

PALS-K FAQs

for Wisconsin public schools



General Information

How long does it take to administer PALS-K?

All PALS-K tasks, with the exception of the optional Word Recognition in Isolation task, are un-timed. Typically, PALS-K takes approximately 25-30 minutes per student to administer, though the amount of time will vary. When estimating the time that it will take, note that certain tasks should not be administered on the same day, and that some of the tasks can be administered to small groups of up to five children at a time.

How were the benchmarks established for PALS-K tasks?

The original PALS benchmarks were based on more than five years of research through the Book Buddies Tutorial Program. In addition, a committee of kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers reached consensus on reasonable benchmarks. PALS was then piloted across the state of Virginia, and the data were analyzed. 2001-2002 materials were pilot tested in Spring of 2001 with over 1700 students in the state of Virginia. The benchmarks have been revised based on analysis of statewide performance. Please note that the benchmarks change between the fall and spring screenings to reflect progress expected over the course of the school year. Midyear benchmarks represent a range of developmental levels as seen at that time of year.

Rhyme

Can I give either the Group Rhyme or the Individual Rhyme task?

Always administer the Group Rhyme task first, even if you are choosing to screen one child at a time. If the child is below the benchmark on the Group Rhyme task, then administer the Individual Rhyme task.

If a student takes both the Group Rhyme and the Individual Rhyme tasks, which score should be included in the Summed Score?

If a student does not meet the Group Rhyme benchmark, s/he should be given the Individual

Rhyme task. The child's score from the Individual Rhyme Task is used in the summed score, EVEN IF this score is lower than that of the Group Rhyme.

Beginning Sounds

Why am I not allowed to administer Group Rhyme and Group Beginning Sound on the same day?

Because the format of the Group Rhyme task is so similar to the format of the Group Beginning Sound task, we do not recommend administering the two tasks on the same day. This is to avoid confusion for the students. If you must administer the tasks on the same day, you may give one task at the beginning of the screening session and the other at the end of the session.

If a student takes both the Group Beginning Sound and the Individual Beginning Sound tasks, which score should be included in the Summed Score?

If a student does not meet the Group Beginning Sound benchmark, s/he should be given the Individual Beginning Sound task. The child's score from the Individual Beginning Sound task is used in the summed score, EVEN IF this score is lower than that of the Group Beginning Sound.

Alphabet Recognition

Why does PALS-K only assess lower-case alphabet recognition? What about upper-case letters?

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

What should I do if the child calls out letters in ABC order, regardless of the order presented on the alphabet sheet?

If a child proceeds to sing or recite the alphabet song, redirect his or her attention and show the student one letter at a time.

Letter Sounds

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 upper-case letters used for the Letter Sounds task?

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

How do I score reversals?

Reversals are counted as incorrect answers. For example, if a student provides a /b/ sound for a “d,” this is scored as incorrect. (This is not true for the spelling task, however; see below.)

Spelling

Can you explain the rationale for the way the spelling task is scored?

The ways in which young children attempt to spell the sounds they hear in words tells us a lot about what they know about letter-sound knowledge and word patterns. Looking at the way a student approaches spelling certain kinds of words, we are able to diagnose the child’s current stage of spelling development, and what s/he is ready to learn next (see descriptions of these stages in the “Resources for Instruction” section of your “Planning Instruction” tab in the PALS Online System). Spelling is also an excellent predictor of word recognition, word analysis, and word synthesis, and so provides relevant data for screening purposes. A student gets a point for each sound that is represented in simple, short-vowel words. Phonetically logical substitutions are given points, and an extra point is awarded if the word is spelled correctly. Please see the PALS-K Administration & Scoring Guide for a more detailed explanation of how to score the PALS-K spelling task.

How do I score letter and word reversals?

Letter reversals are counted as correct on the Spelling task (although not on the Letter Sounds task; see above). If a student spells a word correctly, but reverses the letters—the letters are flipped, but in the correct order—s/he would receive one point for each letter, as well as the bonus point. If the student reverses the entire word (i.e., “nav” for “van”), s/he would receive one point for each letter, but would not receive the bonus point.

Word Recognition

Why is the Word Recognition task optional?

Word recognition in isolation is not appropriate for every kindergartener, but can be given at a teacher’s discretion, decided on a child-by-child basis.

What is the rationale for the WRI task?

Word recognition in isolation is a strong predictor of instructional oral reading level. For students who have a firm concept of word and are beginning to read, the WRI task offers additional information about the level at which reading instruction could begin. It is recommended that teachers collect further information to confirm the instructional reading level.

Which children should complete the WRI task?

Although the word recognition task is optional, you can gain important information to guide instruction. This task yields helpful information for grouping and planning literacy instruction for any student who already has a concept of word, which is demonstrated by a score of 7-10 on the COW Word List sub-task. The word recognition task is also useful for comparing fall to spring progress.