

## Do all children start kindergarten with an equal chance of success?

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### SPECIAL REPORT

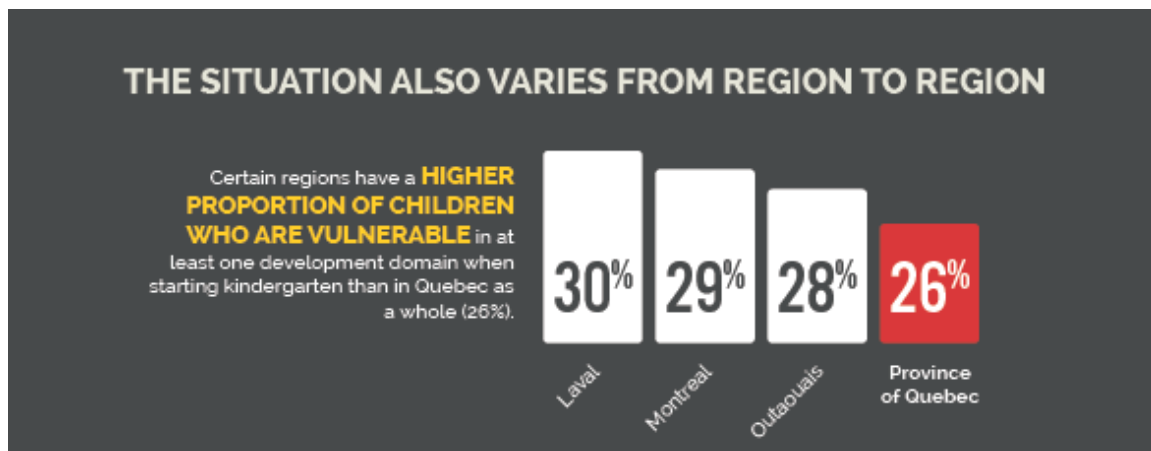
In Quebec, **one out of every four kindergarten-aged children** (26%) is vulnerable in at least one domain of development. These children are likely to be less prepared to take full advantage of everything school has to offer them. This proportion becomes **almost one child out of three** (31%) in the most disadvantaged environments, as compared to **one out of five** (21%) in the most privileged environments (Simard et al., 2013). Environment is therefore a determining factor in the development of the very young children.



These results are taken from the Québec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten (QSCDK), which was conducted in the winter of 2012 with approximately 65,000 children enrolled in senior kindergarten (for five year-olds). Five domains of development were assessed by this large-scale study:

- › Physical health and well-being: General physical development, motor skills, diet and clothing, cleanliness, punctuality, alertness
- › Social competences: Social skills, self-confidence, sense of responsibility; respect for peers, adults, rules and routines; work habits and autonomy; curiosity
- › Emotional maturity: Pro-social behaviour and helps others, fear and anxiety, aggressive behaviour, hyperactivity and inattention, expression of emotions
- › Cognitive and language development: Interest and skills in reading, writing and mathematics; competencies in language
- › Communication skills and general knowledge: Ability to communicate and be understood, ability to understand others, clear articulation, general knowledge

The results of the QSCDK showed that children's situations varied from region to region. For example, the regions of Outaouais (28%), Montreal (29%) and Laval (30%) accounted for proportionally more vulnerable children in at least one area of development than the rest of Quebec (26%) (*Institut de la statistique du Québec*, 2013).



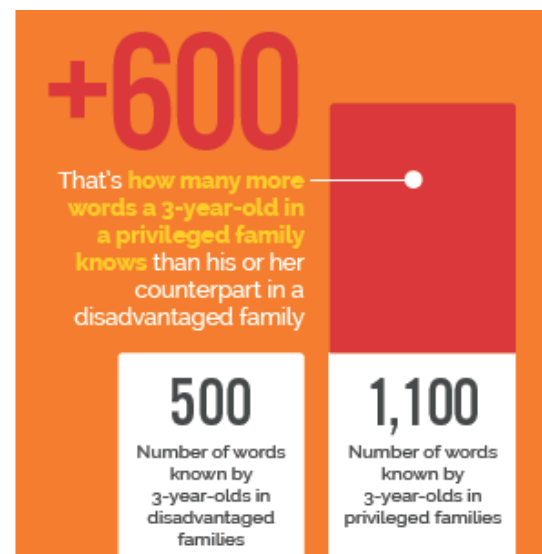
## ● WHY SHOULD WE BE WORRIED?

The situation is particularly worrying since children's development during the first years of their life has an influence on their ability to learn and achieve success in school.

It has also been shown that children who have experienced difficult or stressful living conditions between the ages of 0 and 5 will have developed fewer skills before entering kindergarten, which can result in a delay in vocabulary acquisition (Desrosiers and Ducharme, 2006). Researchers estimate that children in disadvantaged families know fewer words at 3 years old (about 500) than their counterparts in privileged families (about 1,100) (Hart and Risley, 1995).

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 (Entwisle, Alexander and Oslon, 2005).



## ● CAN THIS SITUATION BE CHANGED?

According to researchers in British Columbia, only 5% of childhood development problems are the result of congenital disease or disorder. Their analysis showed that the proportion of developmentally vulnerable children could be limited to 10% if the necessary steps were taken (Kershaw et al., 2010).

It has also been established that stimulating environments are favourable to early childhood development. For example, among children from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, proportionally fewer (23%) of those who attended daycare and junior kindergarten (age 4) presented developmental vulnerabilities than those who did not (44%) (Simard et al., 2013).

Although it is not currently possible to explain exactly why, several regions of the province have a lower proportion of children who are vulnerable in at least one area of development than in the rest of Quebec (26%).

The widest gap is recorded in the regions of Lanaudière (23%), Capitale-Nationale (23%), Chaudière-Appalaches (22%) and Centre-du-Québec (22%) (*Institut de la statistique du Québec*, 2013).

Finally, it has been shown that every dollar invested in giving children a better start in life represents a return of between \$4 and \$9 (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). According to a Harvard University study, funds invested in early learning programs resulted in lower crime and welfare costs, while increasing tax revenues from those children later in life.

These findings gain even more significance when we consider that children whose development is the most at risk are also those who are the most receptive to intervention and stimulating environments (Boivin et al., 2012).

**Although the situation is troubling, it something can be done!**

## About this special report

The information and data presented in this report are taken from an analysis produced by the *Institut national de santé publique du Québec* for the Early Childhood Observatory in cooperation with the *Institut de la statistique du Québec*. The document refers to several studies conducted in various countries, as well as certain results drawn from two major Quebec surveys:

- › Québec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten (QSCDK)
- › Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development in Québec (QLSCD)

## About the Early Childhood Observatory

The mission of the Early Childhood Observatory is to help ensure that the development and well-being of our very youngest children has a place at the top of Quebec's list of social priorities. To fulfill this mission, the Observatory compiles the most reliable and relevant data on 0-5 year olds, produces special reports and encourages dialogue on possible collective action. For more information on the Early Childhood Observatory, please visit [tout-petits.org](http://tout-petits.org).

## About the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation

The mission of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation is to prevent poverty by contributing to the educational success of young people living in Quebec from conception to age 17 by helping them to develop their full potential. To achieve this goal, it supports local and regional mobilization in areas that are critical to educational success: early childhood development and student retention. The Foundation also provides support for awareness activities and tools for parents and Quebec society as a whole. For more information, please visit [fondationchagnon.org/en](http://fondationchagnon.org/en).