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## S.B. 81 – Ten Point Tune Up

As counties swing into action with the realignment of funding and function under S.B. 81 and A.B. 191, it will be essential to work smartly and strategically. These changes offer an opportunity, unprecedented in many of our careers, to do things the way they should be done – serving youth and families close to their home communities; not settling for the “least worst” alternatives; having the ability to work proactively to develop long needed services and programs; and better matching youth with the interventions they need. These are practical questions (surely not the only ones) to guide the work to be done over the next period of time:

1. Does your department need to revisit the values that drive dispositional recommendations (e.g., close to home, family involvement, educational stability, non-institutional setting), and if so, how will you accomplish this? See, e.g., R. Barth, *Institutions vs. Foster Homes; The Empirical Base for a Century of Action* (2002); T. Rubin, “Reviewing What We Do: Deviant Peer Contagion,” *Juvenile Justice Update* (June/July 2007).
2. Is your county using existing secure beds for the right youth for the right amount of time? Consider using the tools offered through the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative – many are on line:  
<http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/JuvenileDetentionAlternativesInitiative.aspx>
3. If you are using juvenile hall for post-disposition commitments, does such commitment meet the litmus test of evidence-based, or does it represent the historic lesser of other bad options? Does S.B. 81 offer an opportunity to provide needed secure or semi-secure programs in a different setting? See, e.g., J. Ziedenberg, *The Dangers of Detention*, <http://juliel.mm-tools.us/justicepolicyinstitute/content.php?hmlD=1811&smID=1581&ssmID=25>
4. Are there other programs your county has used in the past (e.g., out-of-state placement) that can be reconsidered and replaced in light of the S.B. 81 funding?
5. Does your department take a strong role in refusing to accept cases “dumped” from the foster care, mental health and education systems? What would it take for you to do this?
6. Are you maximizing resources available to the youth when you identify dispositional alternatives (e.g., placements that qualify for foster care and Medicaid funding)? For example, do you take full advantage of the following funding opportunities:

- Placing youth in foster care (or group homes) before age 18 so they can automatically receive Medi-Cal, transitional housing, education and training vouchers, and independent living services up to age 21?
  - Getting eligible youth onto Medi-Cal, where they may receive a range of often needed services such as therapeutic behavioral services, mental health services, and case management.
  - Leveraging services through the special education, regional center and mental health systems (including Prop 63 funding).
7. Are you talking to and working with your provider community about your needs for targeted programs or services (e.g., specialized group homes, aftercare programs, transitional housing)? Are you considering different kinds of facilities, e.g., community treatment facilities (Welf. & Inst. Code § 4094 et. seq.), or regional centers for the seriously emotionally disturbed (Welf. & Inst. Code § 5695 et seq.).
  8. Are you and your staff up to speed on the research about “what works” as well as what does not work? See, e.g., Washington State Institute for Public Policy research: <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/topic.asp?cat=10&subcat=54&dteSlct=0>; P. Greenwood, *Changing Lives: Delinquency Prevention as Crime Control*.
  9. Does your department have the ability to do individualized dispositional planning or the ability to bring in dispositional experts? Are you using individualized placements and family-based services? See, e.g., Fight Crime, Invest in Kids, California, *Using Mental Health Services Act/Proposition 63 Funding for Juvenile Justice Youth* (2007).
  10. What else do you need to make S.B. 81 changes work, and who can you ask for help in obtaining legislative changes, training, expertise or resources that are missing? There will surely be additional legislation to help implement these historic changes, so be sure to keep track of specific changes that would be helpful. In addition a number of juvenile justice policy groups are seeking ways to provide training and technical assistance to the profession. Please let the Youth Law Center know what you need; we want to be there to help with whatever we can to make this the success we all want it to be. Contact us through: [www.ylc.org](http://www.ylc.org)