

# Who should care for the kids? [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Ford, Tom

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## EXCERPTS

With a great deal of trepidation, I'm tiptoeing into the mommy wars.

The battle over who should raise our children -- stay-at-home-moms or mothers who work outside the home and use daycare -- has been going on for years. G.K. Chesterson, an English, conservative wit, wrote in 1920, "the latest light on the education of the young...assumes that a child will certainly be loved by anybody except his mother."

The discussion broke out again last month after Charles Pascal, a former Ontario deputy minister of education, wrote a report that the province's four- and five-year-olds should become part of the school system. Daycare and kindergarten would be consolidated into a single \$1-billion program running from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. beginning in 2010.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, who has promised to bring in full-day kindergarten, said he liked the report, but he was vague about how it might be implemented, citing the province's recession problems.

Pascal wants to make neighbourhood schools a community hub, offering parents everything from pre-natal advice to nutrition counselling. The schools' hallways would be filled with infants, school-aged children and grandparents, says Pascal.

In addition, he thinks parents should get 400 days of parental leave during their child's first three years, a critical developmental period.

The usual suspects immediately began throwing stones at the report. John Robson, a columnist for the Ottawa Citizen, said, "forget kindergarten and after-school programs. The state should pick up your kids from the maternity ward and return them with an M.A. and a social conscience 22 years later."

Alberta Finance Minister Iris Evans said people have to understand that "when you are raising children you don't both go off to work and leave them for somebody else to raise."

Now, I have nothing against mothers. I was a single parent with three children myself for a few years. But times have changed since Chesterton's day.

There are a number of reasons for this. One, many mothers with small children must work outside the home to make ends meet. Two, it's accepted that women should have a choice about whether they work outside the home or not. Three, Canada needs the skills and intelligence of more women to fill in today's skills gaps and to prepare us for the future's innovative economy.

Times are particularly tough for one-parent families headed by women. Statistics Canada says 51.6 per cent of these families were poor in 2006. Women and youth account for 83 per cent of Canada's minimum-wage workers. More than one-third of lone mothers with paid employment must raise a family on less than \$10 per hour, according to the 2000 report card on Child Poverty in Canada

As well, there's little financial incentive for women to work outside the home after having a child. Statistics Canada says women who have children often earn less than their childless counterparts, and the more children they have, the less they can expect to earn.

So, the question today is not whether the nanny state is a better mother than the nation's mothers.

It's this: Do mothers leave their children with poorly trained incompetents because that's all they can find or afford, or with professional teachers and early childhood experts?

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**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** mother's labour force participation <sup>[3]</sup>

full-day early learning <sup>[4]</sup>

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