

PALS General FAQs for Wisconsin public schools



Planning for Assessment

Which students are required to be assessed for fundamental literacy skills?

Each school district and each charter school is required to annually assess each student enrolled in four-year old kindergarten (4K), five-year old kindergarten (5K), first grade, and second grade for fundamental literacy skills. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has selected PALS as the early literacy screening instrument.

My district has community based 4K programs. Are they required to administer PALS?

With the passage of the 2013-15 state budget, Wis. Stat. 118.016(1) now states that each school board and each charter school shall annually assess each pupil enrolled in four year old kindergarten through first grade in the school district or charter school for reading readiness in the 2013-14 school year, and beginning in 2014-15, shall annually assess each pupil enrolled in four year old kindergarten through second grade. This requirement for four year old kindergarten includes community based 4K programs that are part of a school district, as well as traditional elementary school based 4K programs.

Why does PALS recommend waiting until six weeks after the beginning of the school year to begin screening 4K and 5K students?

Waiting for six weeks after the start of the school year prior to beginning screening ensures that students have a chance to become acclimated to the school environment prior to the assessment. This allows for a more accurate indication of student performance, and limits the number of students who are mistakenly identified as needing extra services who are not truly at-risk, and simply need more time in the regular classroom to make initial progress in reading.

Can a school begin administration of PALS as soon as the school receives its materials?

No, all assessment must occur during the screening windows. The only exception is for schools that operate with a year-round calendar. Those schools may begin

assessments two weeks after the start of the year for first and second grade students, and six weeks after the start of the school year for 4K and 5K students, even if that date does not fall within the screening window.

Why doesn't DPI have a shorter window (or a longer window) for assessment?

The current window reflects the maximum flexibility DPI can provide districts while ensuring the reliability and validity of the assessment. Teachers should complete the PALS assessment within any contiguous two-week period during the four-week screening window.

Are districts expected to assess all students with disabilities?

Yes. State law requires districts and schools to assess all students, including students with disabilities. Students with disabilities may complete PALS with accommodations if necessary.

Who makes the decision about whether students with disabilities receive accommodations when completing PALS?

Decisions regarding whether students receive accommodations for PALS are the responsibility of the student's Individual Education Program (IEP) team.

How can I get the Braille or Deaf/Hard of Hearing PALS materials?

Contact Duane Dorn at (608) 267-1069 or duane.dorn@dpi.wi.gov to request Braille or Deaf/Hard of Hearing PALS materials.

When is parent opt-out allowable?

The statute requiring screening (Wis. Stats. 118.016) does not provide a provision for opting students out of assessment. Schools and districts should make every effort to assess all students.

Who is responsible for assessing students attending a Virtual School?

Virtual schools are responsible for assessing all students enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten through second

grade. This may be done in two ways: with district staff at other arranged sites, or via video conferencing. If video conferencing is used, schools will need to indicate that they employed a non-standard administration, and caution needs to be taken when interpreting results. Districts should not assess students who live in their attendance area but attend a virtual school in another district.

Is the school or district responsible for assessing a home-schooled student if the parent requests that?

No. The school or district is not required to include home-schooled students in the PALS screening.

Do I need to assess students who are migrant or homeless?

Yes. All students enrolled during the screening window must be assessed.

Do I need to assess a student who is out of state during the screening window?

Schools and districts should make every effort to assess all students during the screening window. It may be necessary to make arrangements with parents to conduct the assessment during a makeup session.

When should I administer a makeup session?

Students who are absent for one or more assessment sessions should take the remaining sessions with other students upon their return. Makeup sessions for the missed session(s) may be scheduled for a later time during the screening window. Every effort should be made to allow the student to participate in the assessment.

How do I assess a general education student with a recent trauma?

Schools and districts should use their own judgment about whether it is appropriate to assess a student who has suffered a recent trauma.

I have students who have limited English proficiency (LEP), also known as English Language Learners (ELLs). What requirements are there for these students?

All four-year old kindergarten through second grade students are required to be administered either the English language version of PALS or PALS español. Each district makes its own determination about whether it is appropriate to utilize PALS español. The DPI recommends that if schools elect to use PALS español that it be limited

to students enrolled in a Spanish dual-language immersion program. Schools that elect this option should contact Duane Dorn at duane.dorn@dpi.wi.gov or (608) 267-1069.

My school administers other assessments in the first few weeks of school. Can I administer the assessments I usually administer, even if the tasks are similar to PALS?

Please check with your school administrator or PALS District Rep regarding any other assessment requirements that might be in place. The PALS assessment does not prevent you from administering other assessments. However, do not pre-teach parts of PALS or administer PALS before the designated screening window.

Materials

What is the difference between Form A and Form B for PALS-K and PALS 1-3?

Form A and Form B are equivalent forms. They assess the same skills, but use different items. For example, they both assess spelling/phonics using the same tasks; however, they use different words. The same form is used in both the fall and the spring. Wisconsin schools will use Form B during the 2014-15 school year.

For spring assessment, will we be using an alternate form (e.g., Form A) or the same form? What about the optional Mid-Year screening?

You will use the same Form in spring that you used in the fall. For PALS-K and PALS 1-3, Form B will be used in the 2014-15 school year. The PALS-K and PALS 1-3 Mid-Year assessment is always Form C, and does not alternate. PALS-PreK has only one form.

Will we have to download and photocopy all of the teacher guides and manuals, or will they come with the testing materials?

All teacher guides and manuals will be shipped to you with your other screening materials. The only exception is the Mid-Year materials. These must be downloaded from the PALS Online System and printed at the district/school.

Why do schools typically receive Teachers Sets only for classroom teachers?

PALS is designed to be administered by the primary classroom teacher who has the most contact with the students in the classroom and is responsible for planning most of the student's instruction. Reading

specialists and ELL teachers are encouraged to assist the primary classroom teacher, although they are not generally encouraged to conduct the assessment. For this purpose, each school has received a PALS Administrator Set, which should be used as a resource for reading specialists and ELL teachers who may be assisting the primary classroom teacher.

Who should receive an Administrator Set, and who should receive a Teacher Set?

The Administrator Set is provided to be a helpful resource for reading specialist, ELL teachers, assessment coordinators, principals, and others involved in facilitating the assessment process.

Where are the Mid-Year materials? Will these be shipped later?

Mid-Year materials will be available for download through the PALS Online System in mid- to late-December. Some districts choose not to administer the optional Mid-Year Assessments, so please check with your PALS District Rep to see if any relevant policies or guidelines exist for your district.

Administration

Who should administer PALS?

It is highly recommended that classroom teachers administer the screening to each student. Given that classroom teachers know their students better than anyone else in the building, the most accurate and informative results will be obtained when the classroom teacher administers all parts of the screening.

If a student becomes frustrated during the PALS assessment, may I stop administration?

If a student is clearly frustrated by a PALS task, you may open up the task. For example, a student who struggles with alphabet recognition may be shown the entire alphabet recognition sheet and asked to identify any known letters.

When using the PALS website, do I need to enter scores for all tasks?

You must enter scores for all required tasks since these scores are used to identify students considered to be at risk of having a significant reading deficiency. (Nonstandard

administration allows for the omission of certain tasks when necessary, but is only permissible if it is designated in a student's IEP.) Only record a score of "0" when the student has taken the task and failed to respond to any items correctly. Leave the optional task score entry boxes blank if the student was not administered the task.

Parent/Family Communication

How do I share PALS assessment information with parents/guardians?

PALS results should be shared with parents/guardians within the context of an in-person conference.

Teachers should be prepared to explain the following when talking with parents/guardians about PALS:

- PALS is an instructional tool designed to help you (the teacher) plan the best literacy instruction for their child. PALS is not a high-stakes test; there is no pass/fail.
- Provide an overview of the tasks that are assessed, the benchmark scores associated with each task, and the scores obtained by their child.
- Explain how these scores give you information to help you plan literacy instruction for the class and for their child.
- Identify the literacy instruction you have in place, and how you are planning to address their child's strengths and needs as indicated by the child's PALS scores.
- Encourage parents of emergent readers to read with their children, sing songs and rhymes with their children, encourage pretend reading and looking through pictures in a book, and so on. Encourage parents of all students to explore books with their children, expand into a variety of genres, and talk about what they read.
- After a parent/teacher conference in which you discuss the above, you may send the Student Summary sheet home with the family.

Note: We do not recommend simply sending home PALS scores, such as a Student Summary sheet, in a child's backpack. PALS results should be presented directly to parents/guardians within the context of an in-person conference so there is no misinterpretation of assessment results.

If you are looking for additional guidance on how to conduct productive, literacy-rich meetings with parents, view the following webinar that is available on DPI's Read Wisconsin (www.readwisconsin.net) website [here](#).

Interpreting and Using PALS Results

I'm finished with my PALS screening and I know which students are below the benchmark for each PALS task. Now what do I do? Where can I get ideas for additional instruction?

The online tutorials offered at pd.casenex.com provides suggestions for how to use your data to group students effectively for instruction. Instructional activities tailored to target specific literacy skills are embedded within the Electronic Lesson Plans that are available for download from the PALS Online System on each teacher's "Planning Instruction" tab. Descriptions of each reading and spelling stage, as well as what types of instruction are appropriate for each of them, are also available on this tab, under "Resources for Instruction".

How can I monitor the progress of my students?

Schools with access to the Online Score Entry and Reporting System may download PALS Mid-Year (Form C) for mid-year progress monitoring. Assessing students in the middle of the academic year provides you with information for continuing, adjusting, or increasing the intensity of instruction.

PALS Quick Checks can also be administered in between screening windows to students who: (1) need more instruction in a specific skill, (2) did not meet the benchmark for PALS and are thus "identified" as being at-risk for reading difficulty, and/or (3) are receiving intervention.

It is important to note the tasks on which the student scored below or close to the task benchmark, since these will be areas to target for instruction. Growth is easily monitored at the task level as well. For example, a student who knew 8 letters on the PALS-K Alphabet Recognition task in the fall and 24 in the spring made strong growth in that skill. Once scores have been entered into the PALS Online System, a variety of reports are available for showing growth, such as the Student Score History, Student Growth History, Student Growth: Oral Reading, and Student Growth: Spelling/Phonics reports.

PALS results for one of my students indicate that he/she is at risk of reading difficulty. What am I required to do for this student?

If a student's score on PALS indicates the student is at risk of reading difficulty, schools and districts are

required to provide interventions or remedial services. Wisconsin Statutes 118.016 and 121.02 state that the interventions or services provided to the student shall be scientifically based, and shall address all areas in which the student is deficient, in a manner consistent with the state standards in reading and language arts.

What steps should our school take to provide interventions or services to students who are identified as at risk of a significant reading deficiency on PALS?

Students who are identified as at risk of reading difficulty should continue to receive high-quality core instruction. In addition, targeted small-group and individual interventions may be necessary based on the results of each PALS subtest.

Teachers are also encouraged to work with other professionals (other classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, ELL teachers, psychologists and principals) to develop intervention plans. It may be helpful to visit the RtI Center website at www.wisconsinrticenter.org to develop a tiered system of instruction and support. The PALS Electronic Lesson Plans provide an appropriate framework for small-group instruction, both for regular classroom instruction and for a literacy intervention program. Once students are identified as needing additional support, PALS provides Quick Checks in each skill area that may be beneficial in determining the focus, intensity and duration of the intervention. Teachers will be able to access both the PALS Electronic Lesson Plans and PALS Quick Checks through the PALS Online Score Entry and Reporting System.

Can the progress monitoring data collected from PALS Quick Checks be used when making an eligibility decision for a specific learning disability (SLD)?

Answer from Wisconsin DPI:

Federal and state laws require Individualized Educational Program (IEP) teams conduct a full and individual evaluation to determine whether a student is a student with a disability eligible to receive special education services. The IEP team must use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the student including information provided by the parent.

If the IEP team is making an initial eligibility decision about a specific learning disability (SLD), the team must

consider progress monitoring data collected from a probe, a progress monitoring tool that meets specific criteria.

The technical qualities of a probe are defined in administrative rule PI 11.02 (9). The use of probes when making SLD eligibility decisions is further detailed in PI 11.36 (c)2. (PI 11.36 is commonly referred to as the SLD Rule). [SLD FAQ #27](#) provides more information about the qualities of probes. The [technical guide for the SLD rule](#) (pages 38 – 39) provides additional information.

Basically, a probe needs to be administered weekly if it is being used to collect data that could be considered in an eligibility decision for SLD. A probe also needs to be sensitive enough to measure small changes in student performance.

PALS Quick Checks are designed to be administered no more than every two weeks and are not sensitive enough to measure small changes in student performance. Therefore, PALS Quick Checks cannot be used as a probe to collect data that could be used in an SLD eligibility decision. It is important to note, however, that PALS Quick Checks do provide valuable data that teachers can use immediately to adjust their instruction for all students. In addition, the data from PALS Quick Checks can be considered by an IEP evaluation team – provided it is reported in addition to the progress monitoring data collected with a probe.

Visit the [SLD page on DPI's website](#) for more information.