The Fathers and Sons Program Policy Study

A Study Funded by the Center for Public Policy in Diverse Societies,
School of Public Policy
University of Michigan

Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, PhD, Chloe Gurin-Sands, William B. Rogers, and the Fathers and Sons Steering Committee
University of Michigan
6/30/2011
# Table of Contents

**Introduction** ................................................................................................................................. 4

**Why Conduct the Fathers and Sons Study?** .................................................................................. 5

**Legal Definitions of Fatherhood through History** ......................................................................... 7
  Challenges to the Marital Presumption ........................................................................................... 9

**Welfare Reform and Fatherhood Policies** ..................................................................................... 10
  Science Policies and Fatherhood .................................................................................................. 11

**Federal Policies and Mothers** ..................................................................................................... 13
  Federal Welfare Programs in Brief .............................................................................................. 14
  TANF and Fathers ....................................................................................................................... 18
  Outcomes of TANF .................................................................................................................... 20

**Presidential Administrations and Fatherhood Policies** ................................................................. 22
  The Johnson Administration ..................................................................................................... 22
  The Clinton Administration ....................................................................................................... 23
  The G.W. Bush Administration .................................................................................................. 25
  The Obama Administration ....................................................................................................... 26

**State and Local Policies to Support Fathers** ................................................................................. 28

**Barriers to Father Involvement** .................................................................................................. 32

**Policy Recommendations** .......................................................................................................... 36

**Conclusions** .................................................................................................................................. 45

**References** .................................................................................................................................... 46

**Appendices** ................................................................................................................................... 51
Introduction

Fathers are important in their children’s lives, especially to help them develop a healthy sense of who they are and what they can become. Over the past 10 years we have been conducting an intervention study to strengthen relationships between nonresident African American fathers and their preadolescent sons as a way to prevent youth risky behaviors. We designed The Fathers and Sons Program to help nonresident fathers prepare their sons to make decisions for themselves regarding some of the biggest challenges that youth face today, such as avoiding substance use, violent behaviors, and having sex at a very young age. Working with their sons in this promising program resulted in fathers improving their parenting behaviors (Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2010). In working with this program it became evident that providing assistance to fathers in meeting their parenting responsibilities was just as important as providing assistance to mothers. Parenting skills and policy interventions, however, rarely focus on fathers.

The Fathers and Sons Policy Study was funded by the Center for Public Policy in Diverse Societies at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan in May 2010 to gain a better understanding of public policies and initiatives that encourage and assist fathers in fulfilling their parenting responsibilities. The intent of this study is to go beyond the realm of traditional fatherhood policy issues that focus on paternity establishment, child support, and employment security to highlight innovative policies that strengthen the role of fathers in the lives of their children. The main objectives are to: 1) systematically examine federal, state, and local policies that address responsible fathering; 2) develop easily accessible dissemination tools to inform fathers about relevant policies and information useful to their parenting efforts; and 3) offer recommendations for new fatherhood policies based on identified gaps in this area.
Why Conduct the *Fathers and Sons* Study?

More than two-thirds of African American children are born to unmarried mothers; nationally, two out of five births were to unmarried mothers in 2005 (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2006). The high rate of non-marital births is a cause for concern because poverty and behavioral problems are more common among children and youth in female-headed families (Carlson, 2006), with the African American male youth at risk for poorer outcomes than other adolescents (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2006). Because African American children and youth are less likely to live in two-parent families, researchers and governmental officials have argued that ecologically-based intervention efforts to protect their well-being should include family members and community institutions (Thornton et al., 2002). Research involving mothers more extensively in youth preventive interventions is well established (Dancy, Crittenden & Talashek, 2006; DiLorio et al., 2006; Lefkowitz, Sigman, & Au, 2000). Far less intervention research has been devoted to fathers, especially to nonresident African American fathers.

The involvement of nonresident fathers in the lives of their children is more prevalent than past father absent research would suggest (Tach, Mincy, & Edin, 2009), leaving a largely untapped resource when working to protect youth from harm. Recent findings show an increase in father involvement among nonresident fathers of 6-12 year olds from 18% in 1976 to 31% in 2002 (Amato, Meyers, & Emery, 2009). Although African American fathers are less likely than white fathers to live with their children at birth, they are more likely to remain involved in their children’s lives once the romantic relationship with mothers ends (Edin, Tach, & Mincy, 2009). Previous research indicates that the involvement of nonresident African American fathers has been associated with positive youth outcomes (Coley & Medeiros, 2007; Dittus, Jaccard, &...
Gordon, 1997; King & Sobolewsik, 2006). Thus, efforts to improve the well-being of African American youth should include nonresident fathers (Mincy, 1994; Mincy & Pouncy, 1999).

Numerous challenges, however, face nonresident African American fathers including economic instability and unemployment; therefore, it is critical to assess public policies with implications for assisting fathers in a broad range of responsibilities. The increase in single-mother headed households in the United States over the past few decades has precipitated a wealth of research on the impact of this demographic trend on children and adolescents being reared in homes without resident fathers, regardless of race or ethnicity. Because father involvement has emerged in the scientific literature as a promising factor for preventing youth problem behaviors, regardless of residential status, it is vital to assess public policies that have implications for assisting fathers in a broad range of fathering responsibilities. Only then will we as a society give every youth a chance to reach their full potential.

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we conducted a study using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005) to design a theoretically-based, culturally specific, family-centered youth risky behavior preventive intervention focusing on nonresident African American fathers and their preadolescent sons (Caldwell, Wright, Zimmerman, Walsemann, Williams, & Isichei, 2004). The Fathers and Sons Program focused specifically on biological nonresident fathers and their 8-12 year old sons. Our main strategy is to strengthen relationships between nonresident fathers and sons by teaching fathers specific parenting skills, improving sons’ refusal skills, practicing parent-child communication skills and enhancing their cultural awareness (Caldwell, De Loney, Mincy, Klemp, Rafferty, & Brooks, 2011). Promising evaluation results lead to replication plans
for other communities, while assessing available community resources and policies that may assist fathers achieve their fathering responsibilities. Several community-based organizations in Flint, MI and the Prevention Research Center of Michigan at the School of Public Health form the long-standing CBPR partnership for the Fathers and Sons Program (see Appendix A).

This report is organized into three sections that set the parameters for both searching and identifying appropriate direct and indirect fatherhood policies that are described at the federal level. These are factors related to: 1) definitions of fatherhood, 2) welfare reform, and 3) fatherhood policies associated with recent presidential administrations. Exemplary state and local policies designed to support fathers are then presented followed by a discussion of continued barriers to father involvement based on current policy initiatives. We present consistent recommendations from the literature regarding federal and state policies to support fathers, followed by findings from the Fathers and Sons study along with specific recommendations related to the needs of nonresident African American fathers of preadolescent boys.

Based on the results of this study, several products have been developed as tools to assist fathers understand selected their rights based on selected policy issues. These tools are listed in the Appendix B and are available upon request.

**Legal Definitions of Fatherhood through History**

Fatherhood is both a social role and a legal status. The way in which fathers fulfill their fathering responsibilities is of interest to both researchers and policymakers because of the implications for their children and for fathers. In general, contemporary policymakers aim to give fathers more parental rights and responsibilities than previous generations, with the primary
emphasis being establishing paternity, providing child support, and participating in child custody issues. A brief historical overview of the legal approach to fatherhood provides a point of departure for understanding the significance of current approaches to fatherhood policies.

Under English common law in the 18th Century, paternity was presumed, meaning that a child born to a married couple was presumed to be the husband’s child (Ellman, 2002-2003, Stolzenberg, 2007, Murphy, 2005). The Marital Presumption Law was established to protect children from “illegitimacy” and to protect the sanctity of marriage (Murphy, 2005). Paternity was only questioned in cases where a child was born out of wedlock under common law (Stolzenberg, 2007). Out of wedlock births was the product of fornication, and both parties engaging in fornication were subject to severe punishment under English common law, such as fines and corporeal punishment (Dayton, 1985). However, citing court records from the 1730s, Dayton (1985) demonstrated that fathers were rarely identified and almost never prosecuted for fornication by the legal system, effectively decriminalizing fornication for men. Thus, fatherhood had virtually no legal standing in the legal system, leaving mothers to support their children alone or seek charity from “the parish” (Davis, 2003; Stolzenberg, 2007). Figure 1 shows that the primary definition
of father at this time was economic and all consuming.

**Challenges to the Marital Presumption**

Presumed fatherhood through marriage was adopted from English common law in the United States and persisted as the legal definition of fatherhood until societal circumstances challenged the way in which fatherhood was defined. Patterns of increasing non-marital births in the United States in the 1970s prompted a reconsideration of the marital presumption adopted from English common law as more cases of ambiguous fatherhood emerged (Ellman, 2002-2003; Murphy, 2005). Ambiguity about the legal father of a child occurred when the social father was not the biological father and no adoption had taken place or when there was no social father, resulting in the question of whether or not the biological father should be the legal father (Ellman, 2002-2003).

The Supreme Court heard the first case challenging policies related to the legal definition of fatherhood in a series of court cases addressing ambiguous fatherhood in the 1970s and 1980s. *Stanley v. Illinois* in 1972 is cited as one of the most influential decisions for redefining fatherhood. The high court’s findings determined that unmarried fathers had parental rights (Ellman, 2002-2003), and that unmarried men could be legally defined as fathers, depending on their relationship with the children (Murphy, 2005). In 1978, *Quilloin v. Walcott* and *Caban v. Mohammed* reinforced the importance of the relationship between unmarried fathers and their children in establishing paternity (Murphy, 2005). While these cases increased rights for unmarried fathers, marriage remained critical for defining paternity, as illustrated by the 1989 *Michael H. v. Gerald D.* case.
Michael H. v. Gerald D. challenged the precedent established based on the Stanley, Quilloin, and Caban cases in direct competition with the marital presumption. In the end, the court found in favor of marital presumption, denying an unmarried, nonresident, biological father his legal fatherhood status to protect the marital family union (Dowd 2005). Thus, the legal definition of fatherhood established in the 1970s and 1980s for unmarried fathers remains complex, with multiple considerations including marital status, biological relatedness, and relationship with the child (Dowd 2005; Murphy 2005).

**Welfare Reform and Fatherhood Policies**

Children born out of wedlock or classified as ‘illegitimate’ did not have rights to inheritance or succession and their unmarried fathers had no responsibility to provide for them (Anderlik & Rothstein, 2002; Murphy 2005; Stolzenberg 2007). In the 1970s efforts were made to remove the stigma and inequality associated with out of wedlock births, with the distinction drawn between marital and non-marital births deemed unconstitutional by the courts (Murphy 2005; Stolzenberg 2007). The movement to remove this distinction from law had important implications for the legal definition of fatherhood and welfare reform. Stolzenberg (2007) concluded that unmarried fathers became legally connected to ‘illegitimate’ children through the children’s right to both the father’s last name and financial support. This increased the rights and responsibilities of unmarried fathers with respect to their children and the welfare reform movement of the 1970s emphasized child support from fathers.

In an effort to decrease the cost of welfare to states, Title IV-D of the Social Security Act of 1974 created the Child Support Enforcement Act, which recognized both the equal rights of
‘illegitimate’ children to financial support and legally required child support payments from noncustodial parents (Murphy, 2005). In 1984, Congress passed the Child Support Enforcement Amendments, clarifying child support requirements (Murphy 2005). The Family Support Act of 1988 simplified paternity establishment and required that states demand any party in a paternity suit take a genetic test upon the request of the other party/parties, subsidizing 90% of the cost. With the passage of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, states were allowed the acceptance or rejection of paternity status based solely upon genetic testing. Finally, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act required all states to allow child support enforcement agencies to order and enforce genetic tests of paternity and introduced the goal of establishing paternity in 90% of all welfare cases (Anderlik & Rothstein, 2002; Murphy, 2005). Thus, as the rights of fathers to claim their children increased, so did the states’ rights to demand paternity establishment and the assumption of more financial responsibility for these children by fathers (Anderlik & Rothstein 2002; Murphy, 2005).

**Science Policy and Fatherhood**

The establishment of the Child Support Enforcement and Paternity Establishment program in 1975 began a shift in financial responsibility for children born out of wedlock from states to biological fathers (Anderlik & Rothstein, 2002-2003). Reliable genetic testing was largely responsible for this shift, resulting in a definition of fatherhood based almost solely on biology (Anderlik & Rothstein, 2002-2003; Ellman, 2002). This highlights the importance of science policy and research in advancing a biological definition of fatherhood. The Human Genome Project resulted in the development of reliable, affordable, and useful technologies for evaluating and comparing deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) profiles, making genetic paternity

DNA establishment of paternity now dominates marital presumption in most, but not all, cases of paternity establishment for non-marital births. Policies are now in place to reinforce the importance of establishing biological paternity in all states. For example, Child Support Enforcement (CSE) programs are federally required state programs responsible for establishing paternity and obtaining child support from 90% of noncustodial parents each year (Solomon-Fears, 2003). As shown in Figure 2, the growing emphasis on biological paternity means that in today’s conception of fatherhood, the biological father has legal rights and responsibilities once paternity has been established. This creates a legal tie to the child, unless the father renounces his parental rights. The law now expects biological fathers financially support their children, regardless of whether they contribute to their health and well-being. Most often, the law treats paternity establishment and fathering as separate issues.
In understanding federal policies to assist fathers, we must first understand ways in which the federal government has assisted mothers in their mothering responsibilities. The most successful federal programs in support of mothers include Food Stamps (now the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), the Special Supplementary Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the Early Head Start program (EHS), and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, all of which focus on improving living conditions for mothers and their dependent children. In this section we briefly summarize these programs, discuss in greater depth the history of TANF, and comment on the inclusion of fathers under TANF. Our goal is to introduce the history of federal welfare programs, providing a context for later discussions of federal, state, and local policies that promote fatherhood. Table 1 provides a summary of the policies to be discussed.

Table 1: Federal Policies that Support Mothers in Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Policies in Brief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SNAP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides eligible citizens assistance in purchasing food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides food coupons, nutritional assessment, health screening, and nutritional education to low-income mothers and their children under age five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Head Start</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds community-based education programs for families and their infants/toddlers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TANF</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal block grant to states, providing eligible families financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Federal Welfare Programs in Brief

Perhaps one of the most well-known federal programs is the Food Stamps program (now the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), which was first established in the wake of the Great Depression. The program initially operated from 1939 through 1943 as a means of alleviating hunger and providing families with assistance in purchasing food (Blau & Abromovitz, 2007). The program was discontinued, but later revisited in 1961 under President Johnson’s administration’s War on Poverty and expanded to a federal program in 1974 (Blau & Abromovitz, 2007). Last revised under the 2008 Farm Bill, the program was renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (United States Department of Agriculture, 2009). The Farm Bill greatly modified the program, increasing benefits by setting future minimum benefits to adjust for future inflation, excluding retirement and educational accounts from countable resources, and providing funding and guidelines for the establishment of state-level nutrition education programs for SNAP recipients. SNAP is not exclusive to mothers; rather, any U.S. citizen who meets eligibility requirements can receive SNAP funding for food purchases.

In contrast to the Food Stamps program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (colloquially referred to as WIC) is exclusive to mothers and children. Nationally funded in 1974, the program’s objectives are far beyond that of SNAP (Blau & Abromovitz, 2007). Benefits to qualified recipients include food coupons, nutritional assessment, health screening, and nutritional education (United States Department of Agriculture, 2010). This program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, specifically focuses on low-income mothers who are pregnant or breastfeeding and their infants
and children under age five who are deemed at-risk for malnutrition. The WIC program is touted for its many positive public health outcomes among mothers and their children. It is often viewed as a preventive care approach to maternal and child health (Blau & Abromovitz, 2007). Reauthorized under the Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (PL 111-296), WIC currently benefits approximately 9.2 million participants, with an average monthly food cost of $41.45 per person (United States Department of Agriculture, 2011).

The Early Head Start program was first discussed in relation to services provided to families with infants and toddlers in the nation-wide Head Start program in 1994 by an Advisory Committee on Services for Families. The Administration on Children, Youth, and Families then designed the Early Head Start Program, a federally-administered program that funds community-based initiatives focusing on three goals: 1) promoting healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, 2) enhancing the development of very young children, and 3) promoting healthy family functioning (United States Department of Health and Human Services, ND).

In 1995 and 1996, 143 Early Head Start programs were created throughout the country with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). These programs offered services such as child-care and parenting classes at a local center, as well as home-based programs, services through weekly home visits, and mixed-approach programs offering services at both a community center and at home. The effectiveness of the initial programs was evaluated, showing positive results for both young children and their parents (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Thus, the program was expanded, and, as of 2006, there were 708 programs nationwide serving about 61,500 children.
The Early Head Start Program is notable for its involvement of fathers in family services. An analysis of survey data collected from 261 Early Head Start programs found that 98.8% of programs attempted to involve resident biological fathers, whereas just 77.2% of programs attempted to involve nonresident fathers (Raikes, et al., 2002). This indicates that, while an overwhelming majority of Early Head Start programs attempt to engage fathers, programs do not equally target resident and nonresident biological fathers. A disparity exists in actual father participation. Programs indicated that a quarter of resident fathers were “highly involved participants,” compared to just a tenth of all nonresident fathers who were designated as “highly involved participants” (Raikes, et al., 2002). When asked about goals for involving fathers with their children, programs mainly encouraged greater time spent with children and greater attendance to Early Head Start program events, with the least endorsed goals including resolving child support issues and assisting nonresidential fathers in remaining connected to their children (Raikes, et al., 2002). Overall, while the vast majority of Early Head Start programs surveyed encouraged resident and nonresident father involvement, programs, on average, do little to specifically empower nonresident fathers to be involved in the program and in the lives of their children.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, formerly known as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC), is also a very well know federal assistance program for families. Here the term “families” most often means “mothers and children.” The Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program was first initiated upon the passage of the Social Security Act in 1936, although the early program did not provide any financial assistance to mothers. It was not until 1950 that benefits were given to the mothers of needy
children (Blau & Abromovitz, 2007). Over the next several decades, federal regulations were added to the program, but, aside from a name change in 1967 (changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children program), few welfare policy changes were made to this legislation. In 1996, however, the AFDC program was repealed under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and replaced by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF). TANF changed existing welfare policy in several ways. These changes are listed in Table 1. The goal of TANF was to reduce dependency on government financial support.

**Table 2. Changes to AFDC Program after TANF**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TANF changes to AFDC program sought to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <em>encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families</em> (H.R.3734.ENR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The federal government funded the TANF program at $16.5 billion for the first five years. The largest change in the program was the devolution of power from the federal to the state level, shifting responsibility to state welfare agencies and incentivizing such outcomes as paternity establishment and “welfare to work” mothers. Another notable reform was the addition
of stringent work participation requirements and penalties for noncompliance. Reauthorized in 2006, changes to TANF were minor but included more stringent work participation requirements and less overall flexibility for state regulatory agencies.

**TANF and Fathers**

Congress first mentioned fathers in reference to welfare policy in 1950 in a seemingly benign regulation, requiring that all welfare caseworkers notify law enforcement when fatherless children enrolled in the AFDC program (Mink, 1998). Fathers were first mentioned *implicitly* in state legislation as early as 1958, when Mississippi stipulated that the parents of all children receiving welfare be ‘ceremonially married’ (Mink, 1998). It was not until 1967, however, that unmarried mothers were first required to name the fathers of their children, a policy aimed at paternity establishment (Mink, 1998). After 1967, fathers were largely mentioned in reference to paternity establishment, indicating the federal priority of financially connecting children to their often nonresident fathers. In 1974, maternal cooperation in paternity establishment was mandated, requiring for the first time that mothers facilitate the process of linking their children to their biological fathers (Mink, 1998).

In the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, fathers were mentioned twice—once in reference to marriage, and once in reference to paternity establishment and child support enforcement. Notably, during debate leading up to the passage of PRWORA, fathers were discussed in competing ways. Debate was seemingly divided between those who endorsed the provider role of fatherhood and advocated for stricter child support enforcement requirements and those who wanted to put marriage on the national agenda (Johnson, Duerst-Lahti, & Norton, 2007). This debate was echoed in Title I of the Act, placing
fathers at the beginning of a bill that would virtually ignore them. Title I states that “marriage is the foundation of a successful society,” “promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral to successful rearing and the well-being of children,” and that “in 1992, only 54 percent of single-parent families with children had a child support order established” (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996). This Act clearly frames fatherhood around two central themes: marriage, and child support (in that order). If not married, fathers were expected, above all else, to provide for their children, an assertion later solidified in Subtitle D of PRWORA with the creation of required state laws regarding mandatory paternity establishment.

Thus, while fathers were explicitly mentioned in TANF, policies focusing on fathers specifically elicit child support, largely ignoring the earlier notations of fathers as “integral to successful rearing and the well-being of children.” It would be another 9 years before the reauthorization of TANF; however, the debate about fatherhood issues came earlier. In October of 2001, under the 107th Congress, Representative Patsy T. Mink (D) of Hawaii introduced H.R. 3113, a proposal to reauthorize TANF with extensive revisions. Among other reforms, Congresswoman Mink’s proposal included the elimination of mandatory cooperation in paternity establishment, a mandate that states distribute all child support collected on behalf of a family to that family, and subsequent penalties for states violating those provisions (H.R. 3113, 2001). In effect, Mink proposed to eliminate the punitive paternity establishment measures under PRWORA. While Mink’s bill was referred to the Subcommittee on Human Resources, it was never reported by the committee or moved to a house vote.
In 2005, TANF was reauthorized under the Deficit Reduction Act. The DRA more explicitly mentioned fathers, appropriating $100 million in federal funds for healthy marriage initiatives and $50 million for responsible fatherhood programs (Deficit Reduction Act of 2005). Responsible fatherhood programs, largely the focus of the present study, conceived of fathers as occupying many roles, including husband, counselor, mentor, and provider (Deficit Reduction Act of 2005). In this respect, the DRA is the first federal welfare legislation to define fathers beyond the narrow perspective of “provider.” The DRA also revised the child support enforcement practices established under PRWORA. Changes included a mandate that allowed states to collect up to the entire amount of child support received by those receiving TANF benefits and a mandatory fee for families collecting child support through state child support enforcement agencies but not receiving TANF (Deficit Reduction Act of 2005).

**Outcomes of TANF**

Given that the promotion of marriage was an explicit goal of TANF, marriage outcomes for TANF recipients seems to be a reasonable area for effectiveness analysis. Indeed, in their 2002 report to Congress on the consequences of welfare reform, the RAND Corporation found extremely limited well designed studies of the impact of TANF on marriage rates (Grogger, Karoly, & Klerman, 2002). Importantly, this report indicated that extant data exhibited a null effect of TANF programs for work-related activities on marriage; with only one finding that suggested that programs providing large financial work incentives increased marriage. The report concluded, however, that this finding was limited and inconclusive. Overall, TANF has had little influence on marriage and divorce rates among program participants. One plausible explanation for the lack of findings linking marriage to current federal welfare policy is that it does little to
incentivize marriage (Horn, in Besharov 2003). In fact, the Earned Income Tax Credit that aids low-income working families actually discourages marriage in that low-income families must forego between $2,000 and $8,000 per year in order to marry. Thus, the assumption of the father role within the context of marriage would be discouraged in low-income families.

Despite TANF’s focus on Child Support Enforcement, there seems to be no difference in the rate of child support receipt between TANF and non-TANF families. Rather, families eligible but not participating in TANF received considerably more, on average, than families participating in TANF (Government Accountability Office - GAO, 2010). While this does bring into question the efficacy of child support enforcement policies enacted under TANF, one must consider that the direction of this association is uncertain. The RAND Corporation found that, in general, higher child support payments reduce welfare use (Grogger et al., 2002). Findings from the government’s own assessment (GAO, 2010) then, could indicate that families who are eligible but do not participate in TANF do so because of higher child support rates, thereby actively creating this disparity. While there is too little evidence to say that this is universally the case, one must consider that, under TANF, the state receives up to 100% of all collected child support for TANF recipients, thus there is presumably a financial incentive for those receiving high child support payments to forego participation in TANF.

The majority of federal policies that address fatherhood tend to emphasize biological paternity and child support because DNA as the justification for such action is certain while other measures of paternal responsibilities are not. Financial obligations are easier to enforce than social responsibilities. The importance the socialization role of fathers is often lost in policy
debates despite growing policy interest. Below we explore how different presidential administrations have addressed policies specifically for fathers.

**Presidential Administrations and Fatherhood Policies**

Since 1967 several major policy initiatives have been developed under several presidential administrations. Some supported traditional roles of fathers as financial providers for children, while others expanded the focus of fatherhood to include non-financial aspects of parenting. We begin this section with President Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration because the legislative efforts of this era had significance for addressing economic stability among men due to broader societal concerns. We then focus on President William “Bill” Clinton’s administration because of significant policy changes implemented with implications for fatherhood, followed by attention to efforts by President George W. Bush’s administration to elevate the importance of marriage and fatherhood through legislation, and subsequently consideration of President Barack Obama’s longstanding interest in fatherhood policy initiatives from a multidimensional perspective.

**The Johnson Administration**

*“The War on Poverty”*

President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963 – 1969) assumed leadership of the country at a time when racial disparities in the unemployment rate between Blacks and whites were increasing, especially among youth. To alleviate this disparity, the Job Corps was established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 as part of President Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” This was
a program that helped low-income young men (ages 16-24) become eligible for employment by providing housing and vocational training. While the Job Corps was not framed as a fatherhood policy initiative, it emphasized the financial responsibilities of men and created ways for low-income fathers to provide financially for their families. The structure of the program took fathers away from their families because Job Corps trainees had to live in Job Corps housing for an extended period of time to receive training. The Job Corps continues today, last authorized under the Work Investment Act of 1998.

**The Clinton Administration**

*Welfare Reform*

Three policy initiatives under President William “Bill” Clinton’s (1993 – 2001) administration had major implications for fathers: the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, The Family and Medical Leave Act, and the Responsible Fatherhood Initiative of 2000. PRWORA changed the name of Welfare to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and created a block grant program to states to administer TANF. There are aspects of this legislation that changed the ways in which nonresident fathers interact with their children and families. As described previously, PRWORA linked Child Support Enforcement (CSE) to TANF so that mothers must now go through TANF to receive child support payments from fathers. Annual paternity quotas were established for CSE programs, and in order for mothers to receive TANF benefits, paternity establishment must be attempted. PRWORA also established a minimum for the amount of child support payments. The amount assigned to fathers was not based on their incomes, nor could it be adjusted if their income were to change. PRWORA also provided funding for states to operate optional parent
visitation programs. The Clinton administration’s welfare reform marked a change in fathers’
access to their children without establishing paternity and paying child support.

“The Family Medical Leave Act”

The Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 requires employers with more than 50 employees
to give 12 unpaid, “job-secured” weeks of leave for certain family or medical events in any 12-
month period. “Job-secured” means that, while the employee is not paid during their time off,
they are guaranteed their job when they return. The acceptable reasons for leave include addition
of a child to the family (through birth, adoption, foster-care); illness of a spouse, parent, or child
of the employee; illness of the employee him/herself. This policy is gender-neutral, and
residentially neutral, meaning it applies equally to men and women, and does not matter if the
family member lives with the employee. This is a policy that helps nonresident fathers, as they
may be able to take time off from work to care for their children if necessary, without having to
worry about losing their job.

“Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives”

The Responsible Fatherhood Initiative of 2000 reinforced the emphasis on economic
responsibility of fathers toward their children. While the initiative acknowledged the emotional
responsibilities of fathers, the definition of “responsible fatherhood” under the initiative seems to
be strictly financial. The goals were to collect more money from “deadbeat” fathers who can
afford to pay through forceful tactics, such as immobilizing fathers’ vehicles until they started
paying, as well as increasing work opportunities for fathers through enhanced welfare-to-work
While the Responsible Fatherhood Initiative under the Clinton administration did not include marriage promotion or father involvement measures it is the predecessor of subsequent Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives that are more prevalent today. This is the first independent legislation to focus specifically on the idea of responsible fatherhood and provide opportunities to assist fathers more effectively in their fathering responsibilities, even though the focus remained on economic responsibilities.

**The G. W. Bush Administration**

*“The Marriage Act”*

President George W. Bush’s (2001-2009) fatherhood policies began with the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. With renewed funding for the Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives ($50 million per year), and new funding for Healthy Marriage Initiatives ($100 million per year), the core of this administration’s focus on fathers was the marital unit. Healthy Marriage promotion as part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 included language to support: “1) Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health; 2) Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting; 3) Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs, that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement, for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers…. 4) Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any activity described in this subparagraph.”

Similarly, Responsible Fatherhood programs should focus on: “1) Activities to promote marriage or sustain marriage… disseminating information about the benefits of marriage and
parent involvement for children…; 2) … counseling, mentoring, and mediation, disseminating information about good parenting practices, skills-based parenting education, encouraging child support payments, …3) Activities to foster economic stability by helping fathers improve their economic status’ (Deficit Reduction Act, 2005).

The definitions of healthy marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood promotion, while they do mention the importance of good parenting skills and emotional involvement in a child’s life, still focus heavily on the financial responsibilities of nonresident fathers, and ways to turn nonresident fathers into resident fathers. President Bush also created economic incentives for marriage promotion, which are tied child support and TANF benefits. According to Solomon-Fears (2003) assessment, a portion of the TANF “high performance bonus” goes to the 10 states with the greatest increase in the percent of children living in married-couple families since 2002. With such a heavy emphasis on marriage and financial child support, Bush’s healthy marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood initiatives do little to help unmarried, nonresident fathers become more involved in their children’s lives.

**The Obama Administration**

**“Responsible Fatherhood Act”**

President Barack H. Obama (2009 – present) has demonstrated support for nonresident fathers through his public statements and through the introduction of the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Family Act with Senator Bayh (S.1626) when he was a United States senator (Haskins, 2006; Mincy & Pouncy, 2007). The bill included provisions to fund Responsible Fatherhood programs throughout the United States. This bill was re-introduced in the House as the Julia Carson Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009 (H. R. 2979) by
Representative Danny Davis and in the Senate as S. 1309 by Senator Bayh on June 19, 2009 with a focus on increasing nonresident fathers’ employment, earnings, and child support payments. These bills do not significantly incorporate parenting behaviors as part of Responsible Fatherhood programs, which is a missed opportunity for strengthening family relationships through these fatherhood programs.

President Obama’s administration renewed funding for Bush’s Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage initiatives in 2010. In addition, the Obama Administration has proposed to invest $500 million in FY 2011 toward creating a more comprehensive program, called the Fatherhood, Marriage and Families Innovation Fund. This fund would provide two equal streams of competitive three-year grants to states for comprehensive responsible fatherhood initiatives that rely on strong partnerships with community-based organizations; and comprehensive demonstrations to improve child and family outcomes in low-income families with serious barriers to economic self-sufficiency (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2010/Innovation_Fund_One_Pager.html).

This fund would combine funding for fatherhood and marriage initiatives (which are currently separate under the law), and would set up a system for evaluation of the programs, and strategies for integrating techniques into TANF and CSE. The overall goals of the programs are the same: “to assist parents with employment, child support payment, and parenting and relationship skills” (website).
State and Local Policies to Support Fathers

This section provides a selection of legislation at the state and local levels that have been passed to support fathers in their fathering responsibilities. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, rather; it is intended to be representative of the types of laws that have been passed at the state and local levels in support of fathers.

In 2001, the National Practitioners’ Network for Fathers and Family published a report entitled “A Comparative Review of State Commissions, Initiatives, and Programs Addressing Fatherhood,” which summarized types of fatherhood programs that were established at the state level in response to the need to address fatherhood issues. We updated this information to include a summary of commissions, initiatives, and programs that exist for this purpose at the state level as of June 2011. Government-created actions are categorized by how they are named and described. For example, if the legislation read: “to establish a Commission on Fatherhood,” it is categorized as a commission. In the case where the action is called something other than a commission or initiative (e.g., “coalition”), it was classified based on its level of authority and its similarity to either commissions or initiatives.

As of 2011, most states have programs or legislation to address fatherhood issues (National Fatherhood Clearing House, 2011). The primary focus of most of these bodies is to address issues related to nonresident or noncustodial fathers. In almost all states there are non-governmental, not-for-profits, and university-affiliated programs that address these concerns. Most of these programs receive state or federal funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, although some states do not provide any funding to fatherhood programs.
Some states have taken action beyond simply funding organizations and private programs to address fatherhood issues. This action has resulted in state legislatures or governors creating specific initiatives or commissions devoted to fatherhood issues or charging state agencies with running fatherhood programs. There is a difference, however, between state fatherhood initiatives and commissions. The primary purposes of initiatives seem to be creating and executing programs, and funding existing programs at the state level, while commissions tend to conduct research and evaluations of programs. Commissions typically have less power and funding than specific fatherhood initiatives.

As of 2011, there were eight states with fatherhood commissions and 24 states with fatherhood initiatives. Iowa provides a good example of a governor-created commission (“taskforce”) on fatherhood. The mission of this commission is to “identify barriers to father involvement, identify promising practices that promote fathers’ support of their children, raise public awareness of the consequences of father absence, and recommend changes that support father involvement” (fatherhood.gov/about-us/nrfc-resources/nrfc-state-profiles).

The Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative, on the other hand, is a good example of how initiatives provide funding for programs. In the state of Georgia, a fatherhood initiative was created through a collaboration of state agencies (Department of Human Resources, Office of Child Support Enforcement, and the Department of Technical and Adult Education Special Workforce Services). Table 3 provides a summary of the states that have fatherhood commissions or initiatives to date. The length of the existence and the extensiveness of their funding, programming efforts, and policy goals vary by each state, with commissions through legislative bodies offering the most extensive coverage of fatherhood issues.
Table 3. Legislative & Agency-Based Fatherhood Commissions/Initiatives by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commissions through Legislative Bodies</th>
<th>Initiatives through Legislative Bodies</th>
<th>Agency-Based Commissions</th>
<th>Agency-Based Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IA, HI, MI, NC, OH, FL</td>
<td>AL, AZ, CT, DE, LA, MA, MD, NY, PA, SC, TX, UT, VA, WI, Washington D.C.</td>
<td>KS, RI</td>
<td>CO, GA, KY, LA, MI, MS, OK, KY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Examples of Innovative State Policies**

**Parenting Time Credit**

Some state courts are now offering Parenting Time Credit to reduce some child support costs. Through this system, if a non-custodial parent spends a certain amount of time with his/her child, showing that he/she is contributing to the parenting of the child, his/her child support payments may be reduced. Many courts look beyond simply spending time together and look for proof that the parent is helping with homework, extra-curricular activities, etc. In Indiana, when there is near equal parenting time and the custodial parent makes significantly more money than the noncustodial parent, the child support obligations may actually be switched, where the custodial parent must pay the noncustodial parent. ([http://www.in.gov/judiciary/rules/child_support/](http://www.in.gov/judiciary/rules/child_support/)). Policies such as these may be particularly helpful to low-income fathers who are making an effort to be physically and emotionally present for their children, but may face financial challenges. This is an example of a policy which, if
enacted properly, can support and reward fathers who are involved and fulfilling aspects of their parenting responsibilities that can be helpful to their children and the children’s mothers, rather than focusing on ways to punish them due to limited financial resources. Clear agreements between parents in advance would be necessary for such a plan to be successful.

**Earned Income Tax Credit:**

New York and Washington, D.C. both have policies that allow noncustodial parents who pay child support in full to receive a tax credit. The New York and D.C. policies require that the noncustodial parent pay “at least the amount of current support due during the tax year,” but not that each month’s payment be on time or that the parent have no child support debt (Wheaton 2009, p.2). This type of legislation is an example of policy that supports fathers rather than hindering them. These policies help noncustodial fathers by giving them an incentive to pay child support, and rewarding them when they do. In turn, fathers who feel that they are successfully providing for their children may make more of an effort to be involved emotionally with their child.
Barriers to Father Involvement

Federal policies that effectively include fathers can assist fathers in overcoming structural barriers to father involvement and can strengthen family relationships. Most federal policies specifically focusing on fathers can be sorted into one of two groups: 1) policies with educational or economic outcomes, and 2) policies that affect family relationships (Knox, Cowan, P.A., Cowan, C.P., & Bildner, 2011). While policies with educational and economic objectives do little to advance the definition of fatherhood beyond the “provider role,” these policies do have implications for fathers’ family relationships. The converse may also be true; interventions that enhance fathers’ family relationships may have important educational and economic benefits for fathers (Knox, et al., 2011).

In addressing federal policies with economic and educational outcomes, it is critical to understand that barriers to father involvement can be physical, emotional, and financial. Prominent financial barriers include child support payment, low income, and unemployment. While current policies highlight financial barriers to father involvement through Responsible Fatherhood programs, the present section discusses financial barriers to father involvement as they relate to the child support enforcement (CSE) mechanisms and to the federal tax structure.

The Child Support Enforcement system (CSE) has many advantages for children, but with it also come barriers to father involvement. Marked disparities within CSE exist between low-income and high-income fathers. On average, low-income fathers are ordered to pay a higher percentage of their incomes in child support than are higher earners (Cancian, Meyer, & Han, 2011). Notably, this disparity present at the state-level. Some states, like Wisconsin, set lower child support income percentages for low-income fathers; other states require minimum
orders, which require very high income percentages for low-income fathers, and still others have ‘self-support reserves,’ exempting extremely low-income fathers from paying anything (Cancian, et al., 2011). Overall, low-income fathers often have a higher burden of support than high-income fathers.

This higher burden likely results in increased failure to pay child support amongst low income fathers; nonresident fathers in poverty and with lower education are less likely to pay child support, and further are less likely to pay the full amount of support due (Cancian, et al., 2011). Fathers who do not pay the full amount of child support due accumulate debt and are assessed child support arrears. Again, low income fathers are more likely to owe arrears (Cancian, et al., 2011). Disparities also exist for nonresident fathers with complex family obligations, defined as fathers who have children with more than one partner. While policies vary at the state level, most fathers with complex family obligations are required to pay higher child support orders per-child than fathers who have children with one partner (Cancian, et al., 2011).

Overall, the Child Support System does not produce uniform outcomes for all fathers. Rather, low-income fathers and fathers who have children with more than one partner can often expect to pay more than other groups of fathers. This understanding is critical, as it highlights barriers to fatherhood that low-income fathers experience. Low-income noncustodial fathers carry the substantial financial obligation of child support, yet they do not receive the same tax-relief as custodial parents for their dependent children - the Earned Income Tax Credit that specifically targets custodial parents. Many policies have recently been proposed to address high
financial burden among low-income noncustodial parents, but not all reach a large group of parents (Mincy, Klempin, & Schmidt, 2011).

Mincy and colleagues (2011) specifically refer the reader to New York’s Noncustodial Parent Earned Income Tax Credit (NCP/EITC), a program that reached few fathers because it required that all applicants for the NCP/EITC not have unpaid child support orders. As low-income noncustodial parents are more likely than middle- and upper-income NCPs to have child support arrears, policies similar to the NCP/EITC program will not be able to reach a large group of noncustodial fathers (Mincy, et al., 2011).

Mincy and colleagues (2011) propose expanding the childless worker tax credit for all noncustodial parents, requiring an application to receive the credit. They note that fathers with outstanding child support orders would be able to apply for the credit, but that, under current law, states would be able to intercept the credit from fathers owing child support. Mincy and colleagues see this as a simpler way of reaching all noncustodial parents while avoiding large logistical barriers (such as interagency information sharing needed in NCP/EITC proposals).

Mincy and colleagues (2011) pair this proposal with another recommendation: extend transitional jobs programs to noncustodial fathers who are unable or unwilling to gain employment. They suggest that states should mandate noncustodial parents with outstanding child support orders to participate in transitional jobs programs, offering subsidized jobs, case management, soft skills training, and child support intermediation. Transitional jobs programs would offer income support and require work, a very direct approach to increasing labor-force participation amongst noncustodial parents.
Overall, financial barriers to father involvement are greatest for low-income nonresident fathers. These barriers are often the result of large financial obligations and unemployment, suggesting the need for policies that help ease financial barriers to father involvement. It is clear that, though such policies would still implicitly label fathers as providers, these policies would complement family-oriented programs such as Responsible Fatherhood programs. Overall, new policies should escape the largely-punitive focus of the Child Support Enforcement system, rewarding fathers for their involvement in their children’s lives.
Policy Recommendations
Recommendations for Federal Policies

Research indicates that nonresident fathers may become more involved in Early Head Start services. When the Early Head Start sponsored Fatherhood Demonstration Study of 2002 focused on better engaging fathers, 95% of participating programs encouraged nonresident fathers to participate (Raikes & Belotti, 2006).

1. Make Early Head Start programs friendly and accessible to ALL fathers

Not all Early Head Start programs encourage nonresident fathers to participate (77.2%), whereas nearly all encourage resident fathers to participate (98.8%) (Raikes, et al., 2002). Rather than distinguishing between nonresident and resident fathers, Early Head Start programs should encourage all types of fathers to participate. The results of the demonstration study show that nearly 30% of nonresident fathers participating in the program were rated as “highly involved,” compared to just 10% of nonresident fathers nation-wide (Raikes & Belotti, 2006). Early Head Start programs should therefore include all fathers in program services and identify specific ways to involve nonresident fathers. Additionally, Early Head Start programs should train staff in father involvement, as it may change staff attitudes toward fathers and indirectly increase father participation.

Father involvement in Early Head Start programs can be encouraged through creative approaches. Fathers themselves endorse displaying pictures of fathers and scheduling activities on evenings and weekends as important strategies for promoting involvement in early educational programming (Turbiville & Marquis, 2001). Being sensitive to fathers’ needs and to their schedules is important. Some fathers participating in Early Head Start programs might need additional support. Research suggests that depression is often linked with low participation in
Early Head Start programming (Roggman, Boyce, Cook, & Cook, 2002). Roggman and colleagues (2002) suggest that referrals may be necessary for fathers experiencing depression, and that acceptance and understanding are essential.

All Early Head Start programs should be father-friendly. To assess the father-friendliness of early childhood education programs at the individual and organizational level, Early Head Start programs should consider using Dakota Father Friendly Assessment, a novel measure proposed by White and colleagues (2011). The 34-item scale includes five subscales, identified by factor-analysis: organizational attitudes, organizational behaviors, staff attitudes, staff behaviors, and staff bias (White, Brotherson, Galovan, Holmes, & Kampmann, 2011).

The scale is specifically designed for Head Start organizations, offering a unique tool for organization-level evaluation of father-friendliness that could be useful to Early Head Start programs (White, et al., 2011). White and colleagues suggest that Head Start program staff and administration use the scale to assess their current level of father-friendliness, allowing for feedback about how programs can better involve fathers (White, et al., 2011). Overall, the DFFA should be used as an evaluative tool amongst Early Head Start organizations to evaluate current father-friendliness and to identify actions that would make services more accessible and staff friendlier to fathers.

2. *Reward responsible low-income noncustodial fathers with tax relief*

Noncustodial fathers are responsible for providing support to their children, yet they are not recognized in the same way as custodial parents. Low-income noncustodial fathers who are responsible and pay their child support orders should be rewarded with an increased Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). While there are many competing proposals regarding the way in
which to implement an EITC specific to noncustodial parents, Mincy and colleagues (2011) propose the best solution: an expanded childless worker tax credit for all noncustodial parents. The proposed tax credit would resolve administrative barriers related to timely disbursement and would make the tax credit accessible to a large group of fathers (Mincy, et al., 2011).

Fathers without outstanding child support orders would receive the tax credit in full; states would intercept the tax credit from fathers who owe child support arrears (Mincy, et al., 2011). In this manner, the government would reward responsible low-income fathers, offering them tax relief in recognition of their outstanding commitment to their children. This tax relief would allow low-income noncustodial fathers to better support themselves and their children. By implementing systems that reward responsible fatherhood to complement those that enforce child support, policymakers can encourage fathers to support their children.

**Recommendations for State Policies**

1. **Continue to establish state level commissions and initiatives to oversee fatherhood issues**

   Although the strategy of using state level commissions and initiatives to oversee fatherhood issues is a good one, the charge to these bodies should be expanded to take into consideration the diversity that exist among fathers across all states. Providing definitions of fathers that go beyond the provider role is a critical expansion necessary to begin to develop social policies that will benefit diverse groups of fathers, and ultimately families.

2. **Reward responsible fathers for with special incentives**

   Finding ways to reward responsible fathers may result in fewer burdens on child support enforcement systems as well as on low-income fathers who have differing abilities to pay predetermined costs.
Recommendations from the Fathers and Sons Study

The approach that we have taken in the Fathers and Sons Program offers promise for expanding policy initiatives and for informing clinical practice concerned with working with nonresident African American fathers and sons. As an evidence-based youth risky behavior preventive intervention involving African American fathers and their sons (Caldwell, et al., 2010, 2011a; 2011b), this theoretically-based, culturally-specific program is designed to prevent youth risky behaviors by strengthening relationships between nonresident fathers and their 8-12 year old sons. The original study, which was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, focused on nonresidential families but has since been expanded to include any father-son dyad. The program builds on research evidence suggesting that bonding, authoritative parenting, and feelings of closeness are critical pathways through which parents may influence the attitudes and behaviors of their children. Thus, the conceptual model for the program, based on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), and models of social networks/social support (Israel & Round, 1987) and racial identity development (Sellers et al., 1998), highlights parental behaviors as mediators between environmental factors and youth risky behaviors (Caldwell, Wright, Wasserman, Zimmerman, & Isichei, 2004).

The family remains a vital social context for influencing the health and well-being of children and adolescents; however, most preventive interventions for youth do not include family members, and fathers are often ignored. Involving fathers in youth interventions helps them develop parenting skills and gain insights to help them support their children after the intervention has ended. Thus, influencing father attitudes and behaviors helps sustain program effects over time. Findings from the
Fathers and Sons Program have implications for fatherhood policies. In this section we summarize some of the research findings and suggest policy implications in three broad areas: father involvement, father-son communication, and the mental health service needs of nonresident fathers.

**Background Characteristics**

Father involvement has been the focus of a substantial amount of research, with a growing amount of evidence accumulating about the involvement of nonresident fathers in the lives of their children. Fathers who participated in the study were fathers who did not live in the same household as their son(s) participating in the program. The families were recruited from Flint and Saginaw, Michigan. All intervention participants were from Flint, while most comparison group participants were from Saginaw. The sample consisted of 287 nonresident African American fathers and 284 of their biological sons, ages 8 – 12 years old. Three sons who were not biological participated because they had been raised by their father figure since birth. We used a quasi-experimental study design to evaluate intervention effectiveness with 158 father-son dyads in the intervention group and 129 father-son dyads in the comparison group. The nonresident fathers in this study ranged in age from 22 to 63, with a mean age of 37.4 (SD = 7.7). About 13% of the fathers were married, while 16.7% were living with a partner, 16.4% were divorced, 9.4% were separated, 1.0% was widowed, and 43.2% were never married. Only 19.2% of the fathers were ever married to the mother of their sons in the study. The majority of fathers had a high school/GED education or more (78.1%) and about half (51%) were employed. Most fathers (55.7%) reported that they barely had enough or did not have enough money to get by. However, 73.2% reported that they had a legal child support agreement for their sons. About
77% of the fathers had lived with their sons, while 23% had never lived with them. Among fathers who had lived with their sons, most reported living with them until they were five years old or younger (63%). The sons in the study were 8 to 12 years old, with an average age of 10.2 (SD = 1.4). Their average grade at the time of the study was about 5th grade (SD = 1.4), and on average, they had 3.5 siblings (SD = 2.5). From the sons’ perspective, 63.1% remembered living with their father at some time.

In this section we offer policy recommendations based on findings from the Fathers and Sons Study. This section is intended to initiate additional research and debate in an effort to support fathers as they attempt to be more involved in the lives of their children. As with policy initiatives, one of the first challenges we faced in doing this work was defining the concept of fathers and father involvement. The wide array of definitions, categories and dimensions that have been related to father involvement in the literature (Belsky, 1984; Lamb, Pleck Charnov and Leviene 1987; Snarey, 1993; Palkovitz, 1997; Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999) suggest a lack of consistency and exhaustion in the characterization of this concept. In addition, conceptualizations of father involvement have focused mainly on quantitative rather than qualitative aspects of involvement giving rise to an incomplete understanding of the concept (Lamb, 1997; Palkovitz, 1997, Pleck, 1997). The problem with this view of involvement is that it fails to take into account major processes that connect a father to his child. Thus, most policy initiatives are limited to the functional aspects of fatherhood, with the establishment of paternity and provider role being the underlying theme of fatherhood initiatives.

How involved men become with their children is a function of what is happening in many aspects of their life (Cowan and Cowan, 1987) and what sources of stress and support are
available to influence his psychological well-being (Belsky, 1984). Consequently, a multidimensional view of father involvement is needed (Marsiglio, 1995).

One of the first conceptualizations of a multidimensional view of father involvement was Lamb’s Typology of Involvement (Lamb, 1986), which includes three different processes: 1) interaction involves the father’s direct contact with his child in shared activities, 2) availability is characterized by the father’s potential physical and psychological accessibility to relate to his child, and 3) responsibility includes assuming responsibility for the welfare and care of his child. A responsible father, then, needs to interact with, be available to, and be responsible for his offspring. This definition of father involvement includes measures of quantitative and qualitative components of fatherhood that have implications for fatherhood policies that go beyond the typical paternity establishment, child support, and child custody issues that have dominated the attention of most legal issues in this area.

One goal of the current study was to identify findings that may be useful for suggesting potential directions for future policy recommendations at the Federal, State and local levels to broaden the diversity of fatherhood discussed. We were especially interested in noting policies that may be beneficial to nonresident African American fathers because they comprise a disproportionately large number of fathers who live apart from their children. This family separation has historical roots and social determinants that go beyond individual characteristics to contribute to this circumstance. Residential status alone, however, does not determine contributions that fathers can make to the well-being of their children. Recent evidence suggests that involved parenting may have positive benefits for men’s health as well. Below we offer several policy suggestions based on findings from the Fathers and Sons Study.
Table 4. Policy Recommendations Based on the Fathers and Sons Study Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Recommendations</th>
<th>Rationale and References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Definitions of Fatherhood</strong></td>
<td>We found that the meaning of an unmarried, nonresident father was not monolithic in this study. A man could be nonresident to one child, but resident to another. He could also be a father by paternity, or a father by other means. Having a clear definition of a father from a biological perspective was established with scientific advancements in DNA research. However, the role of social fathers in this society remains strong, especially in nonresident African American families once attachments are made between men and children. (Caldwell et al., 2011a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. Father Involvement</strong></td>
<td>The Fathers and Sons Program was successful in enhancing the parenting skills of nonresident African American fathers in an effort to prevent youth risk behaviors in their preadolescent sons. The intervention program enhanced fathers: • Parental monitoring behavior • Communication about sex with sons • Race-related socialization behavior • Fathers intentions to communicate with sons in the future. (Caldwell et al., 2010) Influencing fathers parenting behaviors reduced aggressive behaviors in their sons. (Caldwell et al., revise &amp; resubmit) Father role identity critical psychological component of father identity • Fathers as providers (Hammond et al., 2011) Masculinity and Communication with son (Rogers et al., under review)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I. Definitions of Fatherhood**

A definition of the meaning of nonresident fatherhood should be provided prior to the statement of any policy recommendation to reflect the diversity of experiences that fathers can have who are not married to and do not live with the mother of their children.

**II. Father Involvement**

In addition to fatherhood responsibilities (i.e., paternity, child support, child custody), father involvement policies must include opportunities for:

*Interaction policies*

a) Send report cards home from schools to nonresident fathers so that they can monitor their child’s school progress – monitoring

b) Fathers can be health educators to their children. Provide programs to help them effectively talk with their sons about sex.

c) Reduce Discrimination

d) Provide programs to enhance fathers’ efficacy as parents

*Availability policies*

a) Men who identify as fathers will be involved with their children
### III. Fathers’ Mental Health Needs

| Fathers with severe depressive symptoms monitor less than those who are not depressed. |
| Fathers engaged in parenting have better mental health than those who are not. |
| (Davis et al., 2009; Caldwell et al., 2011a, 2011b) |
| Masculinity and Psychological Well-being (Caldwell et al., under review) |

## Conclusions

The majority of federal policies that address fatherhood issues tend to emphasize biological paternity and child support because DNA as the justification for such action is certain while other measures of paternal responsibilities are not. *Financial obligations* are easier to enforce than *social responsibilities*. The importance the socialization role of fathers is often lost in policy debates and initiatives despite growing public policy stated interest and intent. Better ways to implement these intentions to support the involvement aspects of fathering would strengthen families and society as a whole.
References


United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). Building their futures: how early head start programs are enhancing the lives of infants and toddlers in low-income

Appendix: A

The Fathers and Sons Steering Committee

Cleopatra Caldwell
University Project Director
University of MI, SPH I
1415 Washington Heights
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
734-647-3176
734-763-7379 Fax
cleoc@umich.edu

E. Hill De Loney
Community Project Director
Flint Odyssey House - HAC
529 Martin Luther King Ave
Flint, MI 48502
810-767-1157
810-232-4066 Fax
cpyd@aol.com

Cassandra Brooks
Project Manager
University of MI
400 N. Saginaw St, Suite 201
810-239-2932
810-239-9770 Fax
clbrooks@umich.edu

Lee Bell
Neighborhood Roundtable
601 N. Saginaw St. Suite
Flint, MI 48502
810-210-8359
belll@umich.edu

Arlene Sparks
G.C.C.A.R.D.
601 N. Saginaw Street
Flint, MI 48502
810-762-4954
asparks@co.genesee.mi.us

Elder Sarah Bailey
Bridges Into The Future, Inc.
G3100 Miller Road, 9C
Flint, MI 48507
810-941-2063
baileysarah61@yahoo.com

Kathryn Blake
Christian Methodist Epis.
3417 Davison Road
Flint, MI 48506
810-701-4569
810-515-1347
blakeka81@aol.com

Terrance Campbell
YOUR Center
4002 N. Saginaw Street
Flint, MI 48505
810-789-8637
810-789-8638 Fax
terrance.campbell@yc4w.org

Janice L. Muhammad
N’CoBra
909 E. Wager Avenue
Flint, MI 48505
810-787-3119
janicemuhhammad@yahoo.com

Cynthia Howell
Healthy Eating
601 N. Saginaw Street
Flint, MI 48502
810-287-6341
810-232-2185, Ext 6019
cynthia.howell23@yahoo.com

Esther Dupens
Birth Sisters
2201 Carpenter Rd, Apt.320
Flint, MI 48505
810-280-4575

Lathan Jefferson
CAUTION
2814 Lewis
Flint, MI 48506
Appendix: B

Available Products


- Don’t Leave Home Without It – Handy bookmarks that lists myths, facts, challenges, and solutions that nonresident fathers can use when they want to address...

  ✓ Legal Issues:
    - Establishing paternity
    - Arranging and paying child support
    - Child custody, co-parenting and visitation

  ✓ School and Work Policies:
    - School policies affecting fathers
    - Work policies affecting fathers

  ✓ Policy Advocacy Issues:

  ✓ Service Needs:
    - Awareness
    - Access

  ✓ Myths and Facts about Fathers

- Fathers Matter Website – Information available about ongoing studies, publications, resources for fathers, information about upcoming programs and events, policy issues and public interest items related to fathers.

- Publication – Manuscript in development.