

# Vulnerability among children in kindergarten

Differences between English- and French-speaking children



Kindergarteners whose mother tongue is English are more likely to be considered vulnerable than their French-speaking peers

My name is James. I speak English at home.

**1 out of 3**

of my friends are considered vulnerable.



Je m'appelle François. Je parle français à la maison.

**1 out of 4**

of my friends are considered vulnerable.

Kindergarteners whose mother tongue is English are more likely to be considered *vulnerable* than their *French-speaking* peers

This raises many questions



- ? What does vulnerability mean?
- ? How do we know who is vulnerable?
- ? How do we know there are differences between English- and French-speaking children in Quebec?
- ? What are the results of the Quebec survey?
- ? What are the factors that could explain differences?
- ? How does the situation vary by region?
- ? Should we be concerned?
- ? What can we do?

Kindergarteners whose mother tongue is English are more likely to be considered **vulnerable** than their French-speaking peers

## What does vulnerability mean?

- A child who is **vulnerable** is a child whose development is well below what is expected for their age.
- When children are **vulnerable**, they are not as ready for school, which means that they may have more difficulty integrating into kindergarten.
- To be ready to go to school and to learn, a child needs to:
  - have good coordination
  - be able to work independently
  - be able to wait their turn
  - be interested in books
  - be able to engage in imaginative play
  - be able to communicate with peers and adults beyond their basic needs



# ISQ survey

## Quebec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten (EQDEM)

### L'Institut de la statistique du Québec

Conducted a survey that measures how well children in kindergarten meet **age appropriate developmental expectations**



2012

ISQ Survey



2017

ISQ Survey



2019 (2017 data)

ISQ + CHSSN:

Analysis by language  
group

### Definition of language groups

- Children whose mother tongue is English
  - English (with or without other languages, excluding French)
- Children whose mother tongue is French
  - Only French, French with one or several other languages & children having learned French and English simultaneously, with or without other languages.
- Children who learned French and English simultaneously were included in the group of francophones

[https://www.eqdem.stat.gouv.qc.ca/index\\_an.html](https://www.eqdem.stat.gouv.qc.ca/index_an.html)

How did they  
measure  
vulnerability  
and age  
appropriate  
development?

## Early Development Instrument (<https://edi.offordcentre.com/>)

- A tool that assesses the developmental health (skills and behaviour) of children as they transition from early development to school age.
- completed by kindergarten teachers usually mid-year



Age appropriate developmental expectations

# What are developmental expectations?

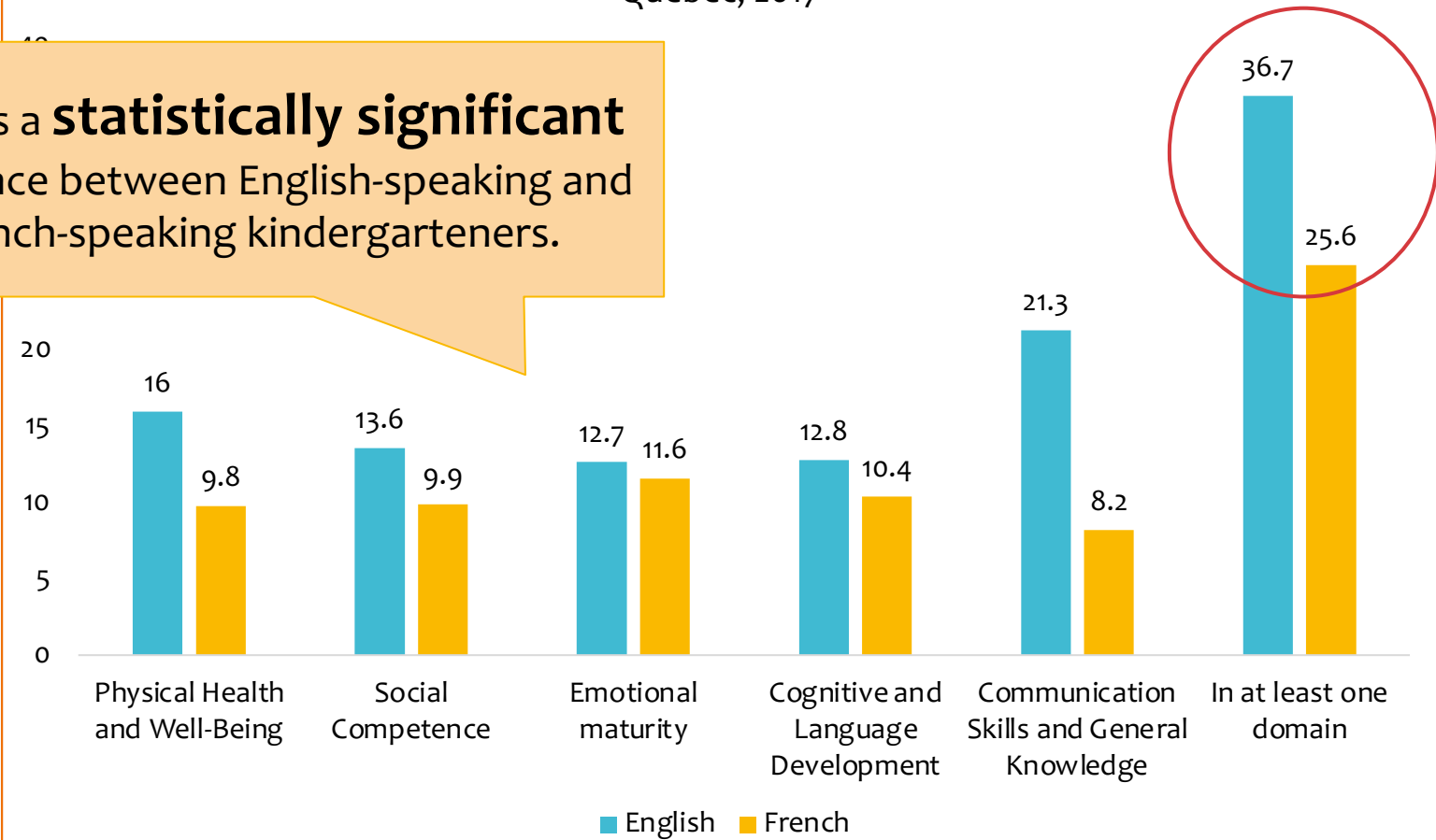
## Five major areas of child development

<b>Physical health and well-being</b>	General physical development, motor skills, diet and clothing, cleanliness, punctuality, alertness <i>Sample EDI question: Would you say that this child is well coordinated (moves without running into things or tripping over things)?</i>
<b>Social Competence</b>	Social skills, self-confidence, sense of responsibility; respect for peers, adults, rules and routines; work habits and autonomy; curiosity <i>Sample EDI question: Would you say that this child is able to follow one-step instructions?</i>
<b>Emotional maturity</b>	Pro-social behaviour and helps others, fear and anxiety, aggressive behaviour, hyperactivity and inattention, expression of emotions <i>Sample EDI question: Would you say that this child comforts a child who is crying or upset?</i>
<b>Cognitive and language development</b>	Interest and skills in reading, writing and mathematics; competencies in language <i>Sample EDI question: Would you say that this child is generally interested in books (pictures and print)?</i>
<b>Communication skills and general knowledge.</b>	Ability to communicate and be understood, ability to understand others, clear articulation, general knowledge <i>Sample EDI question: How would you rate this child's ability to use language effectively in English?</i>

# What are the results?

There is a **statistically significant** difference between English-speaking and French-speaking kindergarteners.

Proportion of vulnerable children in kindergarten by domain of development and in at least one domain according to mother tongue, Québec, 2017





# Why is this important?

- This is an issue of equity
  - Children should have equal opportunities for optimal development
  - Families should have equitable access to support and resources to ensure optimal development
- Speaking French or English should not lead to differences in physical health, social competence, cognitive development or communication skills
- Early intervention is extremely important in preventing delays and identifying difficulties as children grow older
- This level of disparity tells us that there is a problem creating this situation before school entry, which creates problems after children enter school
  - In other words, the gaps get wider over time

# What factors contribute to childhood development?

- Positive/Protective factors
  - Positive, stimulating early experiences
  - Physical and emotional support
  - Parental engagement
- Negative/Risk factors
  - Difficult or stressful conditions
  - Lack of stimulation
- Environments
  - Family
  - Community
    - Daycare & kindergarten
    - Community organizations
    - Housing
    - Social connections
    - Services
    - Economic opportunities



What does the study say?

# Why are English-speaking children in Quebec more vulnerable?

## Negative factors

English-speaking children were **more likely** to:

- be living in a socially very disadvantaged neighbourhood
- be attending kindergarten in a language that is not their mother tongue
- be living in a low-income household
- not to have been in daycare before kindergarten (and more likely started after age 3)
- not to have participated in a Passe-Partout program
- be born outside Canada

## Positive factors

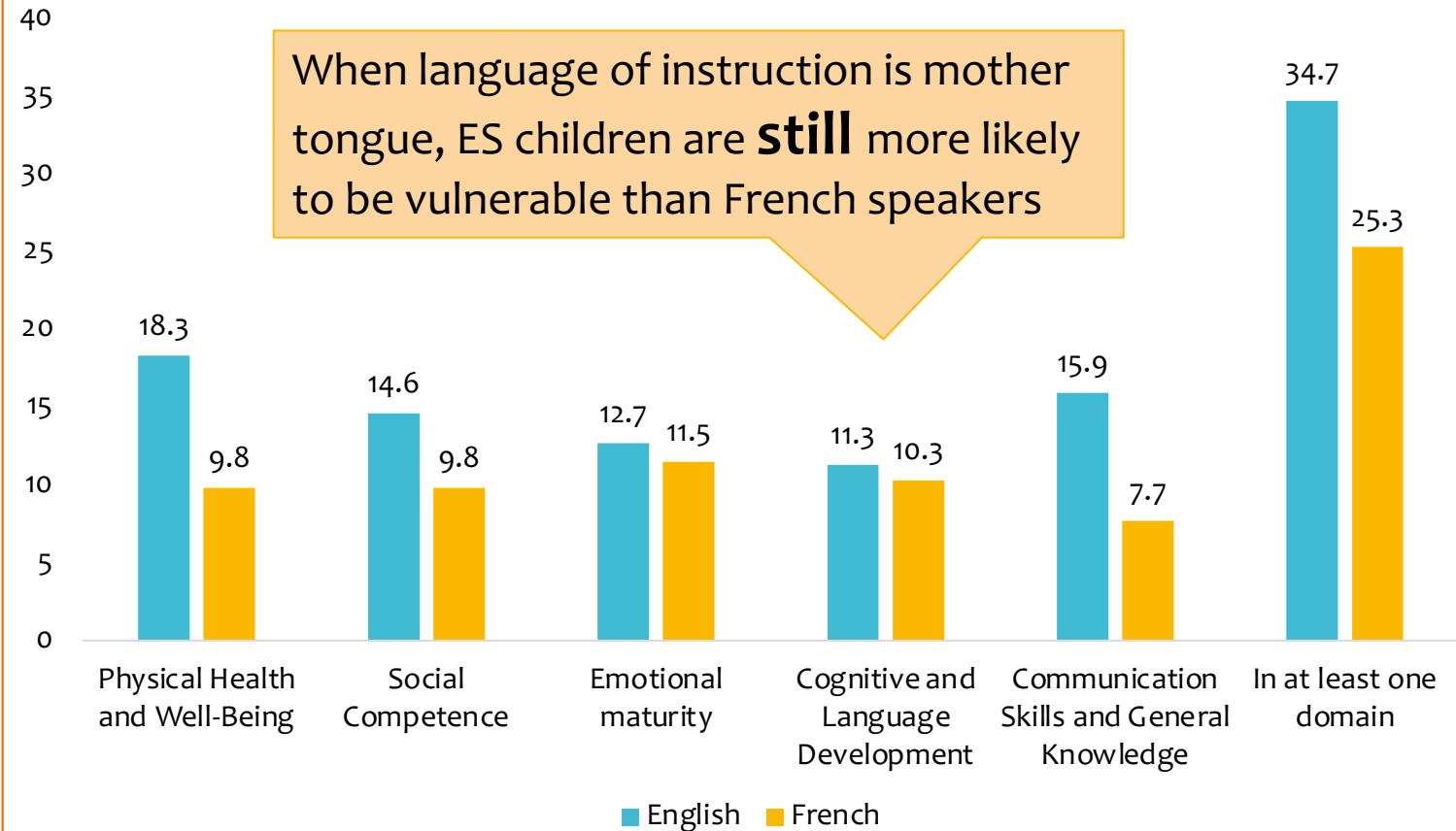
English-speaking children were **less likely** to:

- be attending a school in a disadvantaged area
- be living in a single-parent or blended family

We do not know all the reasons...

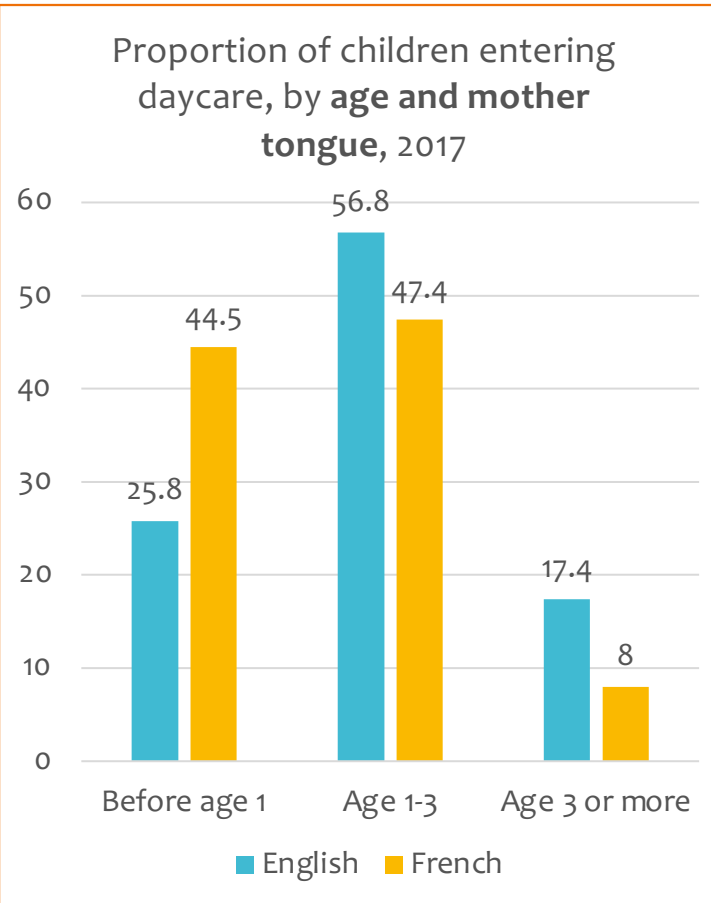
Difference in vulnerability among ES & FS children who **do** receive education in mother tongue

Proportion of children in kindergarten in a vulnerable situation for each domaine of development and at least one domaine according to mother tongue, children who receive education in their mother tongue, Québec, 2017



# Factors differentiating English- and French-speaking children

English-speaking children enter daycare later

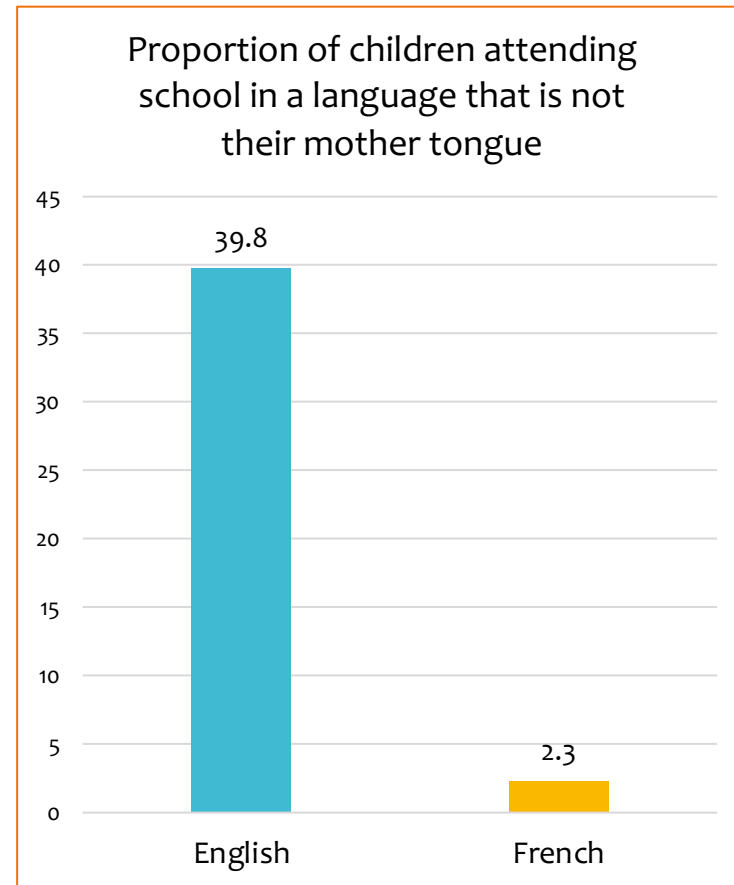


What does this mean?

- English-speaking children tend to enter daycare at a later age, on average
- Research shows that for children with multiple risk factors, attending daycare may help to stimulate optimal development

# Factors differentiating English- and French-speaking children

Many more English-speaking children go to school in their second language

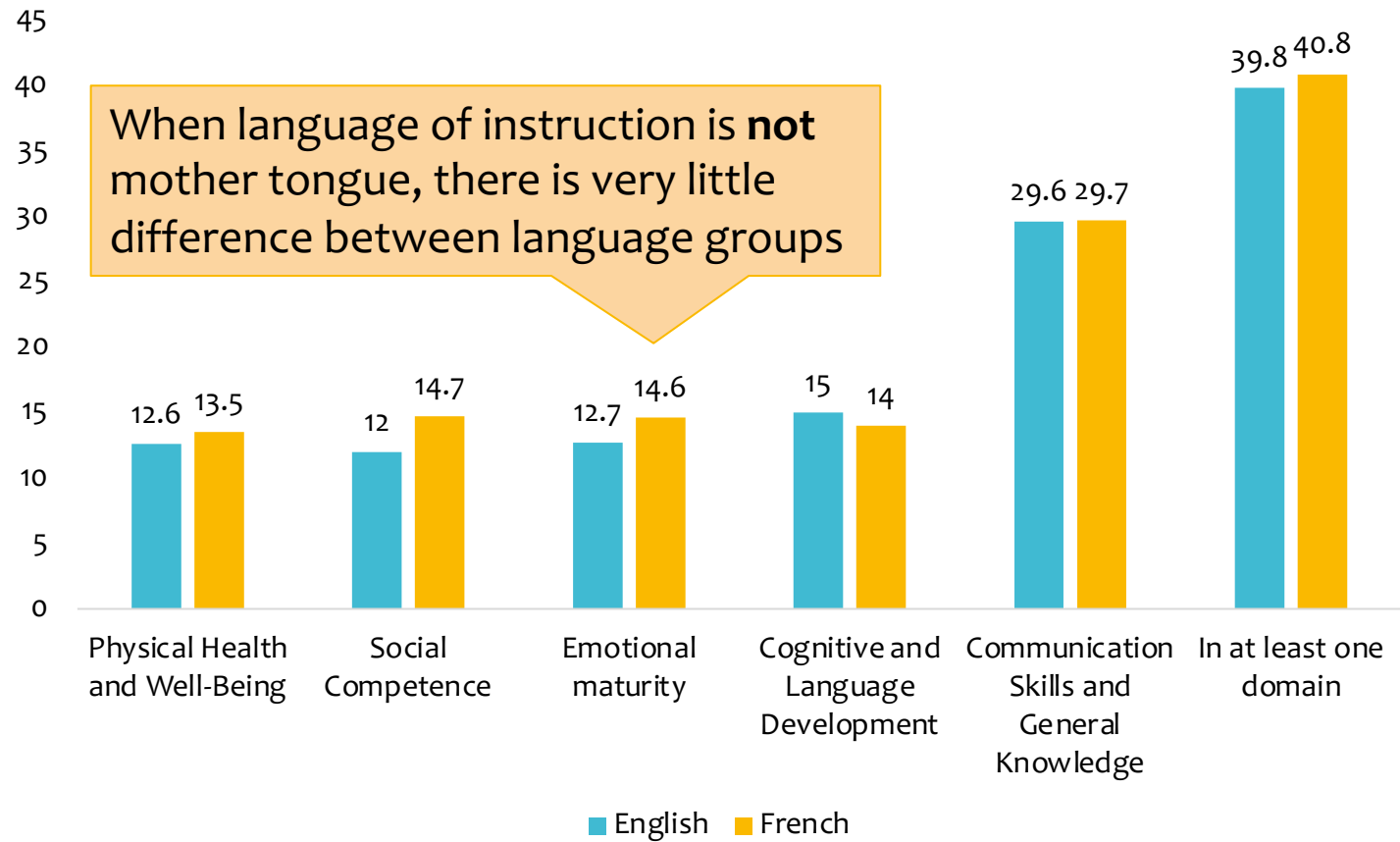


What does this mean??

- A high % of English-speaking children are not eligible to attend school in English
  - Parents' interactions with school may be negatively affected, if they lack French language skills
- English-speaking families may have other factors of vulnerability
  - such as not being connected to community services, having access to additional resources or other sources of insecurity
- Going to school in a second language may contribute to existing vulnerabilities

Difference in vulnerability among ES & FS children who **do not** receive education in mother tongue

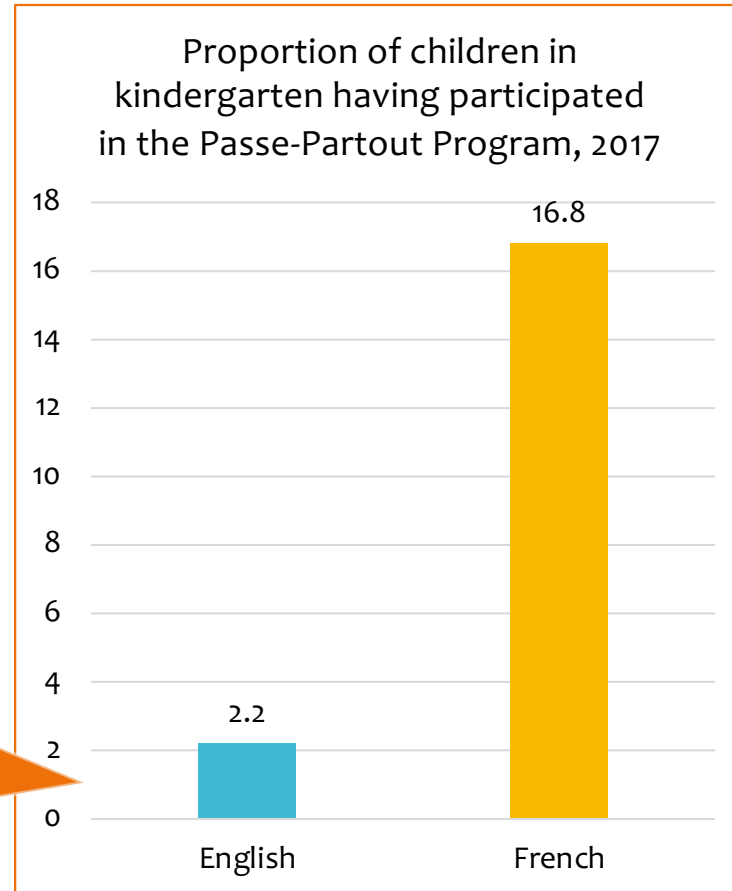
Proportions of vulnerable children in kindergarten for each domaine of development and in at least one domaine according to mother tongue, children who do not receive education in their mother tongue, Québec, 2017



# Factors differentiating English- and French-speaking children

We do not know whether there is any connection between lower rates of participation in PP program and child development outcomes

Fewer English-speaking children did the Passe Partout program



What does this mean?

- Passe Partout is a program for parents of 4 year olds
- It targets socio-economically disadvantaged households
- It is focused on developing parenting skills, preparing children for school, and identifying difficulties
- Activities are held in the school with parents and children, sometimes together and sometimes separately
- Many English schools have chosen pre-Kindergarten instead of the PP program



## Key messages from the graphs

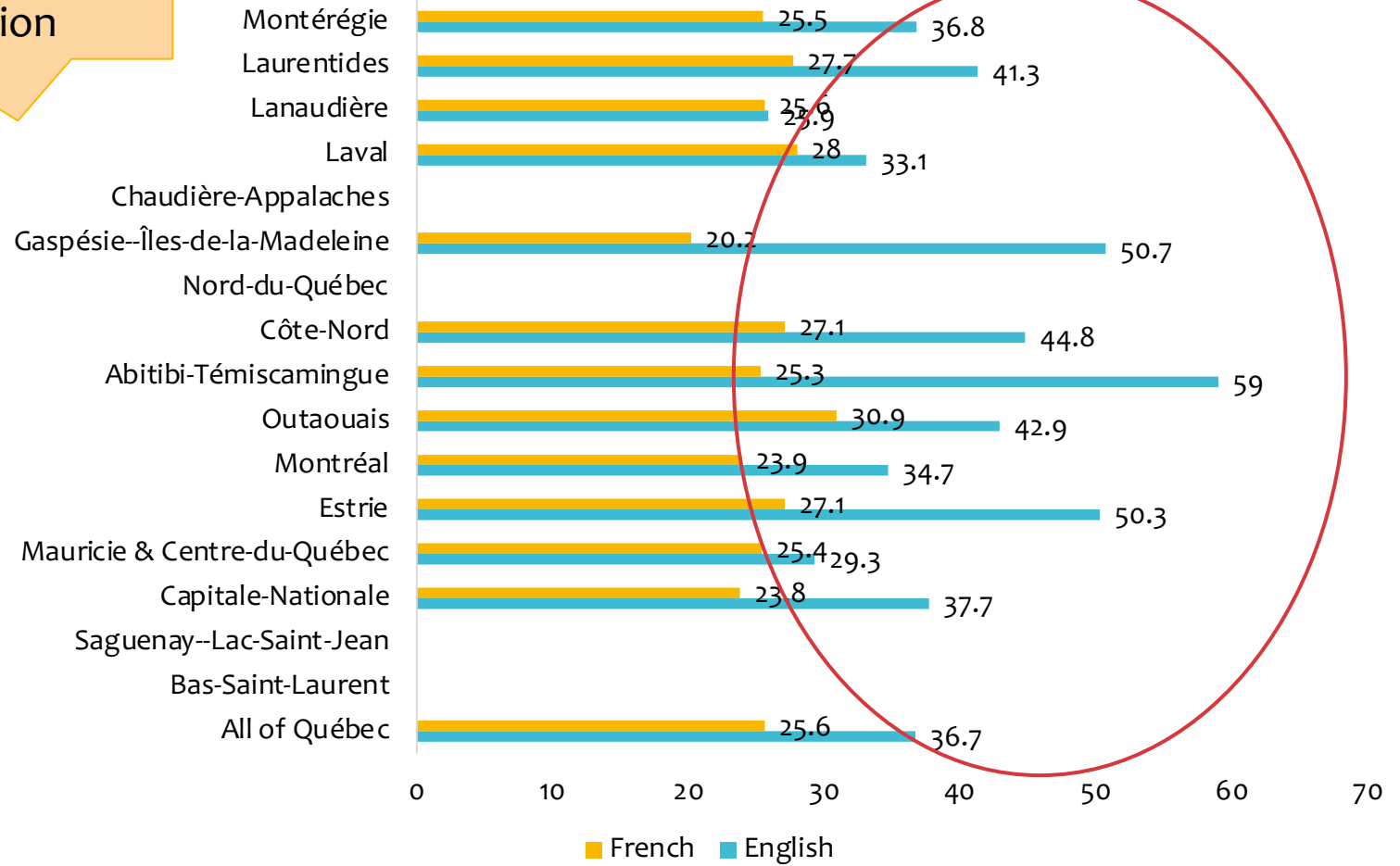
- There are certain factors that distinguish English- and French-speaking children
  - English-speaking children tend to go to daycare later
  - A higher % go to school in their second language
  - A smaller % did the Passe Partout program for 4 year olds
- HOWEVER, we do not know if these factors play a role in vulnerability
  - Language of schooling alone does not entirely explain vulnerability
  - Other forms of disadvantage (low income, social conditions, access to services) are likely to be playing a role
- So...

We do not  
know all the  
reasons...

# How does the situation vary by region?

Higher % of vulnerability among ES in every region

Proportion of vulnerable children in kindergarten in at least one domain according to mother tongue, Health regions and Québec province, 2017



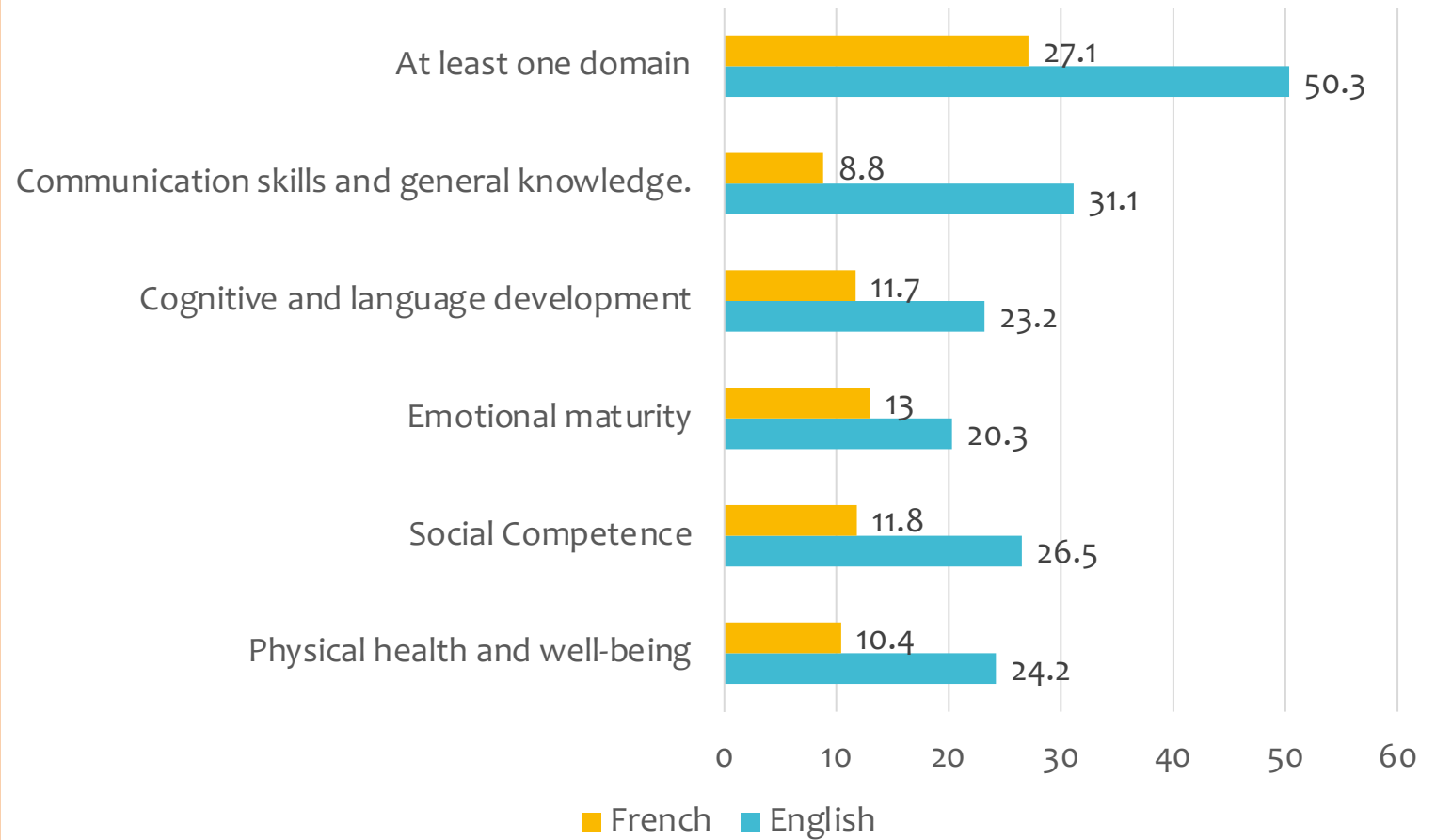
## How does the situation vary by region?

- In **all regions** for which there are sufficient numbers, a higher proportion of English-speaking children are considered vulnerable
- The proportion is **much higher** in almost all regions
- **Over half (50%+)** of English-speaking children are considered vulnerable in
  - Estrie
  - Abitibi-Témiscamingue
  - Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine
- Between **one-third and a half (30%-50%)** are considered vulnerable in
  - Capitale-Nationale
  - Montréal
  - Outaouais
  - Côte-Nord
  - Laval
  - Laurentides
  - Montérégie

However, each region of Quebec is different in the specific % for each area of development

# Example of a regional situation: Estrie

Estrie: Proportion of vulnerable children in kindergarten by domain of development and mother tongue, 2017



# Should we be concerned?

## A case of equity

- English-speaking children seem to be less prepared than their Francophone peers entering Kindergarten.
- The skills that children possess on entering kindergarten are likely to influence their academic success in primary school.
- There may even be a domino effect, as research shows that academic success in primary school can predict educational attainment by age 22.
- BUT... Just because a child is vulnerable in kindergarten does not mean they will have trouble throughout primary school.
- We need to act before school entry (age 0-5)

*Although we may not understand all the reasons...*

**Something can be done!!**

# What can be done?

- **Community organizations and local groups**
  - Offer services to families and very young children
  - Support parents in developing positive parenting and parental engagement
  - Raise awareness of the situation among partners
- **Health & education sectors**
  - Provide screening, evaluations and intervention in English
  - Identify the needs of English-speaking children locally
  - Create targeted programs in areas of greatest need
- **Municipalities**
  - Offer early childhood services
  - Increase free activities
  - Increase social housing
- **Government**
  - Invest in early childhood, taking into account the needs of different social and linguistic groups
  - Develop policies and programs in areas with the highest needs

# Future research

## What more do we need to know?

- Overview of services currently available for English-speaking families in each region
- Explore factors of vulnerability, beyond language of instruction
- Portrait of English-speaking children in economically disadvantaged situations
  - Regional differences?
  - What are the accessible services?
- Characteristics of schools with higher proportions of vulnerable English-speaking children
  - Students' characteristics?
  - Characteristics of human resources and services offered?
- Long-term impacts of starting school with high levels of vulnerability
- Project and program evaluations
  - for example focused on outcomes