

# A Case Study of Harmony Third Edition Across Four Districts

---

## Chapter 1: Getting Started with Harmony

by Nick Yoder, PhD, Whitney Impellizeri Cignatta, EdD,  
and Karryll Winborne-Phillips, PhD



# Contents

<b>Introduction: Getting Started with Harmony. . . . .</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Recommendations . . . . .</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Methods . . . . .</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Key Findings . . . . .</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Educators' Experience of Harmony Third Edition . . . . .</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Educators' Perception of Harmony Third Edition and Future Usage . . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>References . . . . .</b>	<b>.11</b>



# A Case Study of Harmony Third Edition Across Four Districts<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction: Getting Started with Harmony

Harmony Academy is a user-friendly program that educators, counselors, and out-of-school time professionals can use to nurture student social and emotional development. Harmony is user friendly because you can find all program materials online, in addition to offering quick activities students can engage in (Buddy Up), community-building routines (Meet Up), and strategies to explicitly nurture student social and emotional growth (Units, Lessons, & Activities) (Hanish et al., 2016; Yoder, 2022). In the refreshed Harmony Third Edition, program materials embed more teaching practices commonly used within social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, including added role-plays, vocabulary instruction, games, and writing or drawing opportunities (Jones et al., 2021; Yoder, 2022).

There are multiple things that educators do or can do that help prepare them for this work. Research has found strategies within Harmony that educators can use to help get started in implementing SEL programs (CASEL, 2020; Skoog-Hoffman et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021, Reilly et al., 2021). For instance, educators can develop a deep understanding of the program, make efforts to nurture their own social and emotional growth, and understand students' SEL needs. Educators can find dedicated time to explicitly teach social and emotional competencies (SECs), as well as identify the SECs educators can model, help students apply, and reinforce throughout the day. SEL implementation is also enhanced when educators get to know their students and build relationships, leverage students' lived experiences within SEL instruction, and use it as a tool to build student

agency, belonging, and collaborative-problem-solving. Further, educators and students co-construct a safe and supportive learning environment, where students experience the necessary conditions to develop and apply their SECs. Each of these pieces help educators identify what is needed to get started to implement the high-quality SEL program, Harmony.

In the Getting Started with Harmony chapter, we provide high-level findings from the Harmony Third Edition case study about how educators experienced the Harmony Curriculum materials and those practices and tools that helped facilitate successful implementation. Specifically, the Getting Started chapter focuses on the following:

- Educators' Experience of Harmony Third Edition (research question 1)
- Educators' Perception of Harmony Third Edition and Future Usage (research question 4)

First, we provide 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 in getting started and discuss what will propel them to use the program in the future.

<sup>1</sup> 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 get started using the program.

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, recognize 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. **Start in a way that you are comfortable.** There are multiple practices and tools to Harmony Third

Edition. Do not try to implement everything at once. Start with those pieces that you think will bring you and your students immediate success, and then continue building in other pieces of the program.

4. **Use Harmony Third Edition in a way to meet your students’ needs.** Harmony includes multiple practices and tools to support students’ SECs. Educators often cannot use every single piece of Harmony on a daily basis. Thus, it is important to implement those pieces that your students respond well to, and that meet both individual student and classroom needs.
5. **Professional Learning is an essential tool to support your implementation of Harmony Third Edition.** Harmony offers several options for educators to receive on-demand, live, and site-based professional learning opportunities to introduce and expand their knowledge and understanding of Harmony Third Edition. Please visit the Training and Advanced Education menu on the Harmony Online Learning Portal to explore the options that best meet your needs.

# Methods

As part of the Harmony Third Edition development process, Harmony partnered with four districts<sup>2</sup> 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=61<sup>3</sup>) 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<sup>4</sup> (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

## Educators' Experience of Harmony Third Edition

The first research question asked was, "How do educators experience Harmony Third Edition?" To help educators get started, it is critical to understand how they perceived Harmony Third Edition (e.g., goals, navigation, professional learning), strategies they used to overcome implementation challenges, and how they used the new pieces of Harmony Third Edition that support implementation. We discuss these perspectives in the following section.

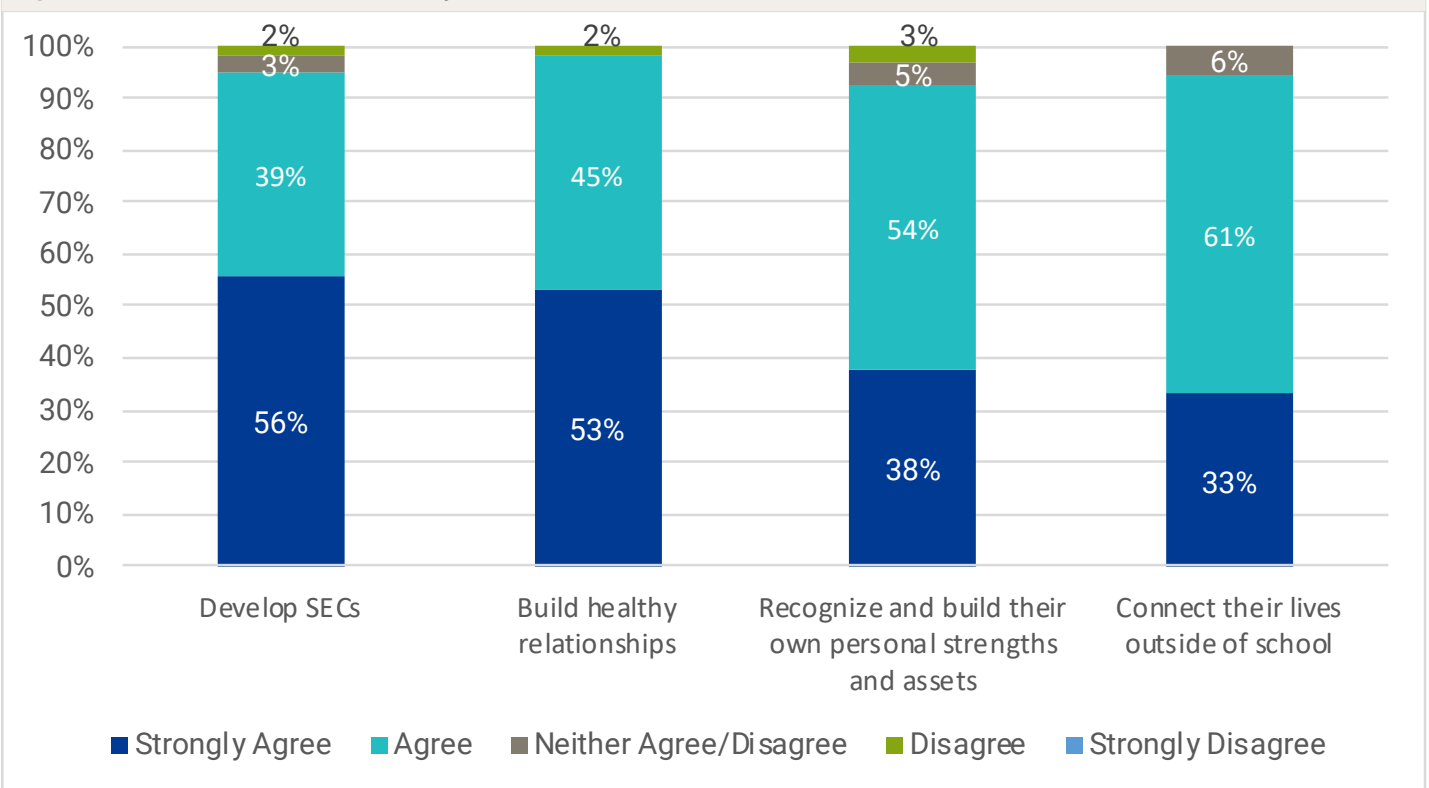
### Goals of the program

Harmony is intended to help students build meaningful relationships, reduce relational conflict in classrooms, and build students' SECs, including their knowledge (e.g., identify self-regulation strategies), skills (e.g., problem-solving, collaboration), and beliefs (e.g.,

confidence and self-efficacy) (Jones et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2017; Yoder, 2022). Educators agreed. In the surveys, educators reported that Harmony Third Edition provided opportunities for their students to develop SECs (95% [strongly] agree), build healthy relationships (98% [strongly] agree), recognize and build on student strengths and assets (92% [strongly] agree), and incorporates learning activities that allow students to connect their lives outside of school (with their family or community) (94% [strongly] agree) (see Figure 1).

Educators in the focus group corroborated these findings. Based on their experience with Harmony Third Edition, educators recognized the benefits that Harmony had for their classroom environment and student SECs development. For example, a third-grade teacher expressed that Harmony Third Edition allowed his students to develop, "... strong interpersonal skills and build classroom community."

Figure 1. Perceived Goals of Harmony Third Edition





Another educator shared that, “[Harmony Third Edition] allowed [my students] to be more social and emotionally engaged in the classroom, and to be more mindful of other students’ feelings.”

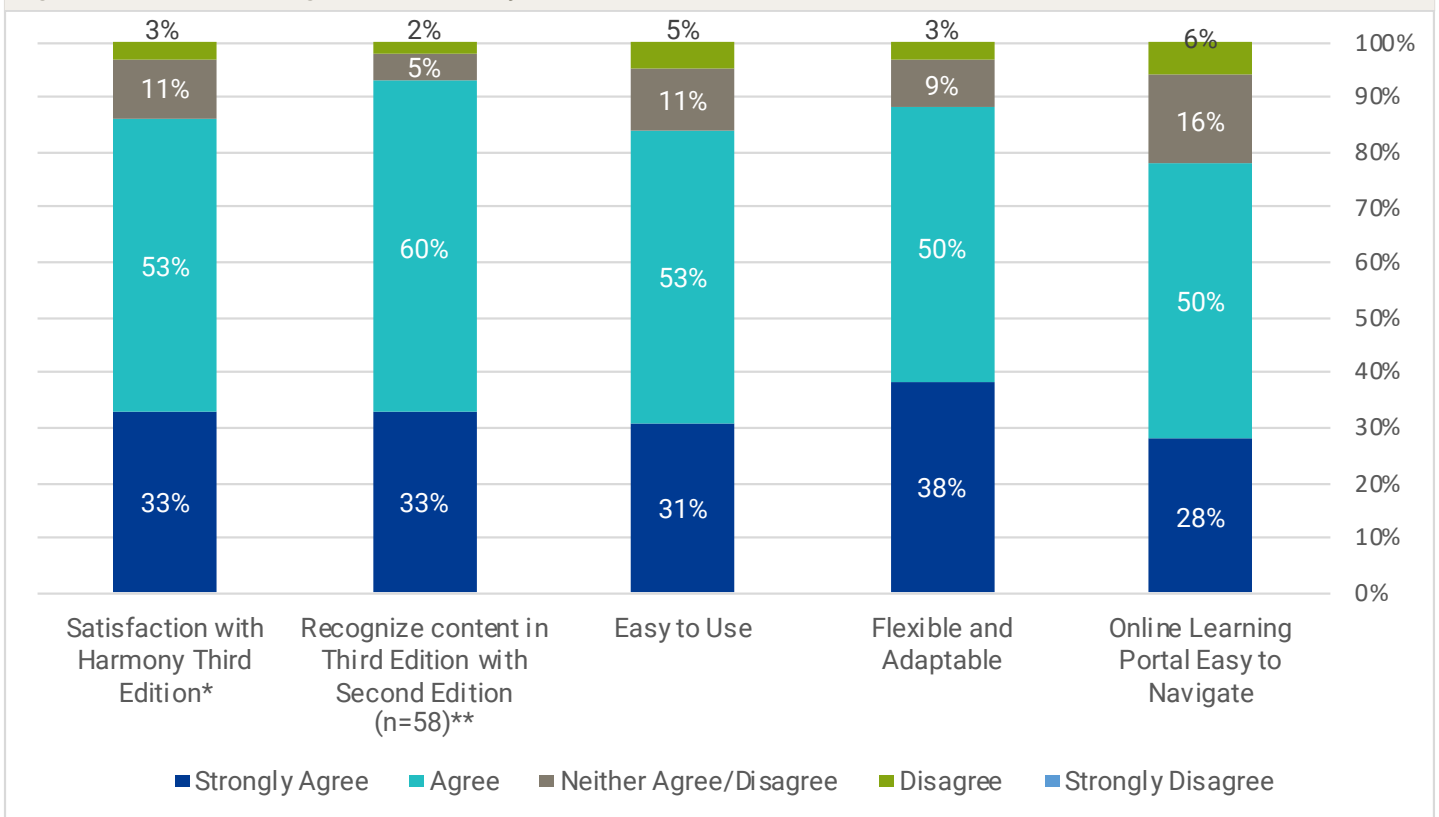
During the refresh, the Harmony team also took great care to ensure that Harmony Third Edition met the needs of all students, meaning that it needed to be adaptable, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive (CASEL, 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Yoder, 2022). Educators agreed that Harmony Third Edition met those goals, with 67% of educators (strongly) agreeing the program is trauma-informed and culturally responsive (86% [strongly] agree). A special education teacher explained, “[Using Harmony Third Edition] has given me really good insight to my students’ home lives, and I think it’s helped create community in my classroom.” Further, educators noted progress in their students’ interactions with one another and improvement in the overall classroom climate. More specifically, an educator said, “My students feel safe. This is a safe classroom. No one will be penalized for not being right and it’s okay to be wrong. No one is

going to make fun of you.” Another educator noticed that her students are more comfortable with one another and that, “They are able to ask questions and ask for help which is making them be successful in their different classrooms. They are advocating for themselves.”

### Navigation of Harmony Third Edition

Educators were overwhelmingly satisfied with the Third Edition and how to navigate the program to support their students’ social and emotional development. In both the survey and the focus groups, educators responded favorably about their experience using the Harmony Third Edition materials. For example, in the survey 86% of educators said they were (very) satisfied with the program. Further, 78% of educators (strongly) agreed the online portal was easy to navigate; and 88% (strongly) agreed that the program was flexible and adaptable (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Educators’ Navigation of Harmony Third Edition



\*Note. Response items ranged from (very) satisfied through (very) dissatisfied

\*\* Note. Not all teachers used Harmony Second Edition

Focus group responses substantiated the survey results. Educators found that the program was easy to use and created a better overall experience in their planning and implementation. For instance, educators appreciated that Harmony Third Edition is completely digital and clearly organized by unit, which allowed them to access specific resources to meet their students' needs in the moment. They also found that the multiple program components helped meet their students' diverse needs. For instance, they found that the newly added Mindful Minute (a part of Meet Up) helped students regulate emotions; and found that the Personal Harmony Goals and Class Harmony Goals encouraged students to be more self-aware and reflective of their social and emotional needs.

Focus group participants also stated that the lesson structure was easy to understand and to use in their respective classroom environments. A third-grade teacher specifically referenced lesson 3.4: Speak Up from Unit 3: Communicating with Others. She said, "It really taught the kids how to communicate when they were frustrated with somebody or if they wanted somebody to stop. I thought it was a valuable add-on."

Educators also thought Buddy Up and Meet Up activities were easy to implement. Educators noted that they frequently implemented these practices throughout the week during their morning meetings. A first-grade teacher expressed, "I think the Buddy Up is definitely their [her students'] favorite part. They especially love the little activities. The conversations are good, too, but they like the things where they are actually interacting with each other." A fourth-grade teacher explained, "I'll pick a stick and I'll say, 'What did your partner say?' and that seems to work out. It's really eye opening; some of those questions [from the Quick Connection Cards] are interesting especially with what they have to say. You get a hint of what life is like outside of school."

Other educators spoke about how they navigated the different program practices and tools. For example, one educator explained that she facilitates Harmony during the social studies block at the end of the day, alternating between doing the lesson or doing Buddy Up or Meet Up, but not concurrently in the same block because of timing issues. She stated, "Usually we'll

switch whether we're going to do the lesson with the book or we're going to do the meeting part. We have to kind of alternate those because we can't do both at the same time." A kindergarten teacher explained that she focuses on a whole lesson throughout the week, "We'll do the Set the Stage on Monday and Facilitate the Activity on Tuesday, which we love." Another educator shared, "[Harmony is] something that the kids seem to be comfortable with. They like the components. My kids really like the Mindful Minute stuff and I find that when there is a conflict or some things arising, they're using those strategies."

## Professional Learning

Most of the educators who participated in the case study had already been implementing Harmony Second Edition. Thus, they already had some professional learning on the Harmony Curriculum. To help educators deepen their knowledge of Harmony Third Edition, most schools participated in two 60–90-minute professional learning sessions, with the first focused on introducing Harmony Third Edition, the Building Community pre-unit, and Everyday Practices. The second focused on the Harmony Units, Lessons, & Activities—those pieces focused on explicit SEL instruction.

Educators in the survey and focus groups noted that the professional learning helped them to navigate the Harmony Third Edition. For example, 77% of educators who received the professional learning (n=60) found it to be [very] helpful in preparing them to implement Harmony Third Edition. Educators expounded on what they found helpful in the professional learning and what they would like more of in the focus groups. A third-grade teacher expressed, "[The professional learning] really showed me new things [about Harmony Third Edition] that I didn't even know. I didn't really use the website [Harmony Online Learning Portal] for Harmony Second Edition, so once they [Harmony staff] showed me that, it's like a whole new world opened up here."

Overall, the educators appreciated how informative and interactive the professional learning was. They also noted how responsive Harmony staff were when they had questions or needed more clarification during

and after the professional learning. A sixth-grade teacher stated, “I feel very comfortable reaching out to anyone at Harmony that I have contact information for anytime about anything.” Even though educators found the professional learning helpful, educators also noted that they were overwhelmed during the professional learning because the information being presented was so robust and comprehensive. In order to mitigate this, a fifth-grade educator suggested the professional learning include a tiered structure, “. . . to look at the different [pieces of Harmony Third Edition] and what might be helpful” in the classroom.

### Strategies to Overcome Implementation Challenges

Educators also expressed Harmony Third Edition implementation challenges and strategies to overcome them. For example, time—for planning and implementation—was the greatest barrier to implementation, particularly given other district mandates. To mitigate time barriers, educators used multiple strategies. For example, they leveraged the flexibility and adaptability of Harmony Third Edition to determine when and how to implement practices. 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 structure to lessons (Part 1. Set the Stage, Part 2. Facilitate the Activity, Part 3. Reflect and Review) to extend the lessons throughout the week to ensure she can support her students’ development. A group of kindergarten educators explained that educator collaboration saved time on planning and implementation; they worked together to integrate Harmony Third Edition lessons into their weekly presentations.

Another implementation challenge included differentiation of Harmony 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. A fifth-grade teacher noticed that her students were struggling to remember all the Clubhouse Friends, so she created an anchor chart and “. . . turned [the Storybooks] into a literacy lesson.”

Classroom observations also provided an opportunity to note any implementation challenges and successes. Across Meet Up, Buddy Up, and Units, Lessons, & Activities, educators and students varied in how closely they participated in the program the way it is intended. For example, some educators followed the Units, Lessons, & Activities more closely than others. For instance, some educators would extend conversations or introduce supplemental activities, extending the time that it took. For Meet Up, some educators implemented all four steps as intended, whereas others varied in how they implemented (e.g., would only do one or two steps, or would not implement a step in a way that hit the active ingredient). Across those educators that implemented Harmony well, observers could notice specific actions they took to prepare. For example, observers noted that educators printed out and highlighted important sections of the lesson, created PowerPoint decks, or had materials ready were more likely to be successful. Observations made it clear the importance of spending time familiarizing oneself with Harmony Third Edition or understanding how it will fit within one’s instructional routine.

### New Pieces to Support Implementation

Educators also discussed the new pieces of Harmony Third Edition meant to support implementation. Specifically, the additional pieces added are meant to support educators as they plan for implementation (Educator SEL) or extend Harmony concepts into the everyday student experiences (Academic Integration). Given that educators were just learning the Third Edition, we did not expect them to use these various pieces deeply, but rather get their initial impressions of them. See the chapters on Everyday Practices and Units, Lessons, & Activities for more detail about implementation challenges and successes.

**Educator SEL.** Successful SEL implementation in classrooms also requires an explicit focus on educator SEL or their competencies and capacities to support students. Harmony added two new pieces to support Educator SEL (some of these elements were present previously but not explicit or intentional in the structured design). The Educator SEL section on the unit page includes an overview of the



importance of the unit-specific SECs (“Relevancy”), strategies to reflect on their assumptions about the development and application of SECs (“Think On It”), and strategies to support all students in their social and emotional development (“Act On It”). Harmony also linked to select Inspire Leading in Learning online modules that support educator development of additional competencies and practices to support unit implementation.

In the survey, 73% of educators found the strategies to support educator SEL on the unit page as (very) helpful (16% reported “Did not use”). Educators expounded on this and noted that the Educator SEL section reinforced strategies they were already using and introduced them to new ones. For example, an educator wrote, “The Educator SEL section is a key component to our [educators’] understanding the why behind the lesson, as well as to build our social and emotional competencies with a high level of student engagement of the lessons.”

**Academic Integration.** Harmony Third Edition has two new pieces that support academic integration, SEL in Action, and unit-specific Academic Integration strategies. The SEL in Action section is meant for students to reflect on their use of the SECs nurtured within the lesson through journal prompts; 65% of educators indicated the “SEL in Action” section was (very) helpful (27% reported “Did not use”). During the focus groups, a special education teacher explained, “I actually use [SEL in Action] during social skills time when I do Meet Up and take questions from SEL in Action.”

The unit-specific Academic Integration strategies are meant to help educators think about how to embed SECs nurtured within Harmony into other aspects of the instructional day. When asked how helpful they were, in the surveys, 67% of educators reported that they were [very] helpful (21% reported “Did not use”). During the focus groups, educators shared that the Academic Integration strategies are being adapted for other subject areas. For example, an educator explained, “We’re starting conversations with our literacy and math coordinators and thinking about how we can embed these strategies.” A sixth-grade teacher explained, “We were already kind of doing

[the Academic Integration strategies]; it wasn’t that I brushed it off. It was more like [figuring out] how do I incorporate what we’ve been working on with Communication Boosters and Bloopers into math problems.

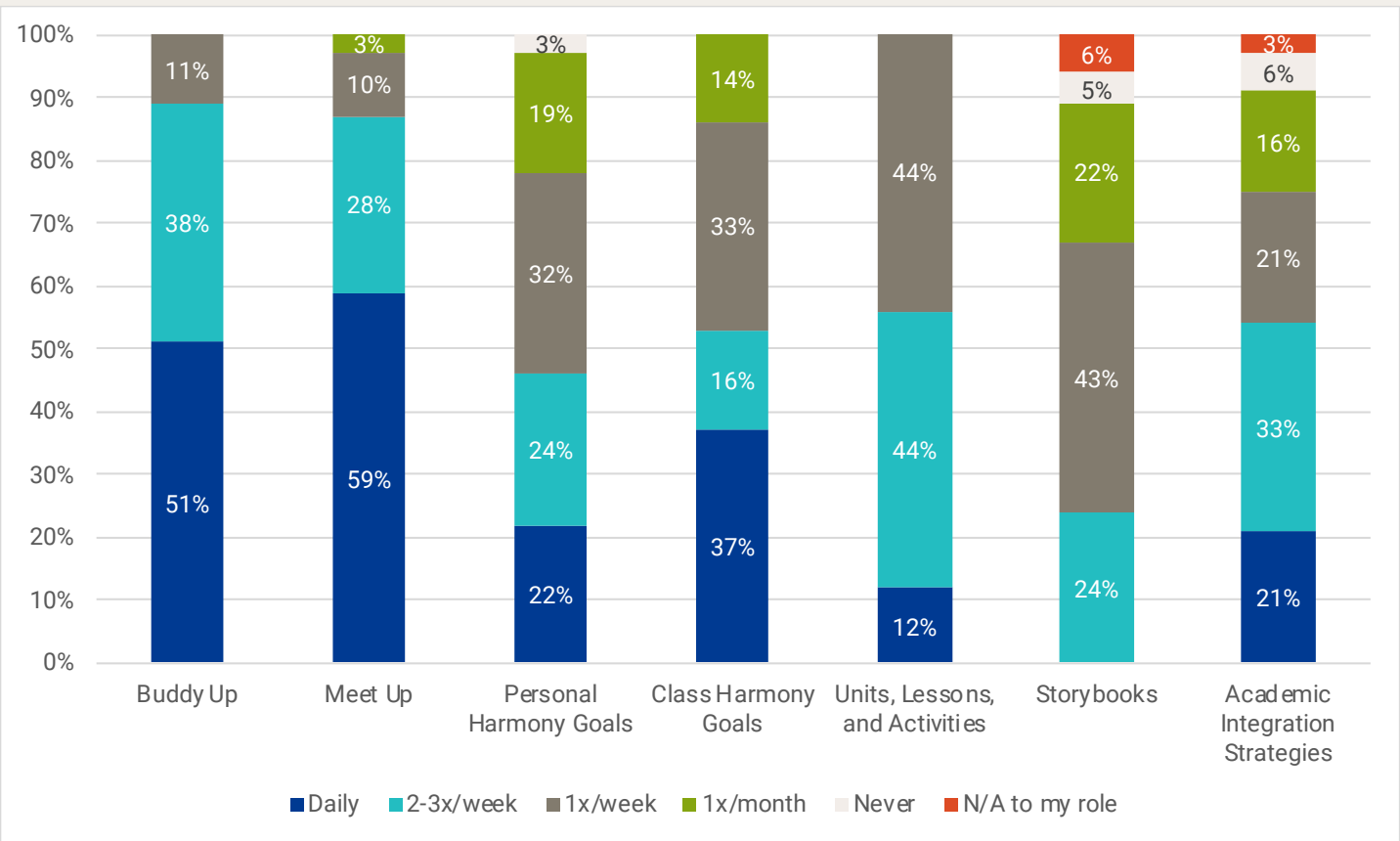
## Educators’ Perception of Harmony Third Edition and Future Usage

We also wanted to know what made educators excited about implementing Harmony Third Edition next school year (research question 4). To answer this question, we asked educators what aspects of the Third Edition they plan to implement next year, and what aspects of the program they found particularly important. Then we set to see if there was a relationship between important aspects of the program and their excitement about implementation.

In surveys, 81% of educators (strongly) agreed that they were excited to implement the program next year. Educators also reported variation in which Harmony Curriculum practices they planned to implement next school year and the degree to which they planned to implement them. For example, over 85% of educators reported implementing Meet Up and Buddy Up daily or 2-3 times per week; whereas 44% of educators reported implementing Units, Lessons, & Activities at least once per week. This makes sense given that we recommend that educators implement Lessons and Activities and Storybooks weekly, while we encourage them to implement Meet Up and Buddy Up three to five times per week (see Figure 3).

Educators corroborated the survey findings in focus groups, noting that they were excited to implement the full Harmony Third Edition program during the next school year. They also varied in which aspects of Harmony Third Edition they were most excited to implement, highlighting the importance of using Harmony in a way that meets the needs of students. For example, a fifth-grade teacher was most looking forward to using Personal Harmony Goals with her students after learning how successful they were from a colleague. She explained, “It [Personal Harmony Goals] worked really well and the students did their action steps as well.” A third-grade teacher

Figure 3. Perceived Harmony Third Edition Implementation Next Year



explained that his students responded positively to coming together as a group and sharing their experiences throughout the week. “I really enjoyed having the Personal and Class Harmony Goals-setting sessions. It helped the kids to reflect on what they like to have as a goal. I will definitely use Everyday Practices next year.”

Finally, we correlated multiple aspects of the Harmony program with educator excitement. We found multiple significant correlations, finding that educators were more likely to be excited to implement Harmony SEL next year if they also thought that Harmony builds healthy relationships ( $r=.55^5$ ), develops SEL skills ( $r=.64$ ), builds upon personal strengths and assets ( $r=.57$ ), promotes culturally responsive practices ( $r=.55$ ), and connects to their lives outside of school ( $r=.48$ ). In other words, it appears the more they believed in the active ingredients of Harmony, the more likely they were to be excited to implement.

“I really enjoyed having the Personal Harmony Goals-setting sessions. It helped kids to reflect on what they like to have as a goal.”

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

# References

---

- Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning – CASEL. (2020). The CASEL guide to schoolwide SEL essentials: A compilation of key activities and tools for school teams. Chicago, IL: CASEL.
- Hanish, L. D., Martin, C. L., Miller, C. F., Fabes, R. A., DeLay, D., Updegraff, K. A. (2016). Social harmony in schools: A framework for understanding peer experiences and their effects. In K. R. Wentzel (Ed.) Handbook of Social Influences in School Context: Social-Emotional, Motivational, and Cognitive Outcomes. Routledge.
- Jones, S. M., Brush, K. E., Ramirez, T., Mao, Z. X., Marenus, M., Wettje, S., ... & Bailey, R. (2021). Navigating SEL from the inside out: Looking inside & across 33 leading SEL programs: A practical resource for schools and OST providers (Revised & expanded second edition: Preschool & elementary focus). Retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/navigating-social-and-emotional-learning-from-the-inside-out-2ed.pdf>
- Martin, C. L., Fabes, R. A., Hanish, L. D., Gaertner, B., Miller, C. F., Foster, S., & Updegraff, K. A. (2017). Using an intergroup contact approach to improve gender relationships: A case study of a classroom-based intervention. The Wiley handbook of group processes in children and adolescents (pp. 435-454). John Wiley & Sons.
- Reilly, J., Yoder, N., Ross, S., Morrison, J., & Mulholland, S. Getting Started with Harmony SEL. National University. Retrieved from <https://www.harmonysel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GettinStartedWithHarmonySEL.pdf>
- Skoog-Hoffman, A., Ackerman, C., Boyle, A., Schwartz, H., Williams, B., Jagers, R., Dusenbury, L., Greenberg, M. T., Mahoney, J. L., Schonert-Reichl, K., & Weissberg, R. P. (2020). Evidence-based social and emotional learning programs: CASEL criteria updates and rationale. Chicago, IL: CASEL. Retrieved from [https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/11\\_CASEL-Program-Criteria-Rationale.pdf](https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/11_CASEL-Program-Criteria-Rationale.pdf)
- Yoder, N. (2022). Understanding the Research and Teacher Experience Behind the Refresh of Harmony Third Edition. National University. Retrieved from <https://www.harmonysel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Harmony-SEL-Third-Edition-Refresh-Full-Whitepaper.pdf>