PALS Plus FAQs
for Wisconsin public schools

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General Administration

How long does it take to administer PALS 1-3?

The time it takes to administer PALS 1-3 to a student can vary based on the reading level of the student, the number of passages administered, and the need to administer additional tasks in order to diagnose the student's current stage of literacy development, and the teacher's familiarity and experience with the assessment process. Also, the Spelling task is usually administered to a whole class or in small groups; administering Spelling individually will significantly increase the total assessment time for a class. Considered on an individual student basis, PALS 1-3 administration will probably vary from 25-40 minutes.

What is the criteria for High Benchmark Designation?

The high benchmark designation exempts students reading well above grade level from future PALS screenings. The High Benchmark Designation is indicated with an up arrow next to a student's name. Students are eligible for the High Benchmark Designation in the spring of first grade or the fall of second grade. In the spring of first grade students must read 18 or more words correctly on the second grade word list, read the second grade passage (or higher) with 98% accuracy or better, and receive a fluency rating of three on that passage. In the fall of second grade students must read 18 or more words correctly on the third grade word list, read the third grade passage (or higher) with 98% accuracy or better, and receive a fluency rating of three on that passage.

How were the benchmarks established for PALS 1-3 tasks?

Benchmarks for some of the PALS 1-3 tasks were based on research collected from three years of PALS data. In addition, PALS 1-3 was pilot tested with over six hundred elementary students in the Spring of 2000. Data from the 2002-2002 school year was analyzed to revise benchmarks. New materials were pilot tested in Spring 2001 with over two thousand students in the state of Virginia.

Entry Level Tasks: Word Recognition & Spelling

What do I do if the list is too difficult for the student?

The Entry Level word list must be administered since this score is part of the Entry Level Summed Score. If the student misses five to eight words in succession, you may open up the list. Ask the student to identify any words that s/he knows in order to put the student at ease and to glean any useful information possible. The next step would be to administer a lower level list if applicable.

Do I stop administration after I give the Entry Level word list?

The Entry Level word list is the only one needed for the Summed Score, but you will continue administering word lists until you have found the highest word list from which the student can correctly read 15 words. Students' scores on the word recognition in isolation (WRI) lists indicate the appropriate level to begin Level A passage reading for the Oral Reading in Context task.

My school uses a developmental word study program or model for spelling and/or word study (such as Words Their Way). Is it necessary to do an initial spelling assessment beyond what is in PALS?

The information obtained in the Spelling Inventory in PALS provides information about a student's spelling stage. This information can be used to begin developmental spelling/word study instruction without further assessment. Therefore, the spelling assessment included in PALS is the only spelling assessment needed before beginning developmental word study.

Other developmental spelling assessments (such as Kathy Ganske's Developmental Spelling Assessment (DSA) or assessments included in Word Journeys) can be administered at various points throughout the school year to monitor progress of student's spelling/word study development. Please note that there also are Spelling Quick Checks available in the PALS Online System for more closely monitoring student progress in their development of spelling skills and progress through the spelling stages.

What is the purpose of the Word Recognition in Isolation task?

The purpose of the Word Recognition in Isolation task, regardless of administration method, is to measure a student's recognition of high frequency words. Word Recognition in Isolation is a measure of immediate word identification, or sight word knowledge. It is not

a decoding measure; students should not be given enough time to decode, or "sound out" the words. Keep in mind that WRI results indicate the required oral reading passage to be read by each student. Prompting students to sound out WRI words and spending time decoding might result in an inflated WRI score, thus indicating a passage level that is too high for the student.

Are Word Recognition in Isolation and the E-WRI (Electronic Word Recognition in Isolation) equivalent forms? Will a student's results be impacted by the form of Word Recognition in Isolation he/she completes?

When the E-WRI version was piloted by PALS, there was no significant difference between E-WRI results and paper-and-pencil results. It is critical, however, that administration procedures for paper-and-pencil Word Recognition in Isolation are followed with fidelity. The assessor must move through each list quickly, presenting each word for less than a second. If the student doesn't say the word immediately, the assessor moves on to the next word. When assessors follow this procedure with fidelity, the form of the assessment (paper-and-pencil or E-WRI) does not impact student performance.

How does an assessor decide which administration method to use for Word Recognition in Isolation (paper-and-pencil or E-WRI)? Can an assessor move between administration methods within an assessment window or year?

Administration decisions about Word Recognition in Isolation are made at the local (district, school, or classroom) level. If administration procedures are followed with fidelity, there should be no significant differences between paper-and-pencil and E-WRI results. Using Electronic Word Recognition in Isolation (E-WRI) ensures that students see each word for a controlled amount of time. For the paper-and-pencil version of Word Recognition in Isolation to be implemented with fidelity, each assessor needs to be confident that he/she is showing words in a similar manner (exposing each word for about one second or less). Consistently utilizing E-WRI with each student greatly reduces inconsistencies in administration. Technically, the online score entry system will allow an assessor to use E-WRI for one student, and the paper-and-pencil version for another student. However, only one assessment method can be utilized per student during each assessment window.

Level A Tasks

My student had two oral reading scores at the independent level for first and second grade texts, but scores were only instructional on the word lists for those grades. Why isn't his reading level "independent," based on the oral reading scores?

The definition of the independent level in reading is that level on which a student functions with speed and accuracy guaranteed. If a student is truly independent at a given level, he or she should be equally accurate in or out of context.

What is the difference between a student who is independent at a grade level and a student who is listed as instructional between two grade levels?

A student who is listed as instructional between two grade levels (i.e. between 1st and 2nd) has scores that fall within the instructional range (90-97%) at both levels, but not independent (higher than 98%) at either one, meaning that the student will need guided support for reading at either level but will achieve the fastest growth when this level is used for instruction. For students who were assigned only an independent level (able to read and comprehend this level with no support), there was not enough information collected to determine an instructional level, which is presumably achieved with a higher level passage.

Why is a student listed as a 2nd grade reader when his 2nd grade Word Recognition in Isolation (WRI) score was 15-17 but his 2nd grade Oral Reading in Context Score (ORC) was below 90%?

This is a highly unlikely scenario and happened only 1.4% of the time in statewide administration of PALS 1-3 in Fall 2001. Ninety-nine percent of the time, if a student scored an instructional-level score on the 2nd grade WRI (15-17 words correct), the student scored an instructional or independent ORC score at the end of 2nd grade level as well. For students who achieved a WRI instructional level at the 1st grade level, 96% of them scored at an instructional or independent level on the 1st grade ORC. For those who scored an instructional level on the 3rd grade level 99% also scored at an instructional or independent level on the 3rd grade ORC. So, with a WRI score at the instructional level, in most cases, the ORC is either at an instructional (90-97% accuracy) or independent (98-100% accuracy) level as well. In a few instances where these two scores conflict, the WRI score is the default since this task predicts overall reading level better than any other measure.

The PALS passages end at sixth grade. What do I do about students who read above the sixth grade?

To determine the reading level of a student reading above the sixth grade, we recommend using passages from the PALS Plus 1-8.

Do the Oral Reading passages represent beginning, middle, or end-of-the-year text?

The primer passage is typical of beginning first grade material. The first, second and third grade passages represent end-of-the-year text.

Can I redirect a child if they skip an entire line when reading?

Yes, if the child skips an entire line of text when reading, stop the child and re-direct him or her to the correct place. Do not count this as an error.

When administering Oral Reading in Context, do I need to determine a frustration, instructional, and independent level for each student?

Oral Reading in Context requires administering one passage per student. This passage is determined based on a student's performance on Word Recognition in Isolation (see p. 20 of 1 – 3 Administration and Scoring Guide for more information). Word Recognition in Isolation is a strong indication of a student's instructional level, thus the resulting required passage is likely very close to or is the student's instructional level. Finding the instructional level is important because this level offers a "just right" balance of supports and challenges to maximize the student's growth when used in instruction with the teacher. Therefore, there are occasions (such as when the student's reading rate is very slow, comprehension is poor, or accuracy is low) when a teacher might opt to administer another passage, or even two, in order to arrive at the best instructional level for that student.

Level B Tasks

Why does PALS only assess lowercase alphabet recognition? What about uppercase letters?

Based on research of over 50,000 kindergarten and first grade children, a ceiling effect was found on upper-case letter recognition (very few errors were made). A ceiling effect was not found for lower-case letter recognition. Therefore, lowercase letter recognition is a better indicator of a child's alphabet knowledge.

Can I tell the child the name of the letter when giving the Letter Sound task? For instance, can I say, "What sound does 'M' make?"

You should not tell the student the letter name when administering the Letter Sound task. Many letter names sound similar to the sounds they represent. Therefore, providing such assistance would not yield an accurate measure of the child's letter sound knowledge.

Why are uppercase letters used for the Letter Sound task?

Many lower-case letters have geometrically similar shapes and are easily confused by young children (i.e. b/d, p/q). Upper-case letters are less confusing in this aspect, and will provide a more accurate measure of the child's letter sound knowledge.

Level C Tasks

What is the rationale for Level C tasks?

Research has shown that a student's performance on blending tasks predicts how well s/he will read several years later (Wagner, Torgeson, Laughon, Simmons, & Rashotte, 1993)[1]. Research has also shown that difficulty with sound-to-letter, or segmenting, tasks is related to difficulty with alphabetic retrieval, and might inhibit written word learning. Level C tasks are provided to give in-depth information about what basic literacy skills may be lacking in students who are not meeting PALS benchmarks for their grade level, so that these specific needs can be addressed through instruction and practice.

I have students who were not required to take the Level B or C tasks, but I suspect they might have a problem with alphabetics or phonemic awareness. What can I do?

Please feel free to give Level B or Level C tasks to any of your students. Although you will not be required to report these scores, you can use this information for instructional purposes and can enter the scores in your PALS Online account for that student.

1   Wagner, R. K., Torgesen, J. K., Laughon, P., Simmons, K., & Rashotte, C. A. (1993). Development of young readers' phonological processing abilities. Journal of Educational Psychology, 85, 83–103.