Going from Questions to Answers:
Using Data at the Local Level
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DaSy The Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems

PA pennsylvania EARLY INTERVENTION

Local Data Use

Creating a culture of data use and supporting effective data use are essential for monitoring, planning, and improvement at the local level. As you look for ways to support local program leaders in using data, **consider starting with the questions you ask, rather than the answers you seek**.

Asking the Right Questions

The DaSy Center has developed a set of critical questions (CQs) about children/families, practitioners, and early intervention programs/local education agencies. CQs are categorized as:

Bread and butter—those that a comprehensive data system should provide the data to answer.

Aspirational—complex questions that require more information than a typical high-quality system may provide or that require linking to other systems.

CQs contain both broad, overarching questions and specific questions for each topic. **Find CQ resources online:** http://dasycenter.org/resources/critical-questions

Great questions! How about the answers?

Example Critical Question Analysis from Pennsylvania

1. Pose a question → 2. Gather & prepare data → 3. Analyze data → 4. Share & use findings

Step 1: During the PA Data Literacy Academy, local leaders identified question 1.B.1.c as a high-priority question.

1.B.1. What are characteristics of the services and supports provided to children/families in early intervention/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE)?
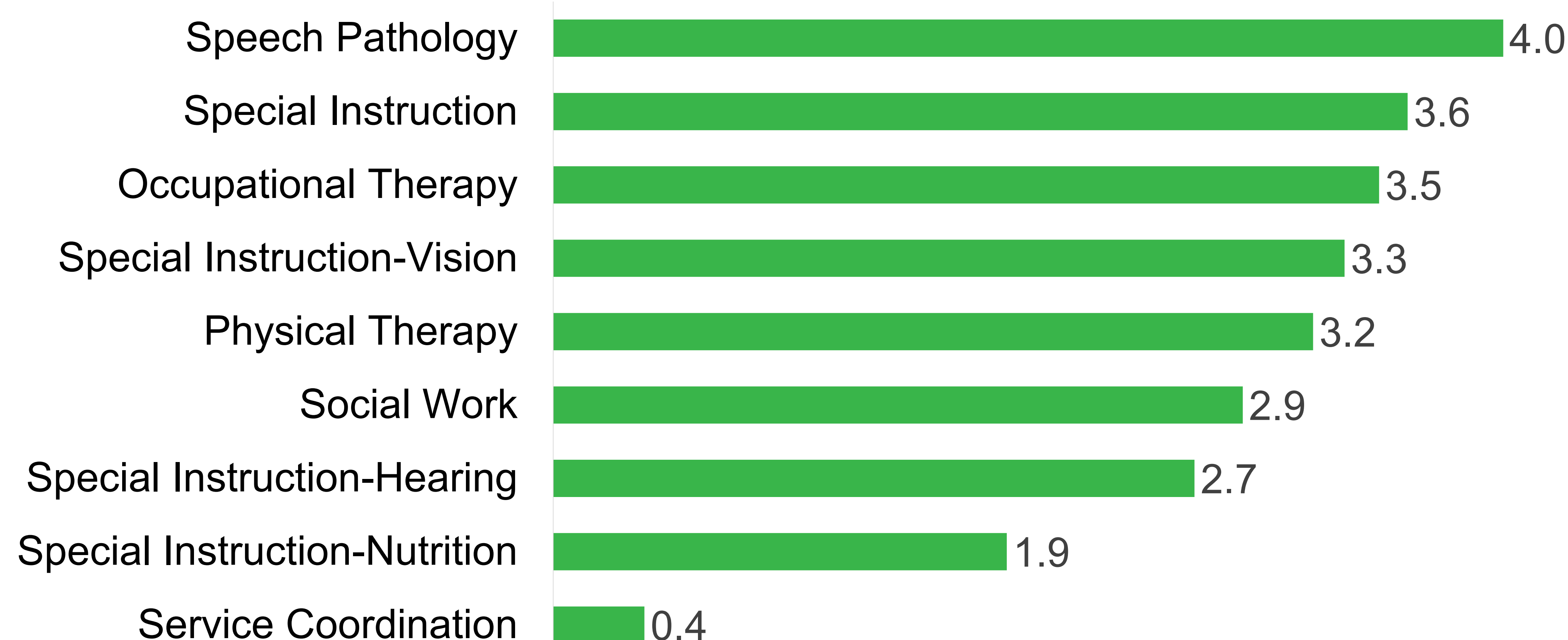
1.B.1.c. What amount of each type of service (e.g., frequency, intensity, total hours) do children in EI/ECSE receive?

Step 2: PA's EI data system, PELICAN EI, enables EI programs to create child records and export aggregate data. An export of data on Individualized Family Service Plans within the fiscal year includes child-level data on service type and frequency. Data elements needed for analysis were identified or calculated as needed.

Step 3: The data team hypothesized about what they expected to see, created Excel pivot tables, and calculated measures of central tendency and spread to analyze the data and answer the CQs.

Step 4: Program leaders identified stakeholders interested in the data, such as local Inter-agency coordinating council (LICC) members and service providers and shared the findings through effective data visualization.

Mean Frequency of Services per Month, by Service Type, 2015-16

Service Type	Value
Speech Pathology	4.0
Special Instruction	3.6
Occupational Therapy	3.5
Special Instruction-Vision	3.3
Physical Therapy	3.2
Social Work	2.9
Special Instruction-Hearing	2.7
Special Instruction-Nutrition	1.9
Service Coordination	0.4

How PA Helps Local Leaders Ask Critical Questions

PA's EI program (birth to 5) has been collecting data for many years and is now scaling up the way data are used to improve the management and quality of EI programs. **PA's Data Literacy Initiative** helps local leaders ask and answer CQs.

Data Literacy Academy

PA hosted a 2-day Data Literacy Academy, for EI leaders to learn new skills to interpret, analyze, draw conclusions, and communicate about data when back in their local programs. In addition to state staff, PA leaders recruited DaSy technical assistance providers to lead sessions on the CQs, local data teams, and data visualization.

Regional Leadership

CQs are discussed at bi-monthly EI regional leadership meetings. Participants identify specific data needed to answer priority CQs and the state then develops reports from PELICAN-EI with those data. These reports are used by local leaders for analysis, data visualization, and development of program quality enhancement plans.

Local Learning Communities

Local learning communities, facilitated by statewide consultants, support data teams through the data use process. One strength of the learning communities is peer-to-peer connections that encourage leaders to pool resources and ensure an efficient cycle of inquiry.