SANFORD HARMONY

National UNIVERSITY

Arizona State University

Why Harmony Matters in Schools and Communities:

Sanford Harmony as the Foundation for Healthy Relationships

By Nick Yoder, PhD, Laura Hanish, PhD, Scott Page, Sarah Caverly, PhD

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Executive Summary

The Need

Humans are naturally social creatures; we have evolved to be protectors, storytellers, historians, mentors, coaches, and teachers to one another. There is little we do as humans that does not require some form of relationship or interaction with one another. However, as we have become more connected to others across the globe—particularly through digital means—young people and adults feel more isolated now than ever before. Young people and adults are missing the meaningful connections that help them feel valued, engaged, and that they contribute meaningfully to their community. This makes purposeful relationship-building activities even more important and provides the impetus for us to continue to build the relationship science needed in support of young people.

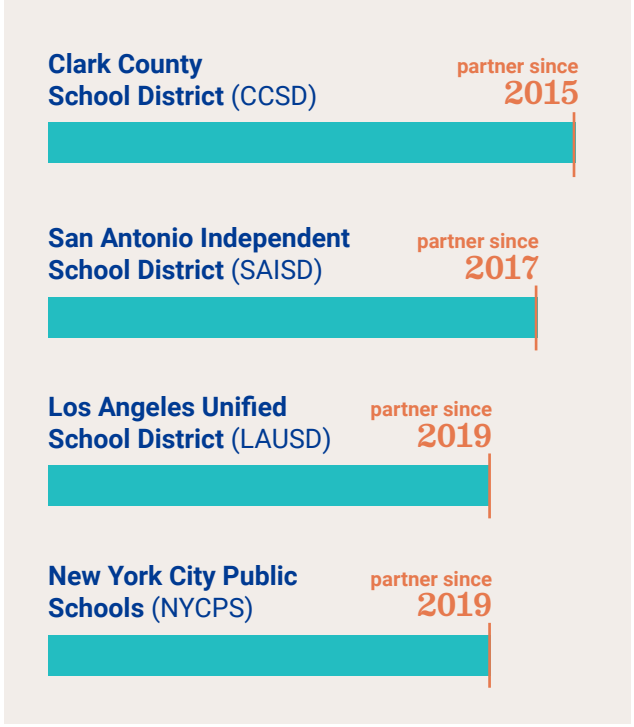
The Solution

Sanford Harmony is unique because it offers both intentional opportunities for young people and adults to connect (e.g., Everyday Practices) and explicit support in the essential skills (e.g., Units, Lessons, and Activities). It is further an evidence-based program that helps build healthy relationships in schools, out-of-school time programs, sports programs, and at home. Harmony offers adults and young people opportunities to connect and engage with one another in meaningful, fun activities designed to build healthy relationships now and into the future.

Our Partners

Sanford Harmony has been supporting districts, schools, and out-of-school time organizations for over a decade, including some of the largest systems within the United States. Clark County School District (CCSD) has partnered with Harmony since 2015, including using our Harmony at Home resources in their community engagement centers. Los Angeles Unified School District, partnering since 2019, now includes Harmony as their base relationship-building program, being implemented in over 400 schools. New York City Public Schools, starting in the mayor's office in 2019, has supported educators and students in over 700 schools, noting that the easy-to-implement solution is why Harmony is chosen amongst others.

Example District Engagement



San Antonio Independent School District has partnered with Harmony since 2017 because Harmony aligns with their academic integration approach. As district needs and priorities have evolved, so too has Sanford Harmony, which is why districts continue to partner.

Harmony—originally developed at Arizona State University and now at National University—has partnered with experts in relationship science, healthy learning, and human development at Johns Hopkins University, University of California–San Diego, American Institutes for Research, Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, University of Oregon, and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Through these partnerships, Harmony has conducted multiple randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs, mixed-methods studies, and user-experience studies.

Research & Development Partners

- National University
- Arizona State University
- UC San Diego
- Johns Hopkins University
- Sesame Workshop Joan Ganz Cooney Center
- AIR
- University of Oregon
- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

District & Education Partners

- LAUSD Unified
- San Antonio Independent School District
- Long Beach Unified School District
- Fresno Unified School District
- Chicago Public Schools
- NASSP National Association of Secondary School Principals
- Orange County Public Schools
- PGCPS
- Denver Public Schools
- Communities In Schools
- NYC Public Schools
- Dallas Independent School District
- Hillsborough County Public Schools
- Departamento de Educación
- DesMoines Public Schools
- naesp National Association of Elementary School Principals
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- CCSD Clark County School District

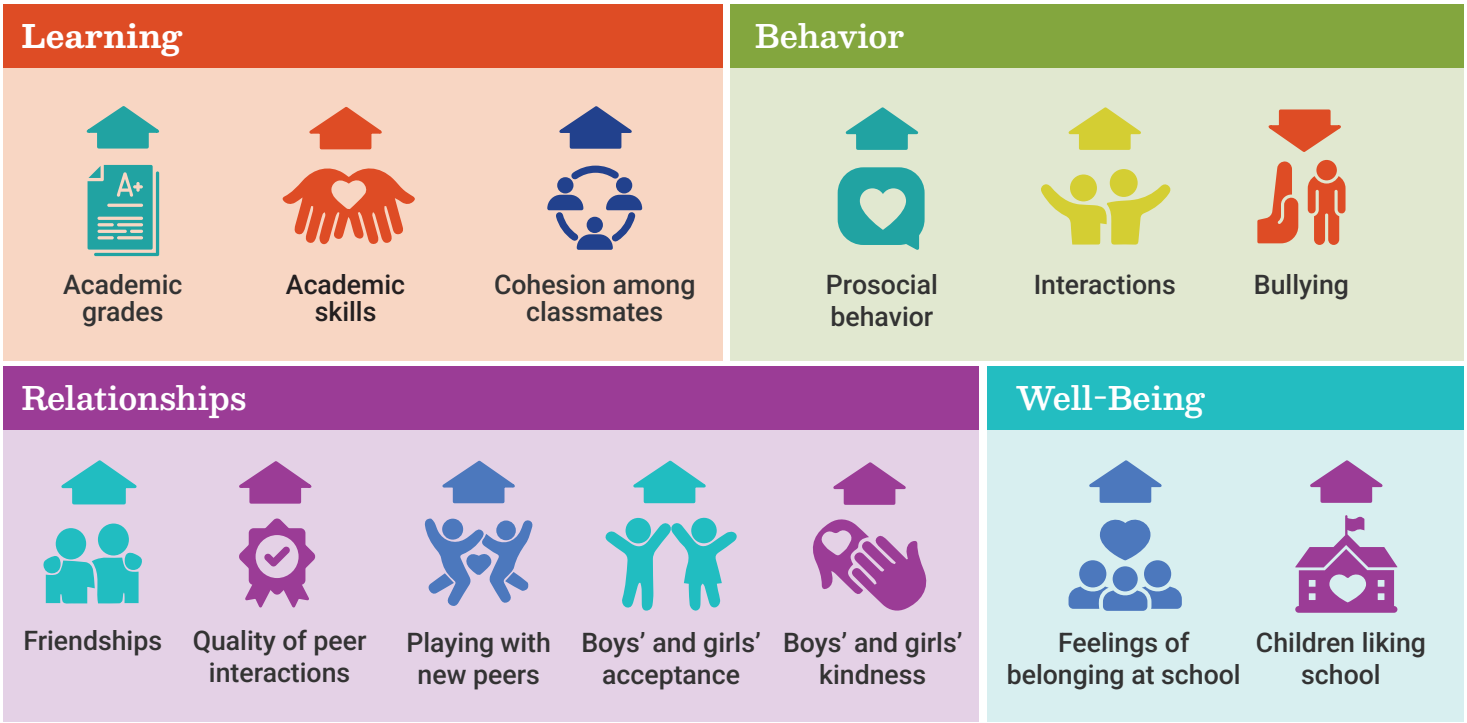
The Impact

For the past 20 years, Sanford Harmony has reached more than:

- **41+ million** students
- **600,000** educators
- **70,000** schools & organizations
- In all **50** states & over **100** countries

A decade of research in our relationship-science and healthy-learning approach shows Harmony's relationship-building activities significantly benefit students in multiple ways, meeting Tier 3 ESSA criteria. For instance, through randomized control trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental designs (QEDs), Harmony has shown improvements in (see Figure 1) prosocial behavior, playing with new peers, quality of peer relationships, cohesion among classmates, children liking school more, a sense of belonging, and academics, and a decrease in bullying.

Figure 1. Research-Based Outcomes of Sanford Harmony



The Legacy

Sanford Harmony has a demonstrated impact on young people and the adults that serve them. Their stories of connection, engagement, and community through relationships have inspired them now and will carry them toward healthier relationships into adulthood. The current generation of young people faces even more concerns than those that came before them. With advances in technology, artificial intelligence, social media, and global connectivity, the intentional opportunities to form healthy relationships will be even more important. And that is where Sanford Harmony will be—supporting young people.

As Harmony continues to build upon relationship science, it will partner with leaders, educators, students, families, and community partners in all the spaces that young people live and learn. We are ready to help solve the critical issues facing education and young people through leveraging relationships and relationship science. By elevating Harmony resources and services, not only will young people come to school more, excel academically, use more prosocial behaviors—through the blended use of print-based and AI solutions, enhanced support for adults, and system-level engagement—thereby participating in healthier school environments, but they will also be prepared to build meaningful relationships and have the necessary essential skills for school, work, and life.

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Why Harmony Matters

By Nick Yoder, PhD, Laura Hanish, PhD, Scott Page, Sarah Caverly, PhD

Vision of Sanford Harmony

Sanford Harmony is meant to support healthy relationships—not only for young people to have healthy relationships in the current moment but by also preparing them to build and maintain healthy relationships in the future. Meaning, we want young people to feel prepared and ultimately have successful relationships—friends, classmates, colleagues, a romantic partnership, neighbors—throughout their lifespan. By leveraging and building upon relationship science, Harmony is ready to continue to build partnerships that meet young people and adults where they are.

Sanford Harmony Meets the Moment

Relationships are central to the human condition. But relationship science demonstrates that relationships do not just happen. They need intentional work—intention on the part of individuals to develop and nurture relationships and intention on the part of the systems or organizations to create opportunities (time, resources, skill development) to facilitate relationship building. Further, developing relationships requires a set of durable or essential skills that support healthy human development, including self-awareness, taking initiative, communication, self-regulation, problem solving, and critical thinking. Taken together, these conditions facilitate healthy learning.

This is what makes Harmony unique: we provide a robust set of tools, resources, and services that young people and adults need to create a culture of relationships and well-being. Through our intentional routines (Everyday Practices), explicit skill instruction of essential or durable skills (Units, Lessons, and Activities), academic connections (Storybooks, Harmony–Academic Integration activities, Everyday Moments, and Harmony in Action), and professional services (professional learning and development, coaching, and leadership support), we are different in that we support young people in multiple ways in the different spaces they live and learn.

With so many pressing issues that are facing districts today—youth mental health, chronic absenteeism, school belonging, student engagement, workforce development—districts require these intentional opportunities for relationship building and skill building for those skills that are needed by them now and into the future. As the loneliness and mental health epidemic—which is now being further

exacerbated by individuals forming relationships and connections with artificial intelligence (AI)—continues, the strategies and connections that Harmony offers are filling a vital need. As Harmony continues to evolve with the pressing needs of young people and adults today, we hope to partner with them to ensure that they feel connected, valued, and cared for—and to develop the relationships and durable skills they need to build successful lives now and in the future. We plan to do that by leveraging and building upon relationship science to create a blend of print-based and AI-enabled solutions, elevated professional development to build the capacity of adults, and system-level supports to create the conditions for healthy learning.

Outcomes Students and Educators Deserve

The evidence from relationship science shows Sanford Harmony's relationship-building activities significantly benefit students in multiple ways, meeting Tier 3 ESSA criteria (e.g., DeLay et al., 2016; Hanish et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2017; Xiao et al., 2023). For instance, across studies of the Harmony Curriculum, Buddy Up alone, and Meet Up and Buddy Up combined, we have found (see Figures 2, 3 and 4):

- ↑ **Increases** in prosocial and kind behavior, positive engagement with peers, and relationships with peers who are different from them.
- ↑ **Improvements** in academic outcomes, in part due to stronger and more inclusive peer relationships, as well as improved classroom climate.
- ↓ **Reduced** aggression and bullying.

Research Implications for Healthy Learning

These findings have direct implications for the outcomes that school systems, educators, and students deserve. For instance, when students engage in healthy learning and relationship-building activities:

> Students are more likely to come to school because they feel connected and engaged. They want to show up to see their friends and their educators.

> School climate improves, reducing behavior incidents and creating more physical and psychological safety to engage in learning.

> Academic achievement improves because students are more engaged, spend less time off-task, and receive better support from their peers in their learning.

> Educators are more satisfied, want to stay at their school, and, overall, feel better and more confident in their jobs when they can deepen relationships with their students, colleagues, and leaders.

> Families feel more connected to the school because they are now more actively involved, and deeper relationships occur between families and the adults in the building.

Figure 2. Effects of Harmony Curriculum, Overall

Academic Achievement
6% improvement

School Enjoyment
10% increase

Belonging at School
6% improvement

Improved Cohesion & Peer Connection
More cohesive and inclusive friend groups

Improved Academics Due to Prosocial Behavior
Math and writing

Aggressive Behavior
34% reduction

Figure 3. Impact of Buddy Up on Student Outcomes

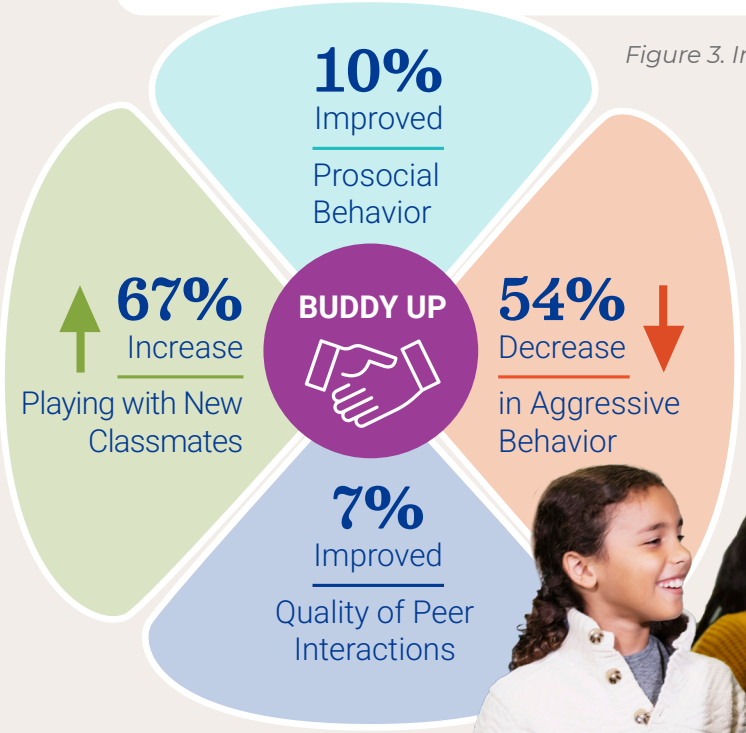
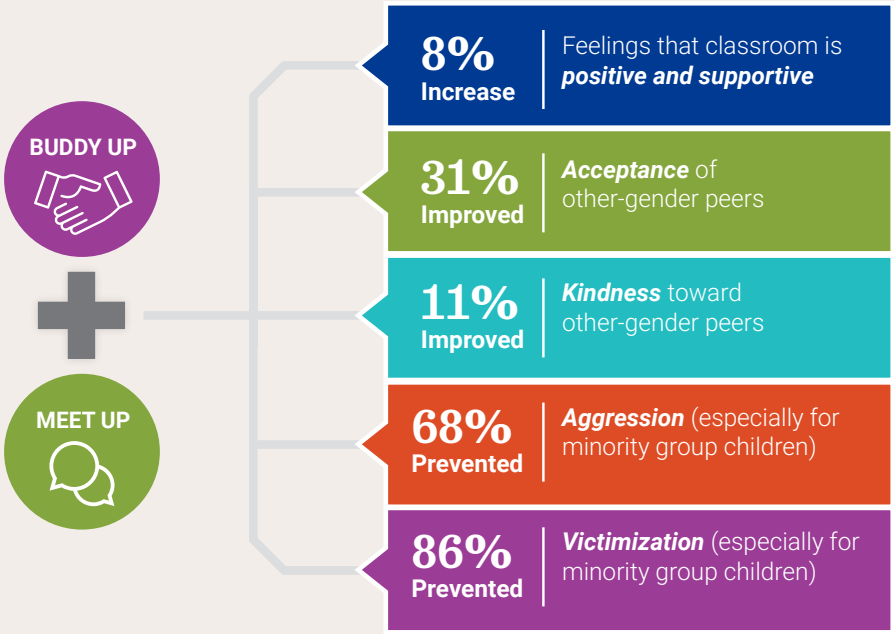


Figure 4. Impact of Buddy Up and Meet Up on Student Outcomes



Building Harmonious Relationships Around the Globe

Sanford Harmony has been a trusted partner to districts across the country and is used by educators worldwide. Sanford Harmony has partnered with the largest districts in the country (e.g., New York City Public School District for 7 years, Los Angeles Unified School District for 7 years, Clark County School District for 11 years), as well as many suburban and rural districts, and engaged with large youth-serving organizations (e.g., YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, American Camp Association, and U.S. Soccer Foundation).

Educators and Students Choose Harmony

Research shows that Sanford Harmony affects school, educator, and student outcomes. But why do leaders, educators, and students continue to choose Harmony?

- Students showed that they improved in their social perspective taking and social problem solving through using Sanford Harmony.
- Students noted that they got along better with their peers, wanted to come to school more, and knew who to ask for help when they struggled with academic problems.
- Students noted that they saw a reduction in bullying and better problem solving with their peers when they engaged in Harmony.
- Teachers noted that their scores on the academic assessment increased relative to the school, due in large part to their use of Harmony.
- Leaders and teachers noted that they saw increases in attendance when they were using Harmony because students felt more connected to school. For instance, one teacher said "I can watch their fourth grade attendance, which is usually between high 60s–70%, and when they come to me after we start our morning meetings and we start building that community, I average about 98% and my tardies are almost non-existent because they know that they have to be there by 8:30. Otherwise, they're going to miss the morning meeting and they don't want to miss that."
- Teachers state that Harmony is amazing at supporting belonging. For instance, one teacher said "With all the different activities with the Quick Connection Cards, with the Buddy Ups especially, you find a belonging that those kiddos haven't felt before with other children."
- Teachers love the Storybooks. They use them at the very beginning of the school year to set the stage for someone who is new to a new environment. The children love to give answers as to how they think Z and Z's friends should respond. For instance, one teacher said, "When we got a new student who was unfamiliar with our classroom, our students showed him how to be a good friend and how to use things in our classroom just like Z and his friends do."
- Teachers and families believe that Harmony at Home is a great addition to the resources. One teacher said, "I love that the Harmony at Home Kit is an extension of what is being taught in the classroom! Consistency is key, and to have families at home continue the learning, it bridges the gaps and helps students see the value in this program both inside and outside of school!"

Keeping Harmonious Relationships Forefront in Learning

The need to support young people and the adults that serve them in building harmonious relationships is not going away. With mental health concerns, feelings of isolation, advances in AI, and the changing workforce, young people need the tools and strategies to build healthy relationships now that will ultimately lead to healthy relationships in their adulthood.

To do this, Sanford Harmony continues to advance innovative relationship-science solutions and high-quality research to bring healthy relationships to life across the multiple spaces where young people live and learn. Specifically, as Harmony continues to evolve, our innovation and research teams continue to explore:

- Building AI tools that identify what Harmony–Academic Integration means and looks like, helping us answer the question, "How do we support young people in transferring the knowledge and skills from Harmony into other aspects of their day?"
- Creating and disseminating both print-based and educational technology products and services, helping us answer the question, "How do we balance leveraging educational technology and artificial intelligence with in-person collaboration to continue to promote human connection?"
- Expanding our solutions to middle and high school, helping us answer the question, "How do we provide developmental support for students from pre-K through Grade 12 to foster healthy relationships and skill development?"
- Expanding value-rich pathways and professional services for educators, helping us answer the question, "How can we support the adults in nurturing relationships with students, colleagues, and families?"
- Creating tools for system leaders, helping us answer the question, "How do we ensure there is an ecosystem of support for young people so that adults work together successfully?"
- Building upon relationship science to help answer the question, "What are the current knowledge, skills, and mindsets that young people need to engage in relationships in the multiple spaces in which they live and learn—schools, expanded learning, sports, healthcare, and their digital lives?"
- Expanding the field of relationship science to answer the question, "How do we define the key ingredients of healthy relationships and what they look like across the multiple types of relationships that young people and adults have?"