

**NHSA'S EIGHTH ANNUAL SPRING CONFERENCE**  
**Healthy Start Matters: Taking Action to Move Forward**

**Summary**

**Dads Matter: A Guided Community Conversation on Male Involvement**  
**March 18, 2007 – (2:10 – 3:30 p.m.)**

Lo Berry, Central Hillsborough Health Start, Tampa, FL, and Mario Drummond, Central Harlem Healthy Start, New York, NY, welcomed participants to this session and thanked them participating in this important conversation. Lo further framed the issues by reading the session description.

Fatherhood and Male Involvement continue to be “hot topics” among the Healthy Start family. Another recommendation from the 2006 Regional Conferences is to “Initiate a national discussion on making male involvement an optional core component of the Healthy Start initiative and explore how to make this happen.” In this community conversation, participants will learn what others think about this issue and share points of agreement and disagreement. Participants will respond to two questions: (1) Should male involvement be an optional core component of the H.S. initiative? (2) If so, what are the next steps to make this happen? The information gleaned from this conversation will help policy-makers, such as the NHSA’s Board of Directors, determine a strategy for taking a leadership role in furthering male involvement on the national agenda and ensuring there are adequate resources for Healthy Start projects involved in this work.

Before asking the first question, Lo and Mario also referred to the recommendation in the recently published 2006 Regional Conference Report, which provided a discussion on the diverse opinions on whether projects should be required to provide male involvement / fatherhood programs, and recommendations for moving forward on the issue.

After posing the first question, “Should male involvement be an optional core component of the H.S. initiative?” Lo added “without funding” to the question. At least twenty (20) participants responded with mixed reactions to the question. Here are some of the highlights of the discussion facilitated by Lo and Mario:

“Yes, studies show that dads are a very important part of having healthy babies and children.”

“Every Healthy Start needs a fatherhood program; because the male has an influence on women...it should be integrated from beginning to end.”

“How do we integrate male services within Health Start? NHSA should join forces with national father programs.”

“No, we should look to collaborating with father programs already established in our communities first.”

“Dads have the same issues as mothers...father-friendly programs are at least a beginning.”

“Bring fathers in for parenting opportunities.”

”We need help with gang violence in our community. How do we bring Blacks and Hispanic fathers who participate in gangs together without violence?”

“Ideal, but not a reality for all projects, (priority) issues vary from project to project.”

“No to a mandate, because it would hurt our program.”

“We do not think it should be a core component because of the cultural barriers. At our site (border site) we struggle just to get women in—can’t deal with male involvement yet...if it becomes a core program, what happens to families without a Dad?”

“Look at the Pittsburgh model, recently funded by Children, Youth and Families (CYF) and at Central Harlem’s Male Initiative for guidance.”

Peggy Sanchez Mills commented that as the NHSA’s new Chief Executive Officer, she welcomed this important conversation and the critical information that was surfacing, and looks forward to the issue gaining momentum and moving the NHSA toward better meeting the needs of all projects and their efforts around male involvement.

Mario noted the wealth and diversity of responses during the conversation and asked Claudia to sum up key points made.

Claudia began by stating that although there was disagreement with whether male involvement should be mandated as a core H.S. program, everyone who spoke agreed that it is an important issue that deserves attention on some level. She continued by reviewing a list of key points that ran through the discussion.

- Different levels of project readiness – projects differ from project to project;
- Cultural differences dictate program strategy and need;
- Collaborate with national and local male/fatherhood programs and agencies to avoid duplication and need for additional funding;
- Look to “best practice” models for guidance;
- Develop strong consortia around male involvement;
- Integration of male involvement services; and
- Outreach to Dads

The issues and concerns raised during this conversation will be used as background to continue this discussion at the board level and to provide a framework for next steps. Lo distributed a participant sign-in sheet that will be used to coordinate an initial conference call to maintain the momentum generated from this workshop.