



# Knowledge of an Aboriginal Language and School Outcomes

Anne Guèvremont, Dafna Kohen  
Health Analysis Division, Statistics Canada

# Background

- Language is an important part of the culture of Aboriginal peoples.
- Percentage able to converse in an Aboriginal language varies by Aboriginal group
  - 69% Inuit, 51% FN on reserve, 12% FN off reserve, 4% Métis (from 2006 Census)
- Language and culture are important components of Aboriginal identity.

# Cultural continuity and language

- Cultural continuity associated with decreased suicide rates in BC communities (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998).
- Aboriginal language use in community associated with decreased youth suicide rate regardless of number of cultural continuity factors (Hallett, Chandler & Lalonde, 2007).

# High school completion rates of Aboriginal students



- Aboriginal population has lower high school completion rates than non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2009)
- Among Aboriginal young adults, Aboriginal language speakers had more negative school outcomes than non-language speakers (Guèvremont & Kohen, in press)

# Immersion outcomes

- Positive outcomes of immersion programs for indigenous children in New Zealand and Hawaii
- Some research from Inuktitut immersion program in Nunavik
  - Best predictor of success in English or French in first year not in immersion (Louis & Taylor, 2001)
  - Increased self-esteem in Kindergarten (Wright & Taylor, 1995)

# Research Questions

1. Is speaking an Aboriginal language related to school outcomes for children and young adults?
2. What is the impact of learning the language in school compared to instruction outside of school?
3. Are there any factors that explain the relationship between speaking an Aboriginal language and school outcomes?

# Data Source

- 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS)
  - National Survey of Aboriginal Peoples (First Nations living off reserve, Métis, and Inuit)
  - Focus on issues such as health, language, employment, income, schooling, housing, and mobility.
  - 45,000 respondents (15,500 child component; 29,500 adult component)
- Child Component (6 to 14 year olds)
- Adult Component (15 years and older; 18 to 34 year olds included in this study)

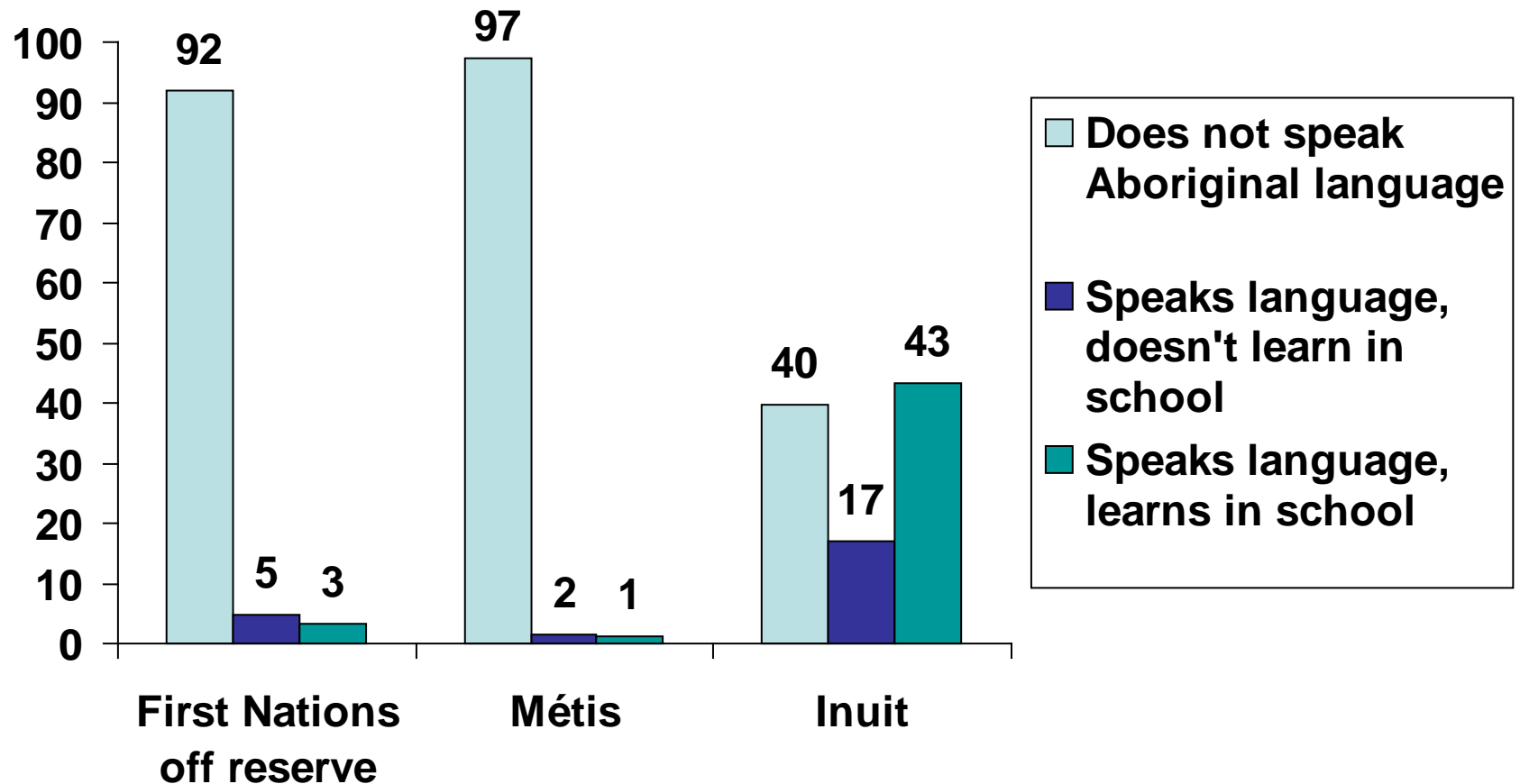
# Definitions

- **Speaks an Aboriginal language** (with effort, relatively well, or very well vs. only a few words or not at all)
- **Learned or taught an Aboriginal language in school**
  - Parents asked who helps the child in learning his or her Aboriginal language
  - Young adults were asked if they were taught an Aboriginal language or taught in an Aboriginal language (in their last year of school)

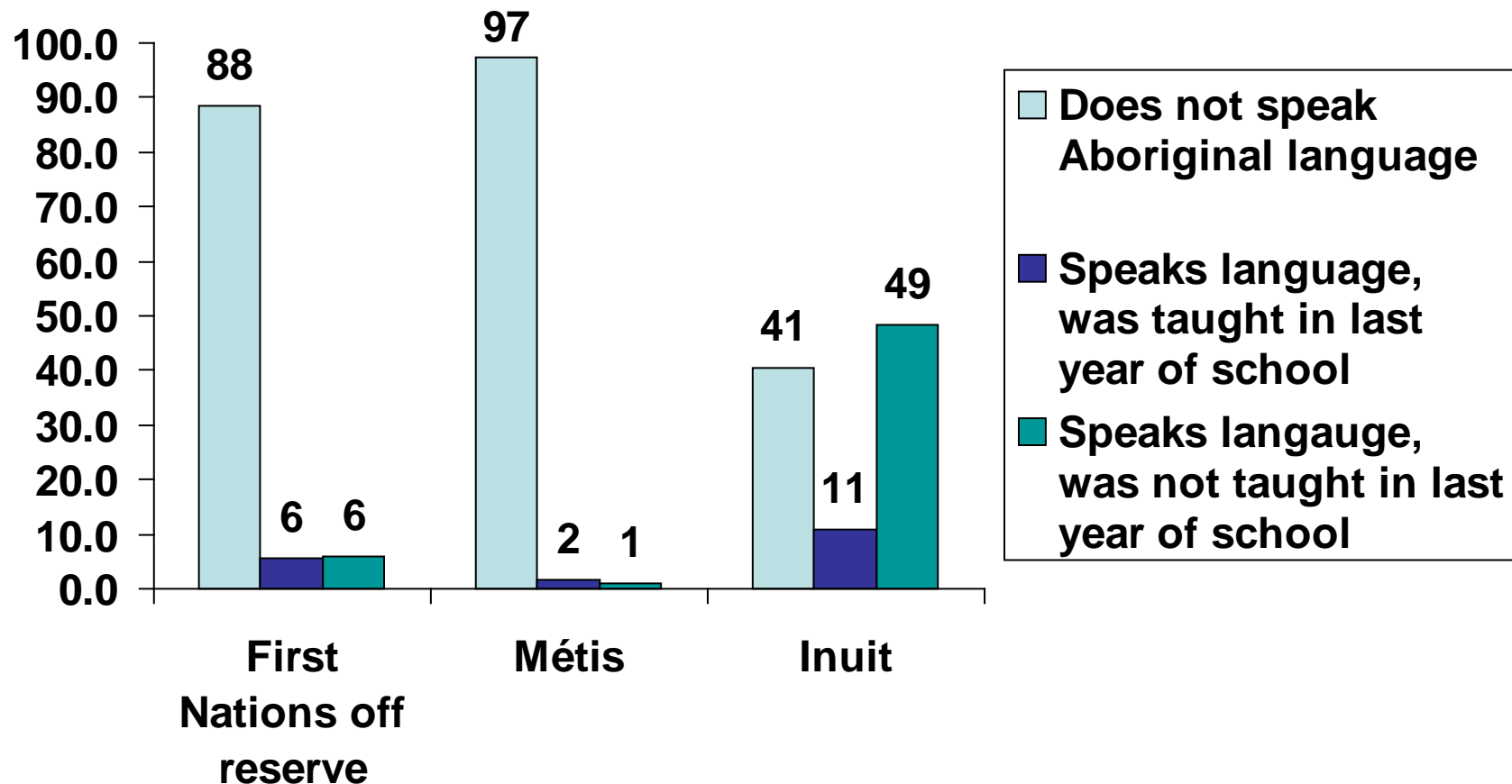
# School outcomes

- Children - parent rating of:
  - doing very well in school
  - how far the child will go in school
  - school satisfaction
- Young adults:
  - High school graduation (vs. withdrawal)
  - PSE graduation

# Percent of children who speak an Aboriginal language and learn it in school



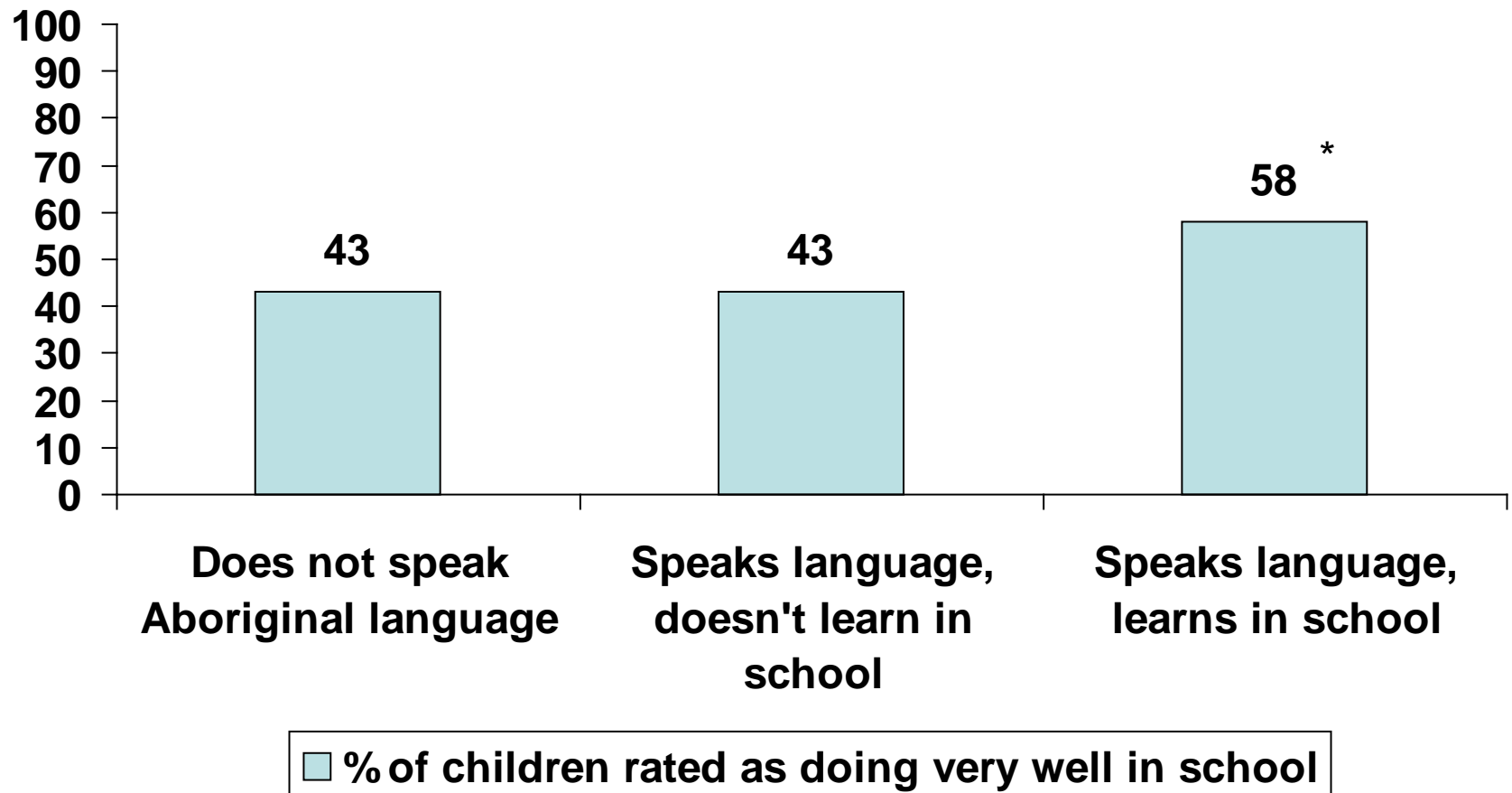
# Percent of young adults who speak an Aboriginal language and taught the language in school



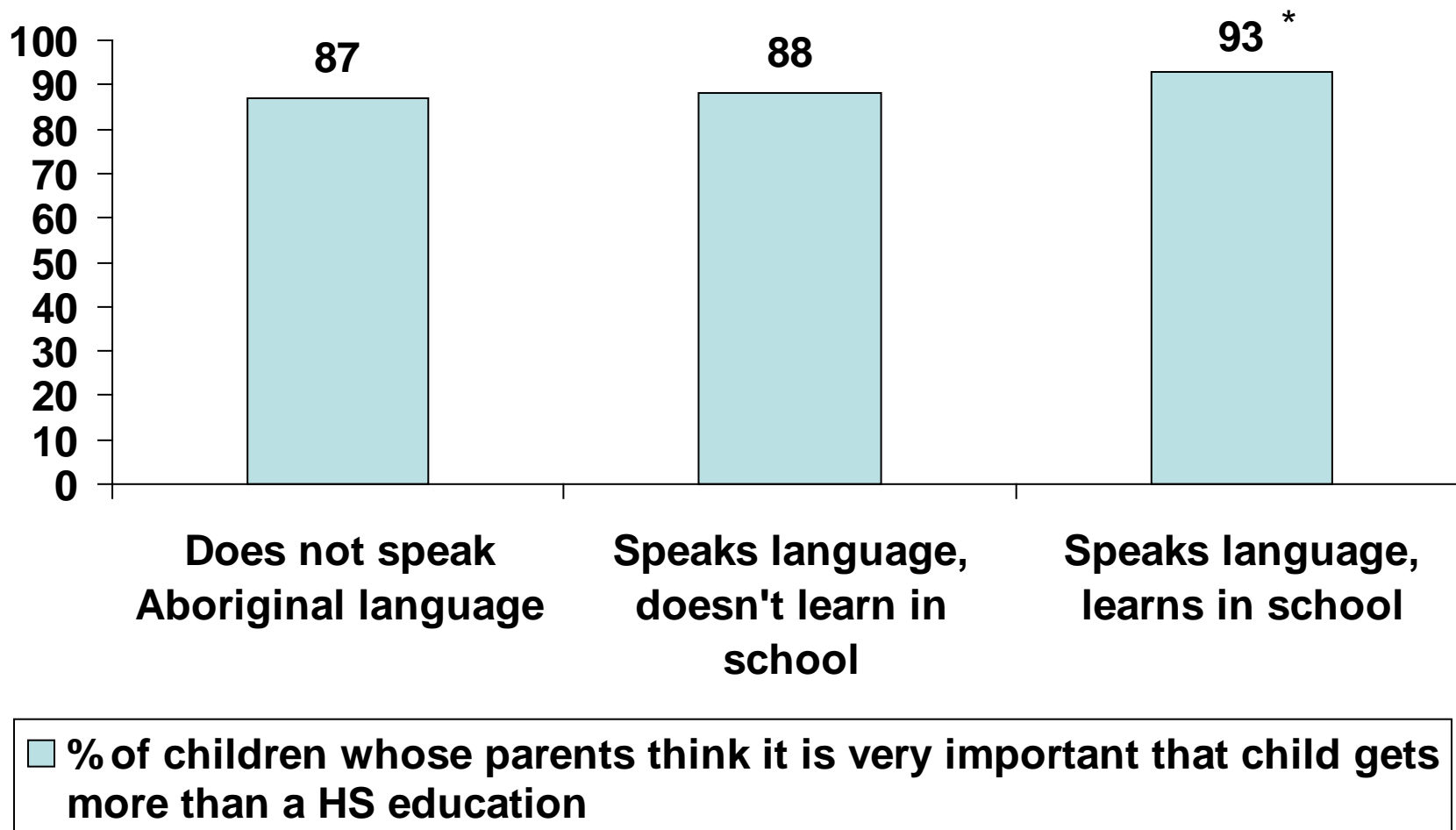


Is speaking an Aboriginal language related to school outcomes for children?

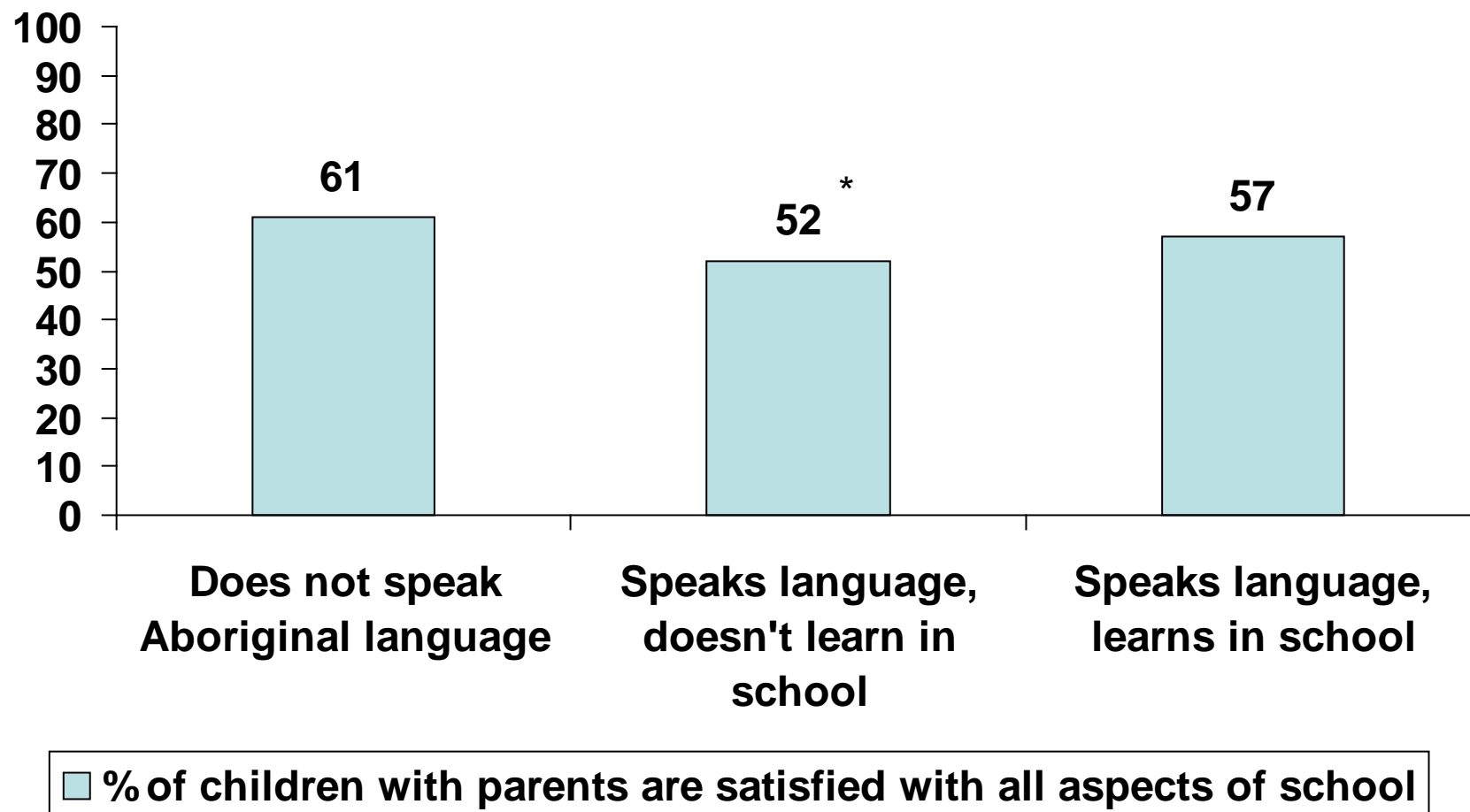
# Children who spoke an Aboriginal language and learned it in school were more likely to be rated as doing very well in school



# Parents of children who spoke an Aboriginal language and learned it in school were more likely to have high expectations for their child



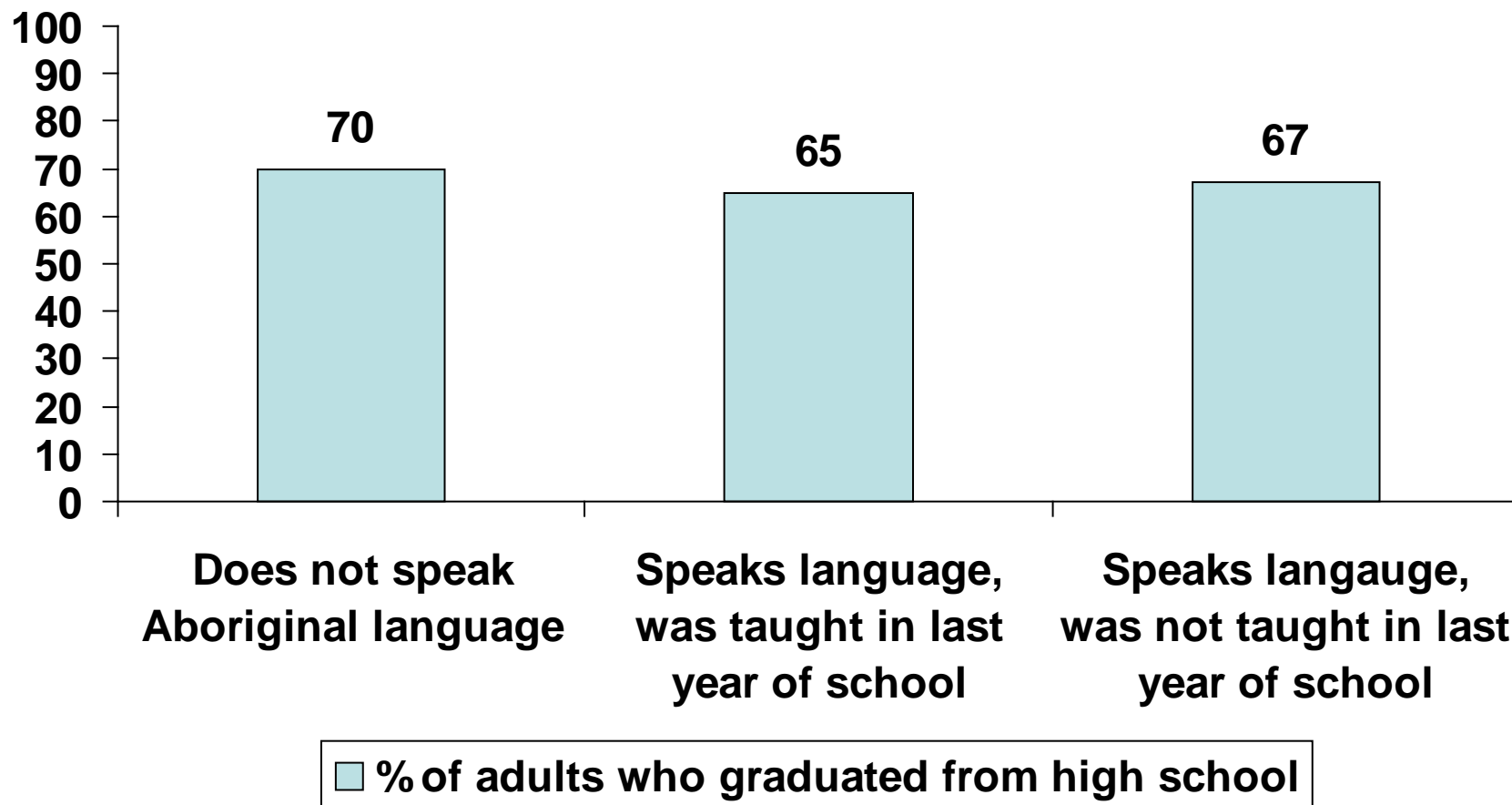
# Parents of children who spoke an Aboriginal language and did not learn it in school had lower school satisfaction



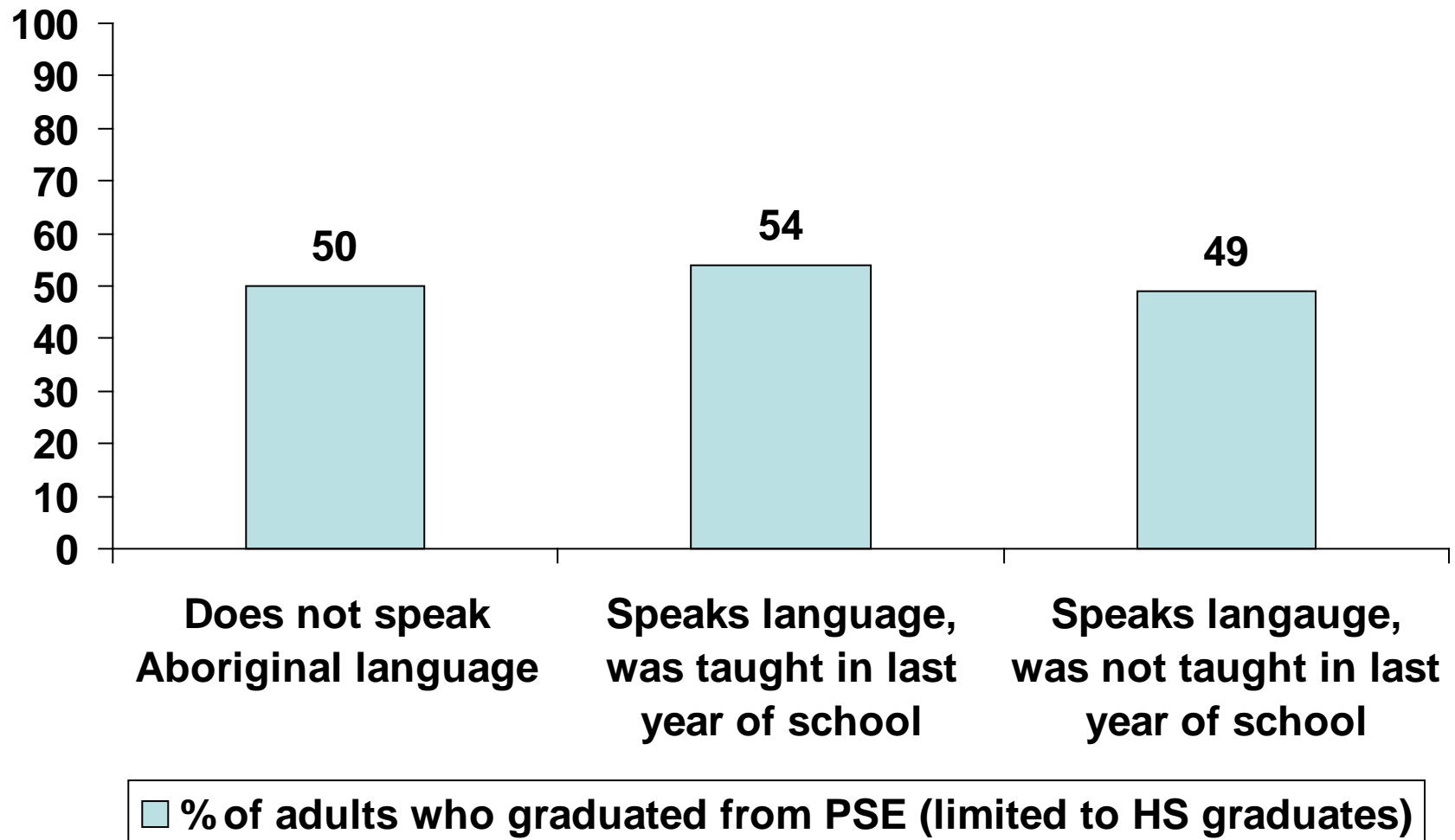


Is speaking an Aboriginal language related to school outcomes for young adults?

# No difference in high school completion rates when adjusted for SES factors



# Adults who spoke an Aboriginal language and were HS graduates were as likely to be PSE graduates



# Conclusion

- Aboriginal language was associated with positive school outcomes for children if learned in school
- School satisfaction lower for parents of students speaking an Aboriginal language if not learned in school
- When SES factors are accounted for, no difference in HS completion for adults who speak an Aboriginal language

# Limitations

- Not known the extent to which the Aboriginal language was taught or used in school
- Not known the quality and expertise of instructors
- School factors unknown
- Subjective and self-reported outcomes
- Cross-sectional data
- Small group sizes

# Implications

- Learning an Aboriginal language in school may have positive outcomes for children who speak an Aboriginal language
- Learning an Aboriginal language in school had no negative effects on HS completion
- Additional data would help us better understand the processes involved



Thanks!

Anne Guèvremont

[anne.guevremont@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:anne.guevremont@statcan.gc.ca)

613-951-2432

# References

- Bougie, E., Wright, S. C., & Taylor, D. M. (2003). Early heritage language education and the abrupt shift to a dominant-language classroom: Impact on the personal and collective esteem of Inuit children in arctic Québec. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 6, 349-373.
- Guèvremont, A. & Kohen, D. (in press). Speaking an Aboriginal language and school outcomes for children and adults. *Journal of Applied Research and Language*.
- Louis, W. & Taylor, D. M. (2001). When the survival of a language is at stake: The future of Inuttitut in arctic Québec. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 20, 111-143.
- Statistics Canada (2009). 2006 Census: Educational Portrait of Canada, 2006 Census: Findings
- Wright, S. C. & Taylor, D. M. (1995). Identity and the language in the classroom: Investigating the impact of heritage versus second language instruction on personal and collective self-esteem. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 87, 241-252.