

# Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success

Why business executives want employees who play well with others

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I received 500 resumes during the past three weeks for one position at my technology company. Many are from impressive professionals with the kind of STEM skills that people need to succeed in this industry. I think a lot of candidates would be surprised though, to know what we're really looking for when they come in for interviews.

Having social-emotional skills and being able to connect with people is key. Our business thrives because we develop products that enable small businesses to meet unique customer needs. That requires us to listen carefully to the challenges they face, and work together across our organization to meet those challenges.

People are often nervous when interviewing, so I try to help them relax and understand what kind of social-emotional skills they have. I ask them, "Can you give me an example, where you had an issue you didn't know how to solve, and how you brought together other perspectives to come up with a solution?"

And then I ask how they managed their emotions when the going got tough.

One of the key things I'm trying to assess is their ability to listen—an ability that people begin to develop through quality early childhood education. I have a 15-year-old and a 3-year-old, and I want them to not only listen to me, but ensure I listen to them. As I've watched them grow up with technology, I've wanted them to respect others, be comfortable asking questions and to learn how to respond when they find out they're wrong. These are the kinds of abilities you'll see experienced teachers developing when you step into a high-quality preschool. In doing so, they're giving kids a true leg up toward a future career with great companies just like mine.

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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.<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.<sup>2</sup>

## 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>3</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

An evaluation of California’s Preschool for All program found strong evidence of improvements in early literacy, early mathematics, and self-regulation skills.<sup>4</sup>

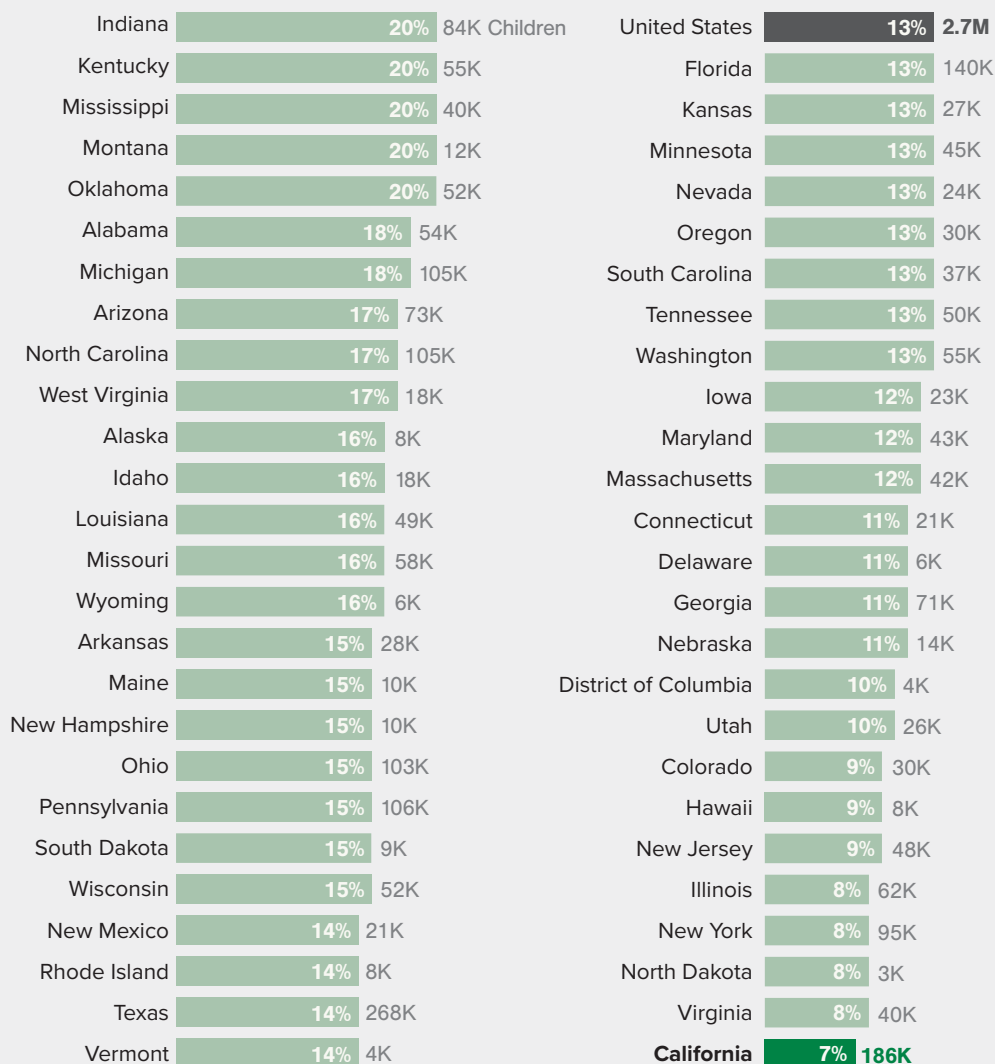
## Many young children face substantial challenges with long-term effects

Data from the National Survey of Children’s Health show that many young children in California experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): 27 percent of children age five or younger have experienced one ACE and 7 percent have experienced two or more.<sup>5</sup>

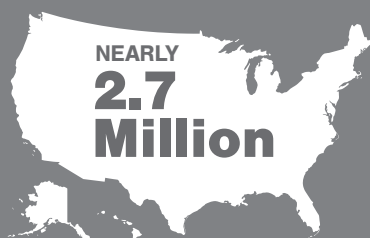
Children are resilient, yet by age 5, too many kids are already on a negative life course that can significantly hinder their later success in the workforce. High-quality early childhood education provides a safe, nurturing environment for these kids.

# 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**



**7%**

**of children in CA  
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 California?

California lawmakers can improve early childhood experiences in our state by:

- providing \$226 million for 2017-2018, in support of the Governor and Legislature's agreement in 2016, to expand the state preschool program by nearly 3,000 students and increase preschool and child care reimbursement rates, in order to promote program quality and attract and retain qualified staff in light of increases to the minimum wage.



**Providing California'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> Davidson, K. (2016, August 30). Employers find 'soft skills' like critical thinking in short supply. Wall Street Journal.

<sup>3</sup> <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.first5sf.org/sites/default/files/page-files/Evaluating%20PFA%20Effectiveness%20-%20Summary%20Brief.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2614&g=448&r=1&a=4576&r2=6>

### **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.

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