

# Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success

Why business executives want employees who play well with others



**Nancy Moody**

Vice President, Public Affairs,  
DTE Energy

My kids went to a high-quality preschool. Does that make them better qualified to climb 60 feet into the air to fix a 100,000 volt power line ...or to manage their stress as a sudden wind gust threatens to knock them to the ground...or to calmly collaborate with a supervisor to keep the power flowing with worse weather on the way?

As an executive with Michigan's DTE Energy, and with the exception about climbing capability, I'll answer with an unequivocal yes! After three decades in this business, I'll be the first to tell you that it takes more than an understanding of electricity and the power grid to succeed in today's energy workforce. We also need people who can listen carefully, manage emotions and work well on a team.

Thanks to thoughtfully articulated values, DTE Energy has created a culture to attract and retain people who have these "soft skills." Unfortunately, other employers are finding applicants with these skill sets in short supply. In a Wall Street Journal survey of 900 business leaders, 89 percent said it's difficult to find employees who bring these abilities to the workplace.

For these reasons and more, DTE strongly supports my membership in ReadyNation. We know quality early childhood experiences drive

long-term achievement. This isn't based on anyone's "opinion"—the research is quite clear. And while we've always advocated for preschool to build pre-literacy and pre-math skills, we're now educating policymakers about the social-emotional skills children develop in high-quality early learning environments.

Right now, these skills help kids get along well with others so they're prepared to learn. In the future, they'll be crucial to success on the job. And that means every job here at DTE. Nothing I accomplish as DTE's Vice President of Public Affairs happens without perseverance, cooperation and collaboration among my team and colleagues. In fact, DTE's leaders in every business unit—from power quality to customer service and worker safety—likewise depend on clear communication, resilience, and our empathetic connections with each other to succeed in keeping the lights on and our customers happy.

From the business bottom line to the power lines, the skills kids develop in preschool can drive their future success in the workplace, and will always provide an important mix in the fuel that powers the success of any team.

**"The skills kids develop in preschool can drive their future success in the workplace."**

## 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. It should be no surprise then that 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

## 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

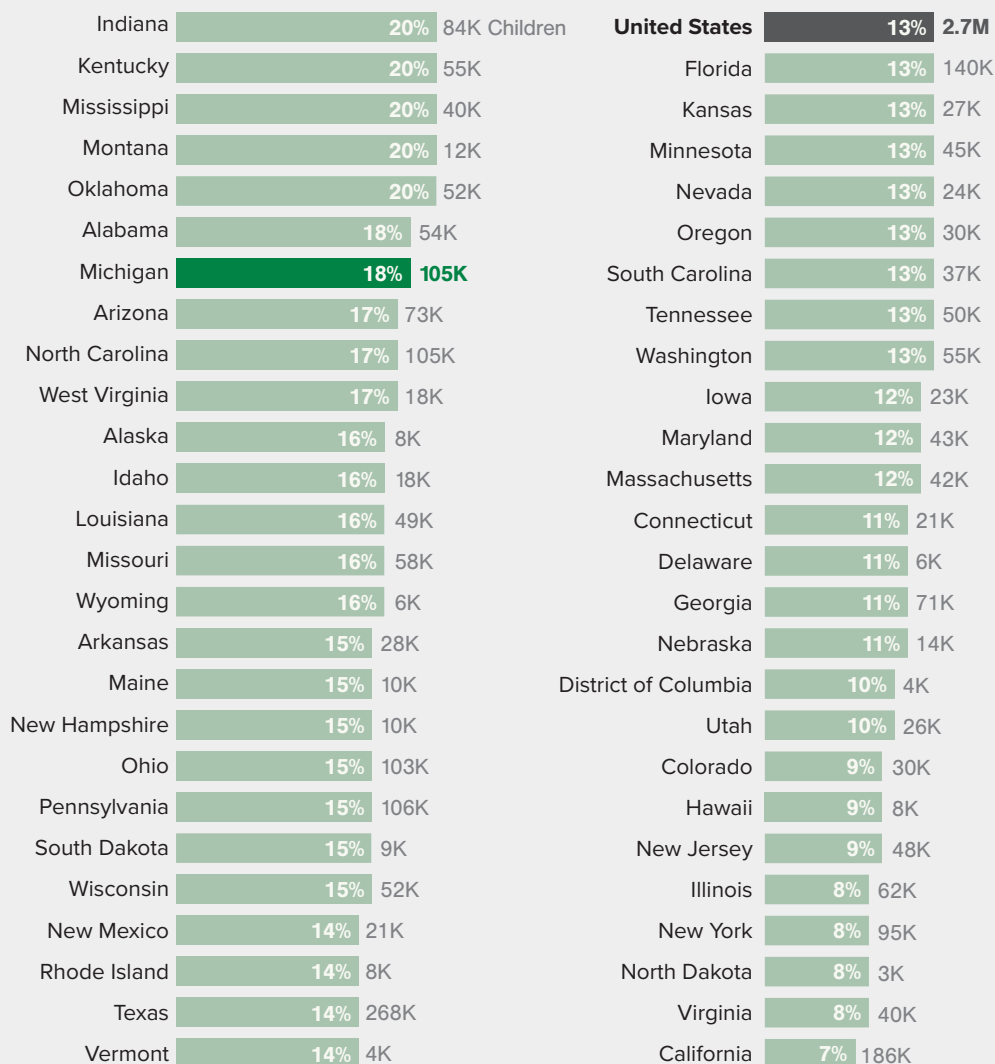
## Many young children face substantial challenges with long-term effects

Data from the National Survey of Children’s Health show that many young children in Michigan experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): 23 percent of children age five or younger have experienced one ACE and 18 percent have experienced two or more.<sup>3</sup>

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

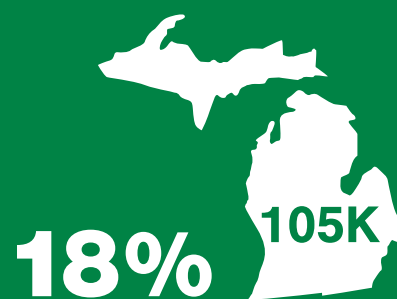
Percentage and number of children, ages 0-5, who have experienced at least two adverse childhood events



Source: National Survey of Children's Health



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



**of children in MI  
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 Michigan?

Michigan lawmakers can improve early childhood experiences for children in their state by approving the proposed \$29.4 million for the Child Development and Care (CDC) Program in the proposed fiscal year 2018 Executive Budget. This is also good for the economy. Michigan employers are having to dig deeper into the labor pool to find qualified candidates and are really looking at the lack of affordable day care as a barrier to hiring and retainment.

**Providing Michigan'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](http://www.StrongNation.org/SEL)**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.strongnation.org/SEL>

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

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2614&g=448&r=1&r2=40&a=4576>

### **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.

Boji Tower / 124 W. Allegan St. / Suite 1220 / Lansing, MI 48933 / 517.371.3565