

PALS: Accommodations

PALS and Students with Disabilities

Section 1. Administration of PALS to Students with Disabilities

Do students with disabilities participate in PALS?

All Wisconsin students, including those with disabilities participate in PALS. Per Wis. Stats 118.016(1), each pupil enrolled in 4-year-old kindergarten to second grade must be screened for literacy fundamentals (as measured with PALS). There is no alternate version of the screener, and this statute does not include any provisions for opt-out or exemption.

Who administers PALS to a student with disabilities?

PALS is a tool to be used for planning a student's reading and literacy instruction. Most 4K - 2nd grade students with disabilities who are placed in the least restrictive environment with access to general education curriculum and standards will receive their reading and literacy instruction in the regular education setting. Classroom teachers who are primarily responsible for literacy instruction should administer PALS to all of their students, including students with disabilities. In some unique situations, such as when a child is only in a special education setting for instruction, it may be reasonable for a special education teacher to either administer PALS alone or collaboratively with the classroom teacher, in accordance with accommodations and modifications specified in the IEP. PALS administration by other school staff members who are not primarily responsible for a student's literacy instruction (e.g. paraprofessional, school psychologist, social worker) should be discouraged. Schools and districts should make every effort to screen all students, including students with disabilities.

What if a student is unable to complete the PALS screener?

DPI recognizes that for a very small percentage of students, not all PALS tasks will be accessible or appropriate due to the given nature of that individual student's disability. In these situations, teachers should administer the assessment but use their professional judgment about whether it is appropriate to continue screening if the student does not respond. If a teacher elects to discontinue screening, the student score for the section should reflect the actual number of points the student earned when the screener was being administered. It is important to remember that the purpose of PALS is to provide information to be used to guide instructional planning and practice. Administrators and educators should use multiple measures when making instructional planning decisions. Using results from PALS along with other formal and informal assessments of student performance will allow educators to make sound decisions about instructional needs and supports for a given student.

How does the administration of PALS address the need to individualize the assessment for young children?

PALS was designed to be flexible, responsive, and accessible to meet the wide range of needs inherently found in young children. PALS includes allowable practices for administration that are built into the assessment. Teachers can use these allowable practices with any student during a PALS administration. There are no time limits for any of the PALS tasks. Students with disabilities will access PALS through these allowable practices similar to their non-disabled peers. The use of these allowable practices does not require an IEP team meeting or IEP documentation.

Where can I receive information on how to administer PALS to students with vision and/or hearing impairments?

To request Braille or Deaf/Hard of Hearing PALS materials, contact Duane Dorn at DPI at 608-267-1069 or duane.dorn@dpi.wi.gov.

Section 2. PALS and IEPs

What accommodations and/or modifications may be necessary for PALS for students with disabilities? What is the difference between "allowable practices" as used by PALS, "accommodations" and "modifications" for students with disabilities?

A standard administration of PALS can include the use of many allowable practices. Allowable practices are support options that are already built into the design of PALS, which enable optimal access for all students including students with disabilities. The use of these practices does not change the construct being measured and does not require documentation in the IEP. Educators should always consider the use of allowable practices prior to considering the need for accommodations or modifications for students with disabilities. Some PALS allowable practices that are available to ALL students, including students with disabilities, are listed below.

Examples of allowable practices (still considered standard administration):

- Multiple testing sessions
- Breaks between tasks
- Scheduling assessment for optimal times
- One-on-one administration
- Small-group administration
- Assessing in an alternative location (e.g. special education room, library, etc.)
- Repeating directions, repeating practice items
- Students repeat directions, checking for understanding

For students who need support beyond these practices, an IEP team can consider accommodations. Accommodations do not change the construct being measured, but rather allow some students with disabilities equitable access to the material being presented. Accommodations should be consistent with day-to-day instructional methods. Accommodations will be documented in the student's IEP (using the I-9). Below are examples of accommodations that may be used for students with disabilities without risk of invalidating PALS scores.

Examples of **accommodations** (still considered **standard administration**):

- Visual aid (e.g., ruler, magnifier)
- Auditory aid (e.g., FM system, sound field system)

The use of modifications should only be addressed by a student's IEP team after careful consideration of both allowable practices and accommodations. Modifications change what is being assessed and result in a non-standardized administration. Modifications should be consistent with day-to-day instructional methods and should not be first introduced during screening. It is likely that the use of modifications will significantly limit information obtained during screening to guide instructional planning. Modifications must be documented in the student's IEP (using the I-9). Below are examples of modifications that may be used for students with disabilities, as determined by the individual student's IEP team.

Examples of **modifications** (considered **nonstandard administration**):

- Assistive technology for non-verbal students
- Braille text and altered instructions
- American Sign Language and altered instructions
- Use of a scribe
- Allowing non-verbal students to identify letters of the alphabet by pointing rather than vocalizing

How does an IEP team determine that there is a need for accommodations or modifications for a student with a disability who will be screened with PALS?

If a student only requires allowable practices, there is no need for an IEP meeting and no IEP documentation is required. IEP teams should always consider allowable practices that are available to all students, including students with disabilities, before consideration of accommodations or modifications. Because PALS is a tool to guide instruction, accommodations and modifications are considered supplementary aids, services, and supports provided to or on behalf of the student. Any accommodations and modifications used during a PALS administration should be consistent with those that are provided during a student's daily instruction and generally should not be introduced for the first time for the sake of screening.

If an IEP team determines there is a need for accommodations or modifications beyond the use of allowable practices, where is this documented in the IEP?

As mentioned above, allowable practices do not need to be documented in the IEP. Accommodations and modifications beyond allowable practices should be documented on I-9, IEP Summary, Supplementary Aids and Services. Supplementary aids and services must include frequency and amount and be stated so that the level of the LEA's commitment of resources is clear to parents and other IEP team members. The statement must be appropriate to the specific service and stated in a manner that can be understood by all involved in developing and implementing the IEP.

Because PALS is a tool for instructional purposes, it is not necessary to include documentation specific to PALS on I-7, IEP Participation in Statewide Assessments.

What does the I-7 (IEP Participation in Statewide Assessments) need to reflect about PALS?

Because PALS is a tool for instructional purposes, it is not necessary to include documentation specific to PALS on I-7, IEP Participation in Statewide Assessments.

PALS is a screener designed to provide information to immediately inform instruction. Although it is administered statewide, PALS is unique in that it is a state mandated universal screener, not a high-stakes summative assessment such as the Badger Exam (Smarter Balanced) or Dynamic Learning Maps.