

Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success

Why business executives want employees who play well with others



Jeffrey H. Smulyan,

Chairman & CEO,
Emmis Communications

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.

"These early years are an investment that can pay big dividends in terms of academic achievement and ultimate success in the workforce."

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>

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 citizen-ready.

1212 New York Avenue NW / Suite 300 / Washington, DC 20005 / 202.464.7005



COUNCIL FOR A
STRONG AMERICA

StrongNation.org