

Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success

Why business executives want employees who play well with others

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A banker, a telecom executive and a guy obsessed with keeping people cool on hot days walk into a diner. At first, it seems they've little to talk about, since their occupations are very different. But then the banker mentions a smart employee who's rubbing customers the wrong way. From that point, they can't stop talking about a major challenge they all face.

If you think that couldn't happen in real life, take a look at a new Zogby poll. It reveals that 64 percent of business leaders know someone who's lost a promotion or job due to poor "social-emotional" skills. In other words, regardless of how talented or smart these employees were, they had a tough time with listening, managing emotions, being empathetic to customers and co-workers, or working well on a team.

While technical skills and aptitude are vital for success in each of our industries, these "soft" skills are often just as important. That's why we place a premium on them in hiring and

promotion decisions and in thinking about how to make our businesses grow.

These skills can't be magically implanted into an otherwise-outstanding employee. They must be taught, learned and practiced in a developmental process that begins in early childhood, including in quality early childhood education.

Visit the classroom of a good pre-K teacher, in fact, and you'll quickly see the seeds of future economic, academic and professional success being planted as the students work through activities and lessons that make these social-emotional skills an integrated part of every school day. That's good news for our children, and for our companies and others that will one day depend on these youngsters to do the great work that leads our economy forward.

We are proud to be part of this report on the power of playing well with others, and to support investments at the federal, state and local level that make quality preschool available for more children.

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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.

An evaluation of South Carolina’s preschool program for four-year-olds found that the majority of participants met reading standards by the end of the school year.⁴ However, the program should also assess mathematical thinking and social-emotional skills that are aligned with the Profile of the South Carolina graduate.

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 South Carolina experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): 28 percent of children age five or younger have experienced one ACE and 12.5 percent have experienced two or more.⁵

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



13%

of children in SC 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 South Carolina?

South Carolina lawmakers can improve early childhood experiences in our state by:

- Developing a comprehensive early childhood education data system with county profiles that would provide early education information to families and communities in a reader-friendly format. The data system should include

achievement data for all young children served in publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs, including educational programs funded by the Education Improvement Act and district-level investments, and information about young children's participation and learning environments.

Providing South Carolina'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 SC Education Oversight Committee. (2016). FY 2014-15 & 2015-16 Evaluation of State-Funded Full-Day 4K, Part I. Retrieved from: <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/reports/EducationOversightComm/FINALPartICDEPEvaluation2014-16.pdf>

5 Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health. 2011/12 National Survey of Children's Health, South Carolina State Profile. Retrieved from: <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2614&g=448&r=1&a=4576&r2=42>

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

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