

Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success

Why business executives want employees who play well with others



Manny Fernandez

Managing Partner,
KPMG Dallas

I was eight years old when I arrived in the U.S. from Cuba. That is when I learned to read, write and speak English. With strong support from my parents, as well as English language educational support provided at my elementary school, I mastered the language in less than one year.

I probably don't need to tell you how challenging it was for me to adjust to being in a new country, with a new language, and starting several steps behind my English-speaking peers. Fortunately, the skills I developed set me up for the success I later achieved in high school, college, and my 33-year career at KPMG.

The kids we commonly refer to as being "at-risk" are in a similar situation because too many are already stuck behind the starting block when they begin kindergarten.

That's one big reason why thousands of ReadyNation members are rallying to expand opportunities for children to participate in high-quality early learning. We want all kids to have a foundation for literacy and math skills when they start school, so they're reading well by third grade, and well-prepared for the academic challenges that follow.

But here's another reason that hits me on the most personal level. Without quality early learning, many children will grow up and fail in the workplace because they haven't learned how to "play well with others." It's about social interaction and the ability to fit in as your own person.

If you think it's not important, consider what it takes to succeed at my workplace: being able to listen to customers and colleagues; being able to collaborate with others to solve problems and capitalize on opportunities; being able to understand different perspectives, be empathetic, and be a team player when the pressure's on.

Step into any high-quality early learning setting, and you'll find educators focusing intently on the very same social-emotional skills. They're exactly what I've looked for as a mentor to hundreds of people on our team at KPMG. I'll be the first to admit that you can't succeed here without those skills—and that we are succeeding, as a company, chiefly because they're an essential part of every business day.

"Without quality early learning, many children will grow up and fail in the workplace because they haven't learned how to 'play well with others.'"

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.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.

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

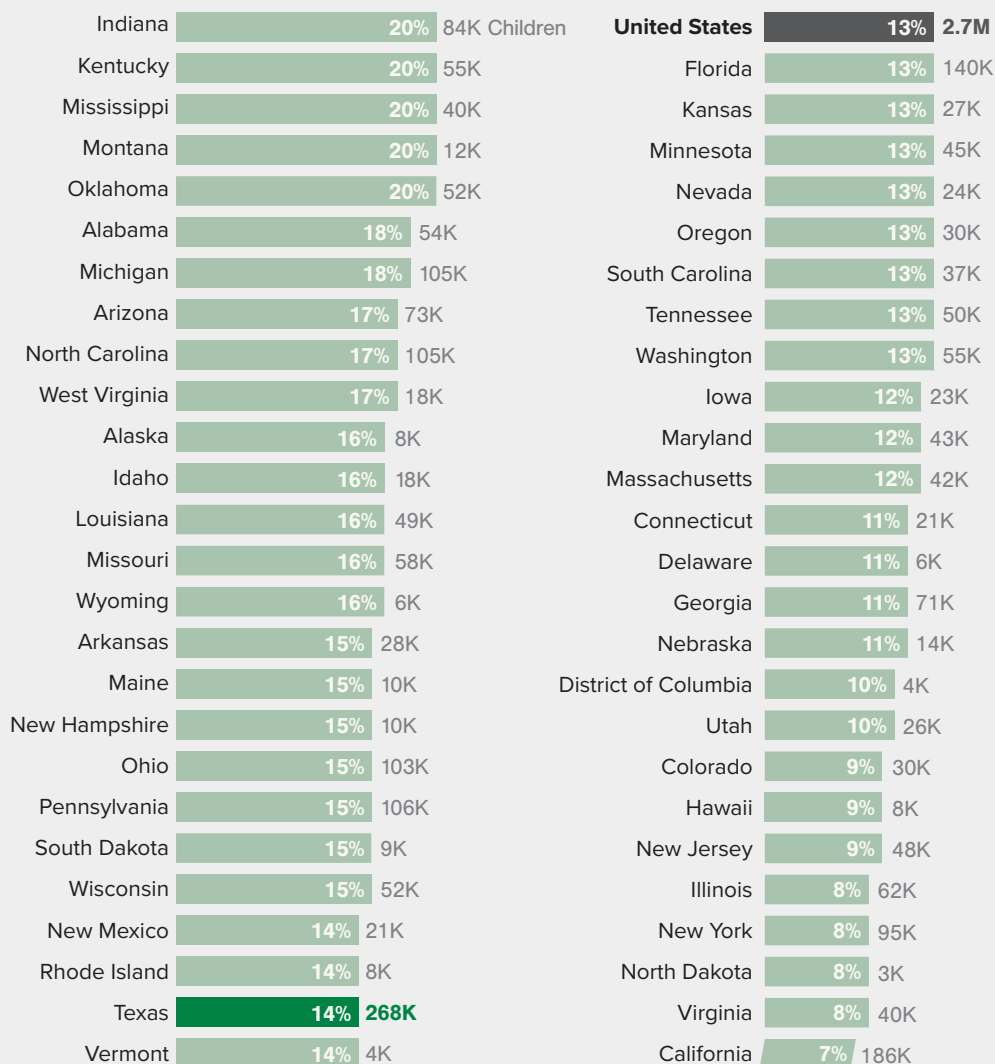
Many young children face substantial challenges with long-term effects

Data from the National Survey of Children’s Health show that many young children in Texas experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): 21 percent of children age five or younger have experienced one ACE and 14 percent have experienced two or more.³

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

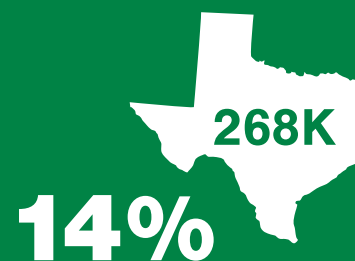
Percentage and number of children, ages 0-5, who have experienced at least two adverse childhood events



Source: National Survey of Children's Health



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



**of children in TX
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 Texas?

The Texas Legislature can improve early childhood experiences for children in their state by:

- Continuing current funding levels for high-quality Pre-K of \$118 million per school year, which will also strengthen the future workforce and economy for all Texans.

Providing Texas' 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 <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>

³ <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.

1108 Lavaca Street / Ste 110 1A-139 / Austin, TX 78701 / 512.257.7399