

Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success in Mississippi

Why business executives want employees who play well with others



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Our business is a competitive one. Our guests have so many choices about where to spend their time and money. And there are so many factors that are generally outside of our control (location, size, weather, etc). The one thing that we *can* control is the way we make our guests feel when they visit us.

Ultimately, we're in the entertainment business. Staying upbeat and positive, not taking ourselves too seriously, and making sure our coworkers and guests are having fun at all times are critical to our success. Being able to effectively communicate with our guests starts with listening and being empathetic.

And developing that empathy begins very early. We have several parents on our team (myself included), and I've seen the positive effects of a high-quality early childhood education experience, and how that experience can improve a team member's workplace well-being.

Here at Harrah's Gulf Coast, we spend a lot of time working to ensure that we all exceed each other's expectations. When we're happy at work, when we like the people we work with and for, that absolutely translates into our ability to exceed our guests' expectations. Socio-emotional skills are a foundational part of that ability, and high-quality early childhood education helps to create and foster those skills, along with core academic abilities like early literacy and math skills.

"I've seen the positive effects of a high-quality early childhood education experience."

In a 2017 national survey commissioned by ReadyNation, 92 percent of a nationally representative sample of 300 business leaders 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

Examining U.S. Department of Labor data, the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce determined that social-emotional skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership, are in high demand across all occupational groups.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; and
- **46 percent more likely** to have a full-time job at age 25.

Many young children face substantial challenges, with long-term effects

Children are resilient, yet by age five, too many are already on a negative life course that can significantly hinder their later success in the workforce. Data from the National Survey of Children's Health show that many young children in Mississippi experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): 21 percent of children age five or younger have experienced one ACE and 13 percent have experienced two or more.⁴ Fortunately, high-quality early childhood education provides a safe, nurturing environment for these children.

Mississippi early learning programs help build social-emotional skills and mitigate ACEs

Quality early care and education (ECE) can help children develop social and emotional skills that can build resilience to stress. Both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics have identified quality ECE as a strategy for preventing or reducing ACEs.⁵ In these programs, children can form strong attachments with caring adults, mitigating the impact of toxic stress that can derail child development.⁶

Mississippi's Early Learning Collaboratives (ELCs) meet 10 out of 10 quality standards set by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), one of the few states in the nation to do so.⁷ Our investments in bolstering access and quality are clearly working: 76 percent of ELC students met their end-of-year kindergarten readiness target scores.⁸

However, ELCs enroll no three-year-olds and only eight percent of four-year-olds.⁹ If we were to better invest in our ELCs, more students would be more likely to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

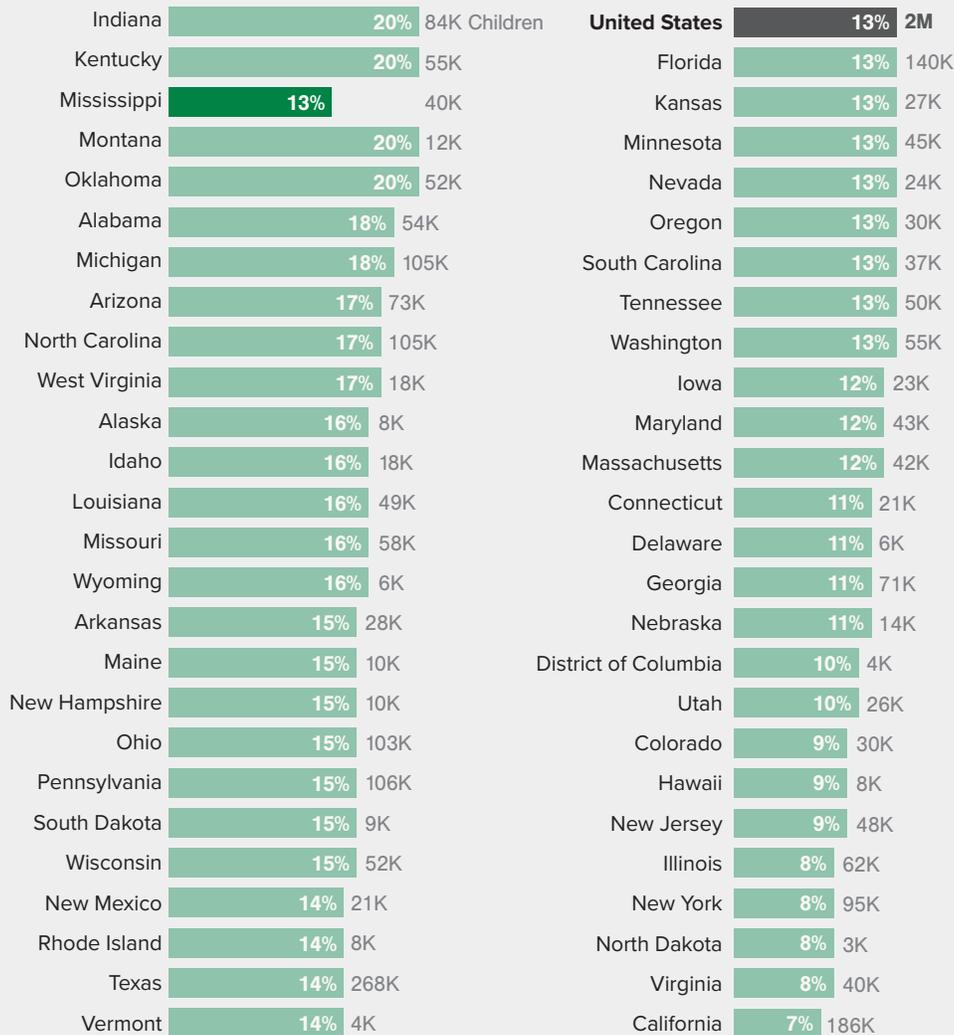
What are "social-emotional skills"?

These behaviors and attributes are known by various names, including soft skills, character skills and employability skills. We use these terms interchangeably in this report, referring to 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

Negative Experiences Impact Children in Every State

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



Source: National Survey of Children's Health

28k

13%
of children in MS 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

OVER
2 Million

Children in U.S. have experienced at least 2 adverse childhood events

How to continue expanding early childhood experiences in Mississippi

Recently, the Mississippi State Legislature made its largest investment ever in state-funded pre-K. This continued support and its expansion will have a positive effect on Mississippi children, the economy, and

future workforces for many years to come. The goal is to advance toward greater and greater percentages of Mississippi four-year-olds having access to a high-quality, low- or no-cost pre-K seat. We applaud the legislature's efforts to support pre-K teachers and pre-K coaches, preparing the way for sustainable outcomes for children.

- 1 RN. (2017). Social-emotional skills in early childhood support workforce success. <http://www.strongnation.org/SEL>
- 2 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2020), Workplace basics: The competencies employers want. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/competencies/>
- 3 Jones, et. al. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. American Public Health Association. <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>
- 4 Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health. 2018/19 National Survey of Children's Health, Mississippi state profile. <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=7915&r=26&g=787>
- 5 CDC (2020, April 3). Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html> ; American Academy of Pediatrics (2019, November 5). Preventing ACEs has potential to reduce leading causes of death in adults. <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2019/11/05/aces11519>
- 6 National Conference of State Legislatures (2018, August). Preventing and mitigating the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences. https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/HTML_LargeReports/ACEs_2018_32691.pdf
- 7 Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K.A. et al. (2021). Preschool yearbook 2020. Mississippi. https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Mississippi_YB2020.pdf
- 8 Mississippi Department of Education (2018, July). Kindergarteners, pre-K students make significant gains on statewide assessment. <https://www.mdek12.org/ocgr/news/2018/07/19/kindergarteners-pre-k-students-make-significant-gains-on-statewide-assessment>
- 9 Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K.A. et al. (2021). Preschool yearbook 2020. Mississippi. https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Mississippi_YB2020.pdf

ReadyNation | Business. Kids. Workforce.

Business executives building a skilled workforce by promoting solutions that prepare children to succeed in education, work, and life.

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

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