



REEES

QUEBEC FIRST NATIONS
**REGIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD,
EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SURVEY**



**FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION**

ACADEMIC SUCCESS FACTORS (CHILDREN AGE 0–5)

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (REEES) aims to describe the state of development of early childhood, education, and employment among First Nations communities in Quebec. It was conducted between January 2014 and March 2015 in 20 communities of 8 nations. In all, 2,435 people (923 children age 11 and under, 472 adolescents age 12–17, and 1,041 adults age 18 and over) answered an electronic questionnaire submitted by field agents.

Data followed by “*” has a variation coefficient of 16.6% to 33.3% and must be interpreted with caution. The symbol “***” indicates a variation coefficient higher than 33.3%. This data is not published, except for estimates below 5%, which must be interpreted with caution.

In some cases, data is presented according to the respondents’ community geographic zone as defined by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada:

- Zone 1 (urban): less than 50 km from a service centre with road access;
- Zone 2 (rural): between 50 km and 350 km from a service centre with road access;
- Zone 3 (isolated): over 350 km from a service centre with road access;
- Zone 4 (difficult access): no year-round road access to a service centre.

Service centre: The nearest location where community members must go to access service providers, banks and government services.

In the REEES, the term “community” is used to refer to “Indian reserves.” Although officially recognized, the term “Indian reserve” is considered pejorative and has therefore been replaced by “community.”

For more information, see the REEES *Methodology* booklet.

The REEES report is divided into three sets of booklets: early childhood, education, and employment. All booklets are available in the FNQLHSC documentation centre: <https://centredoc.cssspnql.com>.

HIGHLIGHTS

This report looks at certain academic success factors for preschool-age First Nations children in Quebec. The results stem from the Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (REEES) conducted between January 2014 and March 2015 in 20 First Nations communities in Quebec. The REEES gathered data from parents (or other primary caregivers) of 450 children age 0-5.

- Stories are read one to three times a week to 32.2% of the children, but rarely or never to 22.7% of them.
- Of the children whose principal language is a First Nations language, nearly half speak and understand it very well.
- Nearly half of the children who mainly use a First Nations language to express themselves are always exposed to it.
- A little more than 40% of children take part in cultural activities at least once a month, compared to 22.7% who never participate.

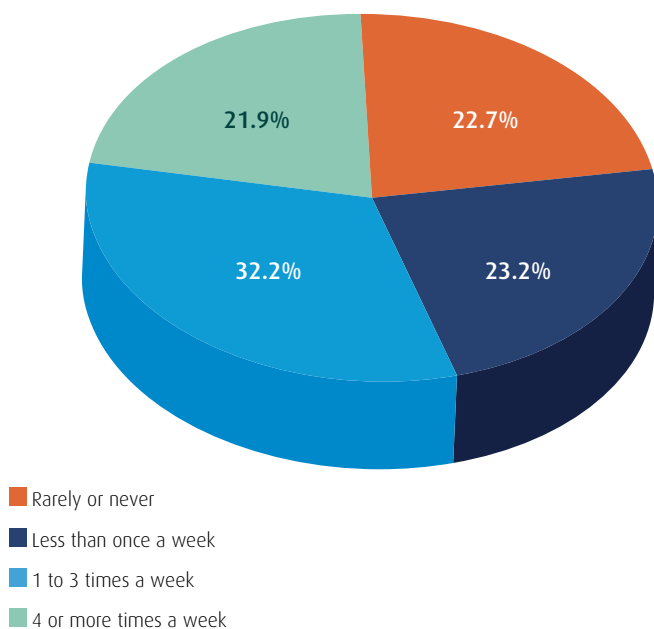


PARENT-CHILD TEACHING

Various preparatory activities started in early childhood facilitate the transition to school and academic success for the little ones. Of these, literacy development activities, which encourage young people to handle books and discover stories and tales read by adults, foster the development of skills that are helpful for learning to read and write. Children who grow up in an environment where books and other reading material (e.g., magazines and comic books) are present and who are stimulated by dedicated reading times will develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes conducive to learning and academic success.¹

Figure 1 shows that reading frequency varies for children age 0–5 according to their families. While 21.9% of children have stories read to them at least four times a week, 22.7% rarely or never have this opportunity. A third (32.2%) participate in a reading activity with their family one to three times a week, and nearly a quarter (23.2%) experience such activities less than once a week.

Figure 1: Frequency of a parent or another family member reading with the child (n=446)

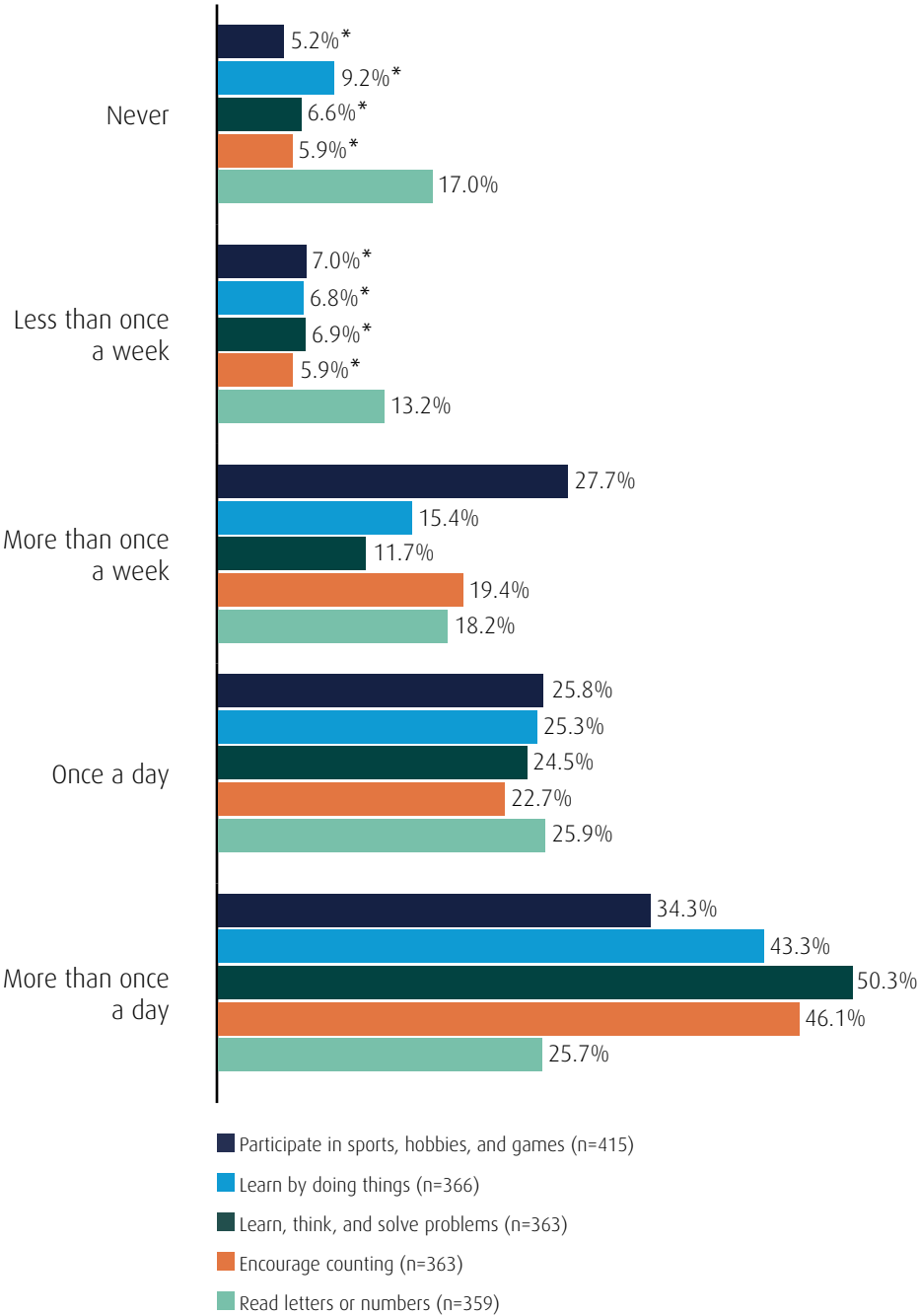


¹ Comité régional pour la valorisation de l'éducation, *Cadre théorique : éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture*, [Online], 2011, 2 p. [http://www.crevalle.org/upload/File/Berceau/2011-12/CREVALE_berceau_cadre_theorique_2011.pdf].

Various learning activities with family members stimulate different areas of a child’s development. Some activities are carried out through action, while others include aspects that are more closely related to academic progress, such as numeracy or learning letters and numbers. Figure 2 shows various activities and how frequently they are carried out with parents or family members.

More than one answer could be chosen for the learning activity questionnaire. The most frequent learning activities (more than once a day) are those aimed at learning, thinking, and problem-solving (50.3% of children), followed by those that encourage counting (46.1%) and learning by doing things (43.3%). The frequency is also generally high for sports, hobbies, and games, with the majority of children (60.1%) practising this type of activity with their parents or other family members at least once a day.

Figure 2: Frequency of learning-related activities

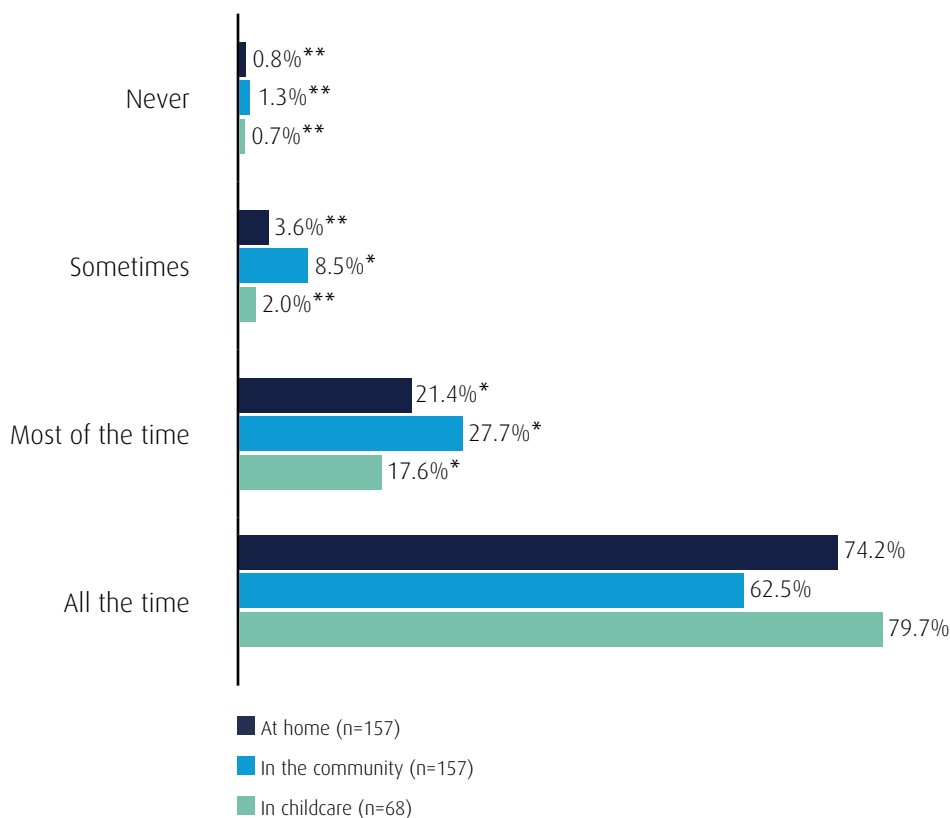


LANGUAGE LEARNING

Principal language mastery is a central factor of academic success. Children whose most used language is a First Nations language will, sooner or later, encounter schooling in a second language. Studies² show how important it is to learn the principal language properly in order to be able to learn a second language. When principal language learning is incomplete, the child is less able to learn and progress in a different language of instruction.

The majority of children age 0–5 whose principal language is a First Nations language³ (47.9%) are exposed to this language all the time, especially in childcare (79.7%), at home (74.2%), and in the community (62.5%). One child in ten is rarely (never or sometimes) exposed to their language in their community (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Frequency of exposure to a First Nations language for children for whom it is their principal language⁴



² Annie Presseau, *Soutenir la réussite des jeunes autochtones à risque*, [Online], Université du Québec à Montréal, 2006. [<http://www1.education.gouv.qc.ca/sections/prprs/pdf/prprsFiche36.pdf>].

Assemblée nationale du Québec, "La réussite scolaire des Autochtones," Committee on Education, February 2007. Claude, Lavoie, "La réussite scolaire des jeunes autochtones," *Psychologie Québec*, July 2001, pp. 19–21.

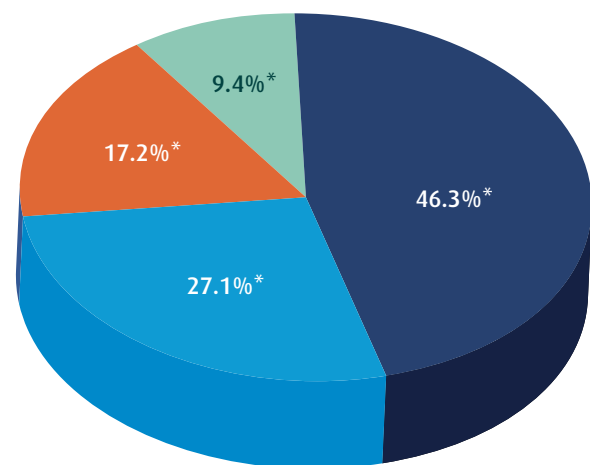
³ The principal language is the most often used language in everyday life.

⁴ The frequency of exposure at home and in the community concerns children age 0–5 whose most used language is a First Nations language (n=157). The childcare data targets solely children of the same age whose most used language is a First Nations language and who attend a childcare service (n=68).

Children's ability to speak their principal language is particularly important in the context of academic learning and integration. The principal language must serve as a learning vector. What's more, this capacity influences intellectual growth and academic results.⁵ Figures 4 and 5 show the survey results on the ability of children age 4-5 to speak and understand their First Nations language.

Figure 4 shows that 46.3%* of children age 4-5 whose most used language is a First Nations language speak their first language very well, 27.1%* speak it relatively well, and less than 20% do so with effort. A little less than one child in ten expresses themselves with a few words. These children's difficulty speaking their principal language suggests they will have difficulties when the time comes to start school. However, this data must be interpreted cautiously because it comes from a small number of individuals.

Figure 4: Child's ability to speak their First Nations language (n=66)



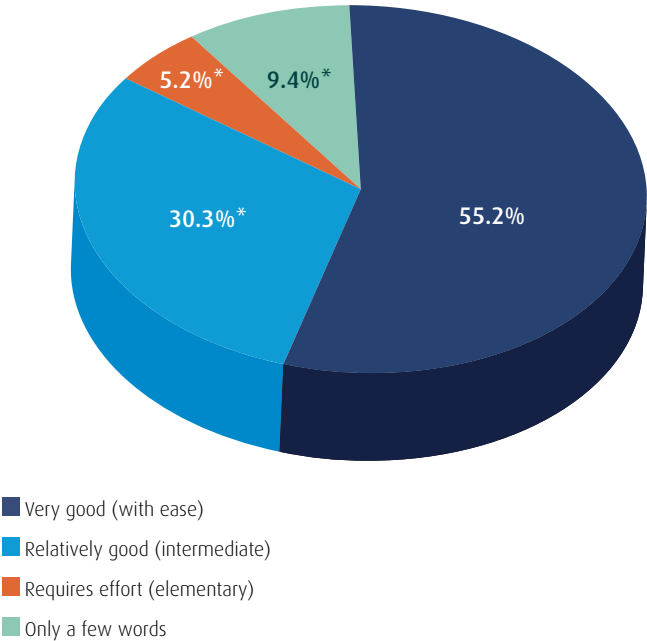
- Very good (with ease)
- Relatively good (intermediate)
- Requires effort (elementary)
- Only a few words

⁵ Claude, Lavoie, "La réussite scolaire des jeunes autochtones," *Psychologie Québec*, July 2001, pp. 19-21.



As Figure 5 shows, more than half (55.2%) of children age 4–5 whose principal language is a First Nations language understand it very well, and nearly a third (30.3%*) understand it relatively well. A small proportion (5.2%*) must make an effort to understand, and nearly one child in ten understands only a few words. While these numbers must be interpreted cautiously—as is the case for the small number of children with limited ability to speak their language—limited understanding can also lead to difficulties in school.

Figure 5: Child’s ability to understand their First Nations language (n=66)



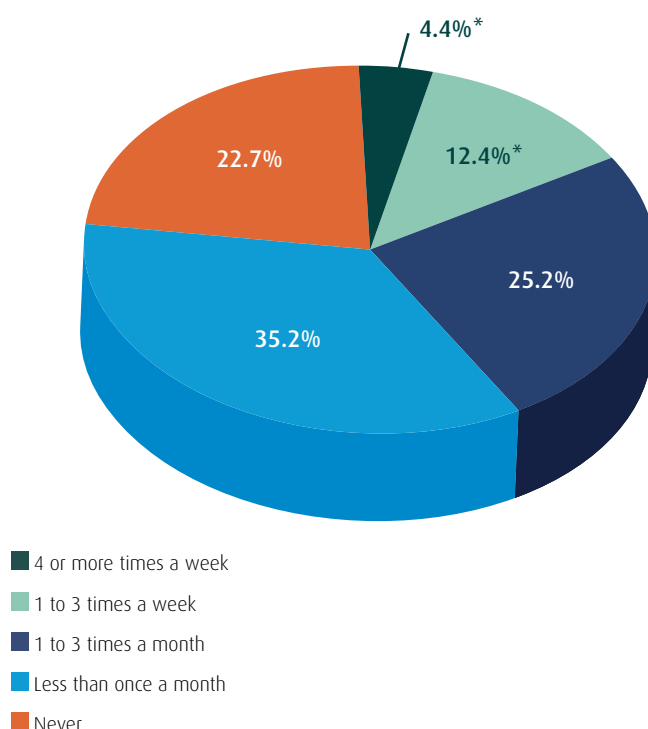
The results show that about half of children are proficient in their First Nations language as their principal language (ability to speak and understand) and would be well equipped to progress in school in a second language. However, other factors that can influence academic success must not be overlooked.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Identity and developing a sense of belonging in the community are among the factors that better equip First Nations children for life's challenges.⁶ Bringing elders and young children together as well as traditional activities with community members are good ways of helping children absorb their culture.

As Figure 6 shows, a proportion of 42.0% of children participate in cultural activities at least once a month (25.2% do so one to three times a month, 12.4%*, one to three times a week, and 4.4%*, at least four times a week). About one third participate in cultural activities less than once a month (35.2%), and nearly one child in four never participates (22.7%).

Figure 6: Frequency of child participation in cultural activities (n=432)



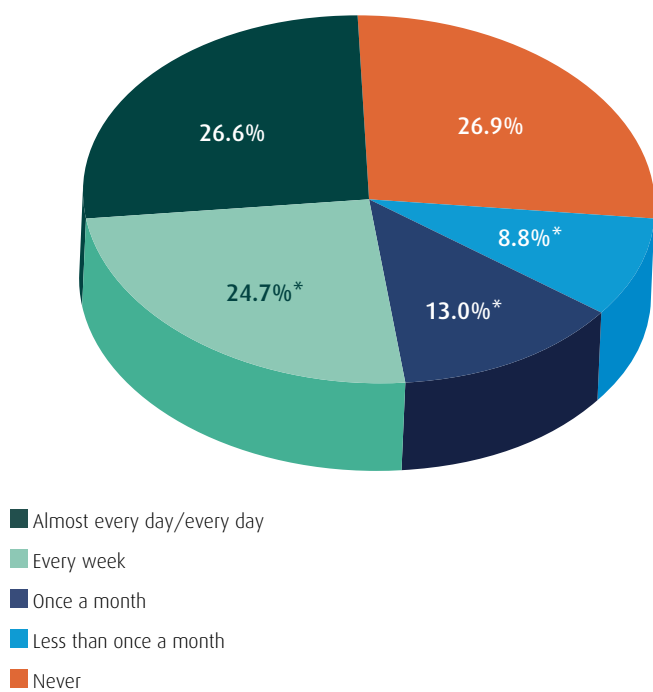
Childcare services are places where a number of children can come in contact with their culture. As part of the survey, the principal childcare service included services provided in the child's home (with a family member or another person), in another home (with a family member or another person), at a daycare (public or private), and in school (before or after school for school-age children).



⁶ Public Health Agency of Canada, *Aboriginal Children: The Healing Power of Cultural Identity*, [Online]. [<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/prog-ini/ahsunc-papacun/aboriginal-autochtones-eng.php>].

How often children learn traditional teachings in childcare varies widely, as Figure 7 shows. About half of the children receive traditional teachings at least once a week. In contrast, more than a quarter of children never receive this type of instruction in childcare.

Figure 7: Frequency of traditional teachings in childcare (n=205)



CONCLUSION

The survey data shows that First Nations children age 0–5 are generally stimulated through a variety of activities and human contact that prepare them for a successful transition to school. However, for some children, certain aspects of their development seem to be more problematic. The survey revealed that about a quarter of the children do not master their principal language in terms of expression and understanding. Studies show that principal language proficiency is important for academic success and even more so when instruction is in another language.

The data analysis also shows that a quarter of the children in childcare never receive traditional teachings. Since cultural identity and developing a sense of belonging in the community stimulate children's overall development, these facets should receive special attention.

In conclusion, preparation for academic success starts in early childhood through learning and support from numerous parties. Group discussion by community stakeholders who work with the little ones could give rise to engaging intervention strategies.



KEY COURSES OF ACTION

The survey results have identified needs that must be met from early childhood for academic success. Some intervention areas need to be prioritized, namely early reading, mother tongue proficiency, cultural identity, and child health. There are numerous inspiring practices in these areas, and they merit consideration in First Nations communities:

- Encourage literacy development
 - Equip parents when children start kindergarten by giving them information kits on activities for developing children's literacy and preparing them for school.
 - Facilitate access to libraries (e.g., primary schools, mobile libraries) where parents and their children can use books and educational games in an adapted environment (appropriate, kid-friendly furniture).
 - Expand the "Croque-livres" initiative (by Avenir d'enfants) by installing book exchange boxes with books appropriate for young children.
- Offer cultural activities and emphasize First Nations identity and language in childcare services
 - Bring elders and children together by valuing and promoting activities like singing, dancing, storytelling, picking, fishing, and crafts.
 - Schedule family learning activities with cultural elements that are specific to the nation, with a focus on the little ones (e.g., traditional cooking activities).
 - Encourage First Nations language use by stakeholders.
 - Adapt daycare layout and architecture by building on known cultural references, such as colours and decorations.
- Promote healthy lifestyles within communities
 - Stress the importance of breakfast and healthy eating. In childcare centres, provide breakfast or a substantial snack at the beginning of the day.
 - Encourage cooperation between stakeholders and awareness campaigns.
 - Offer motor skills development activities for the little ones and psychomotility rooms within communities.
 - Promote healthy eating through a program, such as a health challenge for the whole family.

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