

Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success

Why business executives want employees who play well with others



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My father was a janitor's son who grew up to become the Chief Executive at Union Warren Savings Bank in Boston. Of course he worked hard but he didn't do it on his own—from the beginning he had early education experiences that ensured he was truly ready-to-learn when he started school.

Did my dad deserve this opportunity more than any other child? Our economy and our nation are at peril if we even think about answering "yes" to that question. The pipeline to a successful workforce depends on children of all backgrounds having the academic and social-emotional skills that are vital to this economy.

I'll tell you why those social-emotional skills matter to my business. Above all else, successful financial professionals must have a genuine sense of empathy that enables them to understand each client's individual needs and goals. They must also work well with all of the other people who are instrumental to meeting these goals—in fact at Vanguard, as

a company we succeed not with "rock stars" but with people who work well in a team.

We also succeed through the constant individual growth of everyone in our workforce—our people have an appetite to learn. They're also resilient—because markets do what markets do, and if you can't pick yourself up after losses you can't stay on track for the wins.

If you read the rest of this brief, you can see where I'm going with this. We can't instantly instill empathy, resilience, and the ability to work on a team among everyone who comes to work for us. These qualities are shaped by quality educational experiences early in life—and I'll be the first one to tell you they're absolutely vital to the kind of workforce that will lead our company and our nation forward.

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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

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

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.

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 25.² 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

An evaluation showed that Pennsylvania’s Pre-K Counts Public Private Partnership program cut—from 22 percent to 4 percent—the portion of children at risk for problematic social and self-control behavior.³

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 Pennsylvania experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): 19.5 percent of children age five or younger have experienced one ACE and 15 percent have experienced two or more.⁴

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



106K

15%

of children in PA 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 Pennsylvania?

Pennsylvania lawmakers can improve early childhood experiences in their state by:

- serving about 8,400 more at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds in high-quality pre-K programs, by investing \$65 million in Pre-K Counts and \$10 million for Head Start State Supplemental in the 2017-2018 state budget
- reducing the child care subsidy waitlist by about 1,800 children and providing additional funds to help improve child care quality, by investing \$35 million for Child Care Services



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

¹ <http://www.strongnation.org/SEL>

² <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>

³ <http://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/SPECS%20for%20PKC%202009%20Final%20Research%20Report%20113009.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2614&g=448&r=1&r2=40&a=4576>

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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 citizen-ready.

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