

Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success

Why business executives want employees who play well with others



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I dropped by my five-year-old grandson's preschool last month. The first things I noticed were the bright colors, the books, and the great way the teacher engaged with the kids. And then I noticed the skills they were learning...like how to listen, how to control their emotions and impulses, and how to work and play well with others.

It was a moment that made me especially enthusiastic about this report on how these "social-emotional" skills impact success in today's workforce. Because there is no doubt that they do. In my business, being able to connect with people is key. Even if you're the smartest person in the room, you still have to build relationships and work with others on a team.

Like most employers, I'm thrilled when we hire people who have these abilities. I also know it's almost impossible to develop them once someone becomes an adult. A far smarter move is to ensure kids have quality early childhood experiences—both in and out of the home—that instill and reinforce these

skills. That's because children's brains develop faster during the first five years than at any other time in their lives.

So whether you think of it as hard-wiring or just setting and reinforcing examples, these early years are an investment that can pay big dividends in terms of academic achievement and ultimate success in the workforce as well.

Unfortunately, not all children have the same opportunity. In my home state of Indiana, kindergarten is not mandatory. It wasn't until 2015 that a state-sponsored preschool program was established, and there isn't nearly enough funding to make it available to all the kids who would benefit from it. Changing that is one of the smartest things we can do, right now, for a head start on a successful workforce in the years to come.

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What are “social-emotional skills”?

These attributes are known by various names, ranging from “soft skills” to “employability skills,” and include the ability to, for example:

- Manage emotions and impulses
- Solve problems
- Take initiative
- Be flexible
- Communicate with and work well in teams
- Persevere and be resilient
- Demonstrate empathy

In a new national survey by Zogby Analytics, 92 percent of a nationally representative sample of 300 business decision-makers agreed that children’s experiences in the first five years of life affect the development of their social-emotional skills later in life. Further, more than 60 percent of respondents reported that they have more difficulty finding job candidates with adequate character skills than candidates with adequate technical skills.¹ That’s bad for profits—in fact, more than half of the businesses surveyed are spending more to recruit applicants with these abilities than in the past.

In a *Wall Street Journal* survey of 900 business executives, 93 percent said that character skills were as important or more important than technical skills, and 89 percent reported difficulties in finding employees with these abilities.²

The foundation of adult character skills is built in early childhood

Research shows character skills formed in early childhood impact the workforce. For example, a 20-year study examined the character skills of 800 kindergarteners and followed them until age 25.³ For every one-point increase in children’s character skills scores in kindergarten, they were:

- **54 percent more likely** to earn a high school diploma;
- **Twice as likely** to attain a college degree;
- **46 percent more likely** to have a full-time job at age 25.

Indiana began a preschool program in 2015 and a study following participants until third grade is underway.⁴ An evaluation of 10 states that implemented pilot pre-K programs similar to Indiana’s found strong evidence of the need to not only expand the programs beyond the pilot phase but also to continue improving quality.⁵

Many young children face substantial challenges with long-term effects

Data from the National Survey of Children’s Health show that many young children in Indiana experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): 27 percent of children age five or younger have experienced one ACE and 20 percent have experienced two or more.⁶

Children are resilient, yet by age 5, too many kids are already on a negative life course that can significantly hinder their later success in the workforce. High-quality early childhood education provides a safe, nurturing environment for these kids.

Negative Experiences Impact Children in Every State

Percentage and number of children, ages 0-5, who have experienced at least two adverse childhood events

Indiana	20%	84K Children	United States	13%	2.7M
Kentucky	20%	55K	Florida	13%	140K
Mississippi	20%	40K	Kansas	13%	27K
Montana	20%	12K	Minnesota	13%	45K
Oklahoma	20%	52K	Nevada	13%	24K
Alabama	18%	54K	Oregon	13%	30K
Michigan	18%	105K	South Carolina	13%	37K
Arizona	17%	73K	Tennessee	13%	50K
North Carolina	17%	105K	Washington	13%	55K
West Virginia	17%	18K	Iowa	12%	23K
Alaska	16%	8K	Maryland	12%	43K
Idaho	16%	18K	Massachusetts	12%	42K
Louisiana	16%	49K	Connecticut	11%	21K
Missouri	16%	58K	Delaware	11%	6K
Wyoming	16%	6K	Georgia	11%	71K
Arkansas	15%	28K	Nebraska	11%	14K
Maine	15%	10K	District of Columbia	10%	4K
New Hampshire	15%	10K	Utah	10%	26K
Ohio	15%	103K	Colorado	9%	30K
Pennsylvania	15%	106K	Hawaii	9%	8K
South Dakota	15%	9K	New Jersey	9%	48K
Wisconsin	15%	52K	Illinois	8%	62K
New Mexico	14%	21K	New York	8%	95K
Rhode Island	14%	8K	North Dakota	8%	3K
Texas	14%	268K	Virginia	8%	40K
Vermont	14%	4K	California	7%	186K

Source: National Survey of Children's Health



20%

84K

of children in IN have experienced at least 2 adverse childhood events

These very serious negative life events include:

- Poverty
- Parental divorce /separation
- Parental death
- Parent served time in jail
- Witness to domestic violence
- Victim of neighborhood violence
- Lived with someone mentally ill or suicidal
- Lived with someone with alcohol or drug problem
- Treated unfairly due to race/ethnicity

How can we improve early childhood experiences in Indiana?

Indiana lawmakers can improve early childhood experiences in our state by:

- continuing to expand access to high-quality pre-k and early education opportunities to more Indiana families, especially low-income Hoosiers. This includes growing the number of high-quality programs and available seats throughout the state—especially in rural

Indiana—to ensure more families have access to effective programs.

- working to increase teacher quality by adopting educational requirements and professional standards for the early education field and increasing teacher compensation.

Providing Indiana’s children with positive environments that will shape them into healthy productive citizens will help build a strong future workforce for our state.

To learn more about social-emotional skills and how they support workforce success visit www.StrongNation.org/SEL

¹ <http://www.strongnation.org/SEL>

² Davidson, K. (2016, August 30). Employers find ‘soft skills’ like critical thinking in short supply. Wall Street Journal.

³ <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>

⁴ NIEER. (2015). Indiana In Progress. The State of Preschool 2015 - State Preschool Yearbook. Retrieved from: http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Indiana_2015_rev1.pdf

⁵ Center for Evaluation and Education Policy. (2017). Report recommends expanding Indiana’s pre-K program. Indiana University, School of Education. Retrieved from: <http://archive.news.indiana.edu/releases/iu/2017/02/pre-kindergarten-study.shtml>

⁶ Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health. 2011/12 National Survey of Children’s Health, Indiana State Profile. Retrieved from: <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2614&g=448&r=1&a=4576&r2=16>

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