educators found the lessons to be highly engaging while supporting students’ growth and development of social and emotional competencies (SECs).** Their students were able to apply new skills in authentic ways with their peers. An educator explained that Harmony Third Edition guides her students to learn appropriate ways to ask their peers questions when they are sharing. Another educator noticed gains in her students’ self-esteem in other academic areas, and attributes those gains to her students having learned to be more deliberate in giving and receiving

encouragement. Although educators generally liked the program, they noted that the greatest barrier to implementing Harmony Third Edition was time.

Classroom observations across Meet Up, Buddy Up, and Units, Lessons, & Activities showcased **student and educator engagement and excitement in the Harmony Curriculum, particularly in those classrooms that were implementing the program as intended.** Educators generally followed the program components. As we observed classrooms, we noted places where we could make enhancements in the actual materials (e.g., shortening aspects of lessons, use of PowerPoints) and places where we could reinforce components of the program during professional learning (e.g., importance of Sharing and Responding in Meet Up).



Harmony Program Practices

Educators recognized most of the content from Harmony Second Edition; 84% of educators in the survey (strongly) agreed that the content in Harmony Third Edition was recognizable compared to the Second Edition. 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 or refreshed components in Meet Up, Buddy Up, Lessons, Activities, and Storybooks.**

Meet Up in the refresh included all original components—Greeting, Sharing & Responding, Checking In, and Connecting (Hanish et al., 2017)—but added two new sub-components —Personal Harmony Goals (along with Class Harmony Goals for Checking In) and Mindful Minute (along with Community Builders QCC for Connecting) (Yoder, 2022). Educators (strongly) agreed that allowing students to check in with themselves (Personal Goals) or with others (Class Goals) was helpful (91%) and connecting with themselves (Mindful Minute) and with others (Community Builders QCC) was helpful (89%). During the focus groups, educators corroborated these findings. For example, educators embedded Meet Up into their morning meeting to help set the tone for the day and used Meet Up after lunch or recess to refocus their students. **Educators also stated that Personal Harmony Goals allowed students to be more social and emotionally engaged in the classroom and mindful of other students’ feelings.** Another educator was compelled to reflect and respond to her own social and emotional needs because of promoting SEL with students.

Observers further noted that educators and students went through most of the core components of Meet Up as intended, but also noted some deviations. For example, not all students’ names were used during the greeting, and oftentimes, students did not have a chance to respond after a student shared during the Sharing & Responding portion, which are important components.

Buddy Up did not change between Second and Third Edition (except for expanding the Quick Connection Cards [QCC] deck). During observations, the Harmony team noticed

specific practices that really enhanced the Buddy Up process. For example, **educators made sure that they focused on one QCC (rather than multiple), provided time for students to truly engage with their buddy (who changed weekly), and provided context for the importance of Buddy Up or the SECs students used during Buddy Up.**

Lessons and Activities had the most substantial change in the refresh. Original content was divided into four units with five lessons per unit that were developmental from Pre-K to Grade 6 (no longer grade-banded), with an introductory lesson at the beginning of each unit (for a total of 24 lessons). Harmony also developed a 10-day Building Community pre-unit that introduces the Everyday Practices and includes four getting-to-know-you lessons (from Second Edition). Although the content in Harmony Third and Second Editions were similar, the structure of the lessons was made more consistent across all lessons with three components—Set the Stage, Facilitate the Activity, and Reflect and Review.

Based on survey results, 88% of educators (strongly) agreed that the lesson structure was easy to understand and use; 85% of educators (strongly) agreed that students found the lessons and activities engaging; and 76% of educators (strongly) agreed that the Building Community pre-unit includes activities that create a positive classroom community (and 14% stated they did not use the pre-unit given the time of year they received the early release version) (see Figure 2).

During the focus groups, **educators further stated that the lessons were effective at providing targeted support for specific areas of**

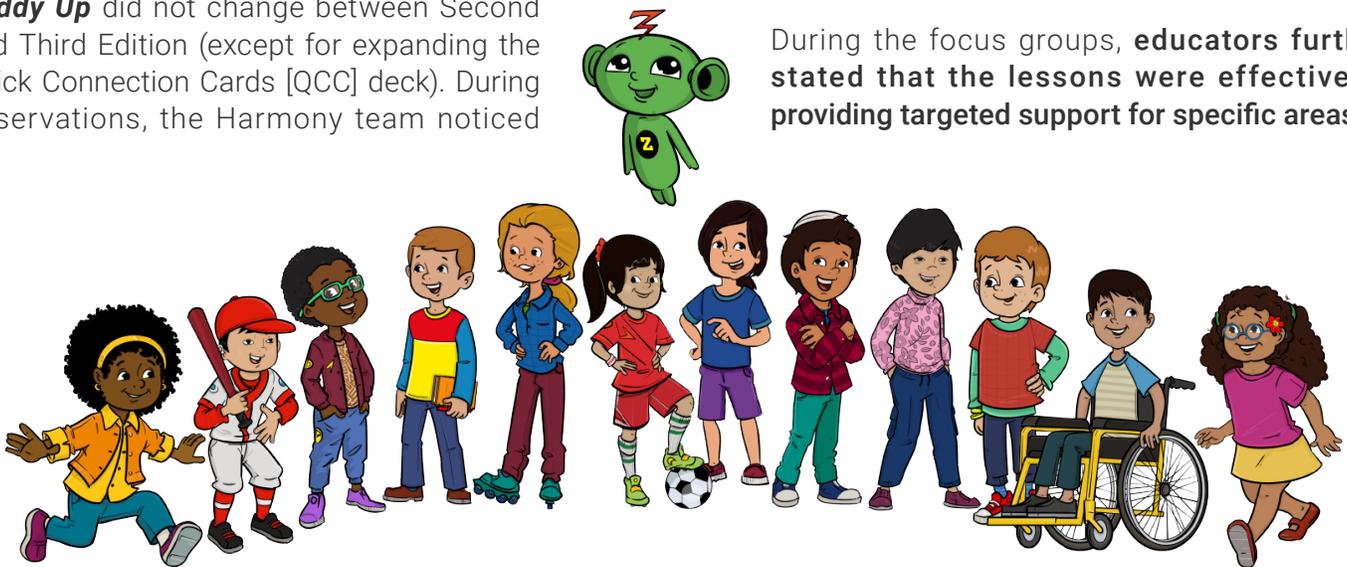
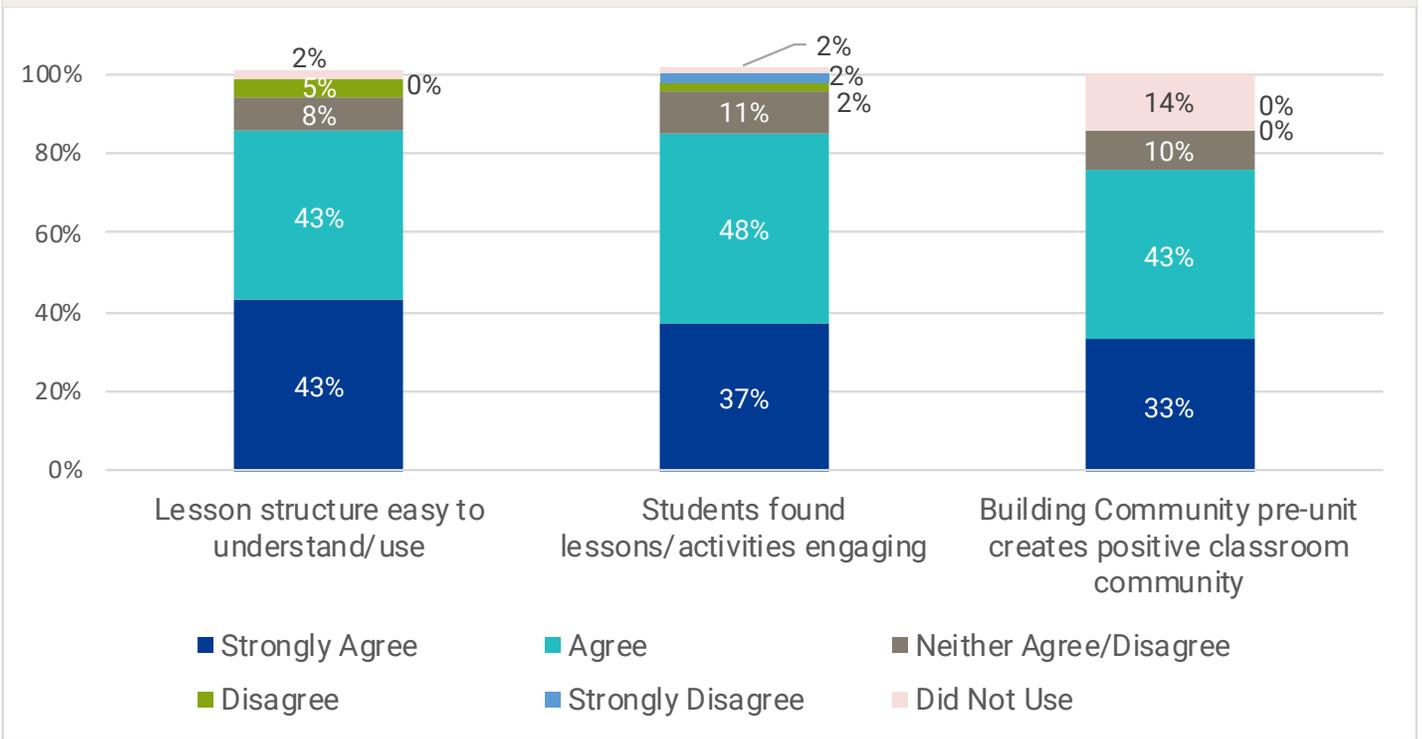


Figure 2. Educators' Views on Lessons and Activities



need (e.g., difficulty making friends or challenges with communication during group work), and this allowed educators greater autonomy when selecting lessons. As Harmony continued the refresh, educators requested (and Harmony ensured) that the Facilitate the Activity section was written in a way that it could be done without the other two components to ensure the lesson could be completed within 20 minutes. Observers also noted the importance of ensuring that the Facilitate the Activity section could be done in 20 minutes, as oftentimes, it was not possible for educators to complete all three sections with the time allotted for Harmony.

Storybooks were revised to be shorter, grade-specific, and aligned to the lesson SEL objectives (lesson-specific for Grades Pre-K-2; and unit-specific for Grades 3-5). Most educators that used the storybooks⁵ (69%) (strongly) agreed that the storybooks are interesting and engaging to students; and 78% (strongly) agreed that they were useful to introduce lesson SEL concepts. During focus groups, educators stated that their **students appreciated the Z character to support skill development and that**

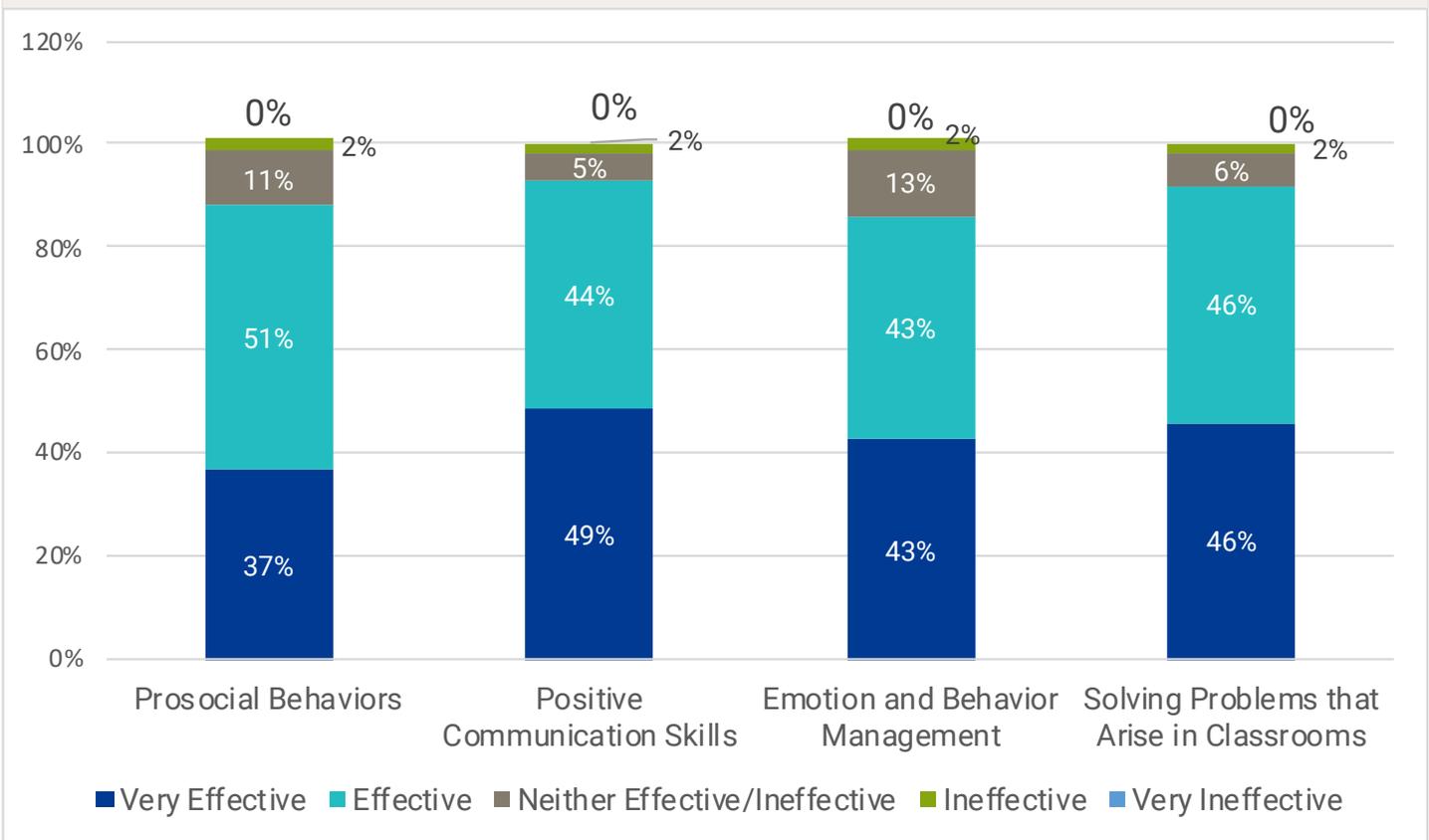
the stories were shorter. They were also excited to discover that the stories **have a read-aloud feature in both English and Spanish.** Although storybook use was rarely observed, observers saw educators use the story as an opportunity to ask students questions about the SEL concepts during and after reading.

Meeting the Needs of All Students

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; and 95% of educators (strongly) agreed that Third Edition provided students opportunities to develop their SECs. Further, educators reported in the survey that the Third Edition was very or somewhat effective in promoting the following outcomes: prosocial behaviors (87%), positive communication skills (94%), emotion and

5 n=42 used the Storybooks.

Figure 3. Impact of Harmony Third Edition on Students' SECs



behavior management (86%), and solving problems that arise in the classroom (92%) (see Figure 3).

The focus groups corroborated what **educators reported** in the survey. Specifically, they reported **positive changes in their students' SECs (e.g., communicating with peers, working in groups, and controlling their feelings) and peer relationships**. Further, educators **noticed carryover effects** of Harmony Third Edition **in other subjects**. For example, in English Language Arts, educators noted that the Storybooks supported vocabulary development, and the Lessons & Activities supported student writing skills. Further, other educators noticed that students used the Harmony SECs in social studies, especially when students engaged in group work.

Observers also noted variation in how students engaged with the Harmony content. **In classrooms where educators implemented the program as intended and demonstrated excitement as they used the program with students, students were**

also highly engaged with one another, responded to each other, and collaborated (either in whole group, small groups, or buddy pairs) with each other during Harmony activities. When educators felt more rushed or were not as bought-in to about the program, there was a notable difference in student engagement.

Perception of Student Outcomes and Harmony Third Edition

The first two research questions focused on descriptive information about Harmony Third Edition. The third research question asked, "What is the relationship between educators' perception of Harmony Third Edition and their perception of students' outcomes?" In other words, we were curious if there were specific aspects of the Third Edition refresh that correlated with the perceived student outcomes. For example, **educators' perception that Harmony provided opportunities to build healthy relationships significantly correlated with most perceived outcomes, including, for example, using**

prosocial behaviors ($r=.52$), positive communication skills ($r=.59$), emotion and behavior management ($r=.43$), and creating feelings of belonging ($r=.62$). Similarly, **perceiving the program as trauma-informed is significantly correlated with perceived student emotion** and behavior management ($r=.40$); and **perceiving the program as culturally responsive is significantly correlated** with educator perceptions of the student outcomes feelings of belong ($r=.47$), improving peer relationships ($r=.46$), and academic achievement ($r=.47$).

Educators' Perception of Harmony Third Edition and Future Usage

Finally, we wanted to know what made educators excited about implementing Harmony Third Edition next school year with our fourth research question,

6 r =correlation coefficient, where .40-.59 is a moderate correlation, .60-.79 is a strong correlation, and >.80 is a very strong correlation.

“What is the relationship between educators’ perception of Harmony Third Edition and their perceived future usage of Harmony Third Edition?” **Eighty-one percent of educators (strongly) agreed that they were excited to implement the program next year.** We found that educator excitement to implement Harmony next year was significantly correlated with educators’ perception of Harmony’s ability to build healthy relationships ($r=.55$), develop SEL skills ($r=.64$), build upon personal strengths and assets ($r=.57$), include activities that connect with students’ lives outside of school ($r=.48$), and promote culturally responsive practices ($r=.55$). **When educators understand these core goals of Harmony, they are more likely to be excited about program implementation the next school year.**

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