Lessons Learned About Essential Conditions For Success

The key lessons derived by the Knowledge Management Review Subcommittee through an expedited literature review include eight issues that should inform California's policy, implementation and accountability functions for a prioritization approach, defined as timely access to effective treatment, services and supports. Because these types of assistance to families are often offered through organizations that provide a single service and because families require help from multiple sources, interagency collaboration in working with families is essential to achieving and maintaining success.

1. **Sustainability Requirements.** There is considerable evidence that multi-departmental coordination and collaborative partnerships require strong leadership, performance management, clear communication about desired results and interim benchmarks among partners in order to be sustained over time (examples include: Bai, Wells & Hillemeier, 2009; Darlington, Feeney & Rixon, 2004; Drabble, 2010; Duerr Berrick, Frame, Langs & Vanchol, 2006; Horwath & Morrison, 2007; Lawson, Claiborne, Hardiman & Austin, 2007). Even with a powerful mandate, change is difficult work that requires attention, dedication, and continuous communication to assure that organizational boundaries remain permeable and working relationships are flexible. This work is more likely to be successful when there is clear state policy and at least one committed champion in each local jurisdiction, a number of interpersonal relationships that cross organizational boundaries, a continuing stream of data to guide activities, and a shared vision that focuses on child and family well-being, strengthening families and prevention from maltreatment.

2. **Local Implementation.** With leadership and support from the state level, detailed implementation planning will be required at the County and community levels. Although we maintain a strong belief in the power of statewide planning, direction setting and testing of new concepts to guide the child welfare system, differences in the size, scale, demographics and characteristics of the 58 counties mean that County service agencies operate similar services somewhat differently.

3. **Results Focus.** (Placeholder for summary statement -- including need for a vision that integrates safety, permanence and well-being in line with recent federal Administration for Children and Families Information Memorandum. Evidence for promising and proven strategies will help to set achievable outcomes)
4. **Cost/Benefit and Return on Investment.** (Placeholder for summary statement -- including reference to Washington State Institute for Public Policy’s "Return on Investment: Evidence-Based Options to Improve Statewide Outcomes", April 2012.)

5. **Displacement of Existing Service Populations.** (Placeholder for summary statement – although fear of displacing other key populations is often voiced by allied agencies as a rational for not prioritizing child welfare families, there is evidence that multiple agencies serve the same families, particularly when all family members are matched across agencies. We need to avoid looking through the lens of only one system because we could miss opportunities to leverage multiple resources. By taking a cross-systems view we can build on existing connections to take a cross-systems view to elaborate any existing connections and overlap in the service population i.e., veterans with children. We need to ask, "How can existing prioritization status be used to leverage expedited services for child welfare families?" San Francisco is now tracking priority to prevent reentry of child welfare parents who are probation—matching clients already seen in common. There are ways to mitigate displacement. Look at the positives—cost savings by working together to save on costs in providing services for each agency. (For example enable agencies to share information concerning drug testing of same individual so that the process—and cost—is not duplicated by two county agencies.) Look at shared, common outcomes—we need not be at cross purposes e.g., persons are less likely to reenter prison if they are parenting.)

6. **Scalability.** While pilot projects have demonstrated success in knitting together pieces of the siloed service system (Claiborne & Lawson, 2011; Graham-Bermann, Banyard, Lynch, DeVoe & Halabu, 2007; Macbeth, 1993), they have typically relied on grant or contract funding to hire “navigators” or other special personnel. One of the key challenges for the Council is to envision an approach that makes organizational boundaries more permeable, re-engineering the interface between systems rather than duplicating or adding resources.

7. **Implementation Champions and Partners.** (Placeholder for summary statement – need for continuity of leadership. Implementation happens at the front line – youth, parents and frontline staff must be included in planning from the beginning.)

8. **Performance Management and Data Linkages.** (Placeholder for summary statement on data linkage systems across departments would require sharing of detailed information on an on-going basis, including identifying of shared clients, and addressing concerns about confidentiality. Focus on performance management approaches that support continuous quality improvement.)
Suggested Guidelines

**Joint State/County Planning & Implementation.** Detailed implementation strategies should be developed at both the statewide and county levels to give meaning and force to policy directives on prioritization. Without clear direction and detailed implementation planning, policy directives alone will not be effective (especially in light of realignment).

**Clear Agreed Upon Outcomes That Are Meaningful to All Partners.** Cross-departmental discussion of the shared meaning of child and family “well-being” are needed to expand understanding of the results desired through prioritization. For example, is the primary aim to assure timely reunification and permanence (core child welfare indicators)? Or is it also intended to decrease substance abuse, assure stable housing, decrease re-entry and enhance self-sufficiency? The specific results desired, measures to be used, and benchmarks for success must be known and agreed on in order to design effective implementation strategies that are meaningful to all partners. The implementation plan must include rigorous monitoring, continuous quality improvement strategies and clear accountability targets.

**Multi-System vs. Single Agency Approach.** The broad needs of the child welfare population mean that the one-agency-at-a time collaborative strategies used in some previous efforts will likely be ineffective in meeting the multiple needs of child welfare youth and families. When each type of service can be critical for some, but none are necessary for all, a broad partnership strategy that cuts across many different government and community organizations will be most effective.

**Pilot Testing/Breakthrough Series Collaborative Approach.** Because population demographics, organizational jurisdictions and resources differ across counties, a number of implementation strategies may be required. The Council should consider pilot testing different approaches in 2 or 3 interested counties, evaluating outcomes and sharing the results widely.

**Use of practices that have been proven to be effective.** There are evidence-based, or promising practices that should be shared and agreed upon.

**Build on efforts of the Data Linkages and Information Sharing Committee of the Child Welfare Council.** (Placeholder for summary statement – work on data linkage systems across departments would require sharing in a way that protects family confidentiality, but promotes integration.)
References:


