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ALASKA

BRIEF

Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success

Why business executives want employees who play well with others



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Facing sickness, injuries and life-threatening situations at a hospital or clinic is one of the most stressful situations imaginable. Yet it's a 24-7 proposition for medical professionals who provide patient care. Their success depends on smart decisions, often under extreme pressure, and usually in collaboration with others. With that in mind, I jumped at the opportunity to emphasize the value of social-emotional skills in the healthcare field in this report from ReadyNation.

In the workplace, professionals often use the term "emotional intelligence" as another name for these types of skills. When caregivers are empathetic, compassionate and communicative they're in a far better position to apply their expertise and manage emotions among themselves and their patients as well. After decades in this field, I know these qualities can't be easily "taught" on the job. They're developed and strengthened in the very earliest years of a child's life.

That's why quality early childhood experiences are so critical. Preparing young and expectant mothers and fathers to be nurturing parents—ensuring there are safe and affordable options for child care—and expanding opportunities for all kids to participate in pre-school must be a top priority for policymakers and employers alike. We are proud that Providence Health & Services Alaska has invested in high-quality early learning through the Center for Child Development.

You don't have to take my word for this. You can review the extensive scientific data about brain development during a child's first years, and studies on the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on social and emotional development as well.

You can also check in with 92 percent of the 300 business leaders surveyed by Zogby, who've looked at the science and concur that experiences during the first five years affect social-emotional skills for life.

Equally important—as you'll see in this report—these business leaders report they're having a tough time finding people with the character skills that are crucial to their professions. I join them in calling for investments in quality childhood experiences that develop these skills and pave the way for a successful workforce in the years to come.

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.

Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman analyzed data from the classic Perry Preschool program. He found that improvements in character skills, particularly related to motivation and behavior problems, explained a large proportion of the positive adult outcomes found (e.g., higher educational attainment, reduced crime, less risky health behavior, etc.).[4]

An evaluation of Alaska's Pre-Elementary program found improvements in students' vocabulary and cognitive development (language, concepts and motor skills). The study did not examine character skills.[5]

Many young children face substantial challenges with long-term effects

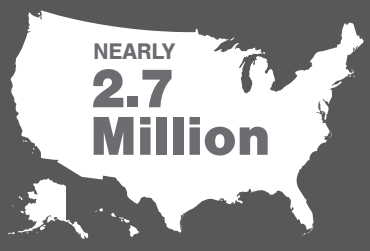
Data from the National Survey of Children's Health show that many young children in Alaska experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): 25 percent of children age five or younger have experienced one ACE and 16 percent have experienced two or more.[6]

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



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



16%

of children in AK 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**

Children are resilient, yet by age five, 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.

How can we improve early childhood experiences in Alaska?

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

- Maintaining investments in Head Start and Pre-K programs.
- Maintaining investments in Infant Learning Programs to provide early intervention services to children with developmental disabilities and children who experience abuse and neglect.
- Maintaining investments in Best Beginnings, which provides Imagination Library books to 35 percent of Alaska's children under five.[7]
- Reinstate Child Care Assistance by $500,000 to ensure working families have access to affordable, quality child care.

Providing Alaska'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 CSA. (2017). Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Support Workforce Success.

2 Davidson, K. (2016). Employers find 'soft skills' like critical thinking in short supply. Wall Street Journal.

3 Jones, et. al. (2015). Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness. American Public Health Association.

4 Heckman, J. et. al. (2012). Perry Preschool & Character. The Heckman Equation.

5 State of Alaska Dept. of Education & Early Development. (2012). Alaska Pilot Pre-Kindergarten Project (AP3) Year Two Report.

6 Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health. 2011/12 National Survey of Children's Health, Alaska State Profile.

7 Best Beginnings. (2017). Expanding Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Across Alaska.

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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