

PALS 1-3 and Students with Disabilities

Is PALS considered a statewide assessment?

Yes, PALS is considered a statewide assessment. However, PALS is unique in that it is a state mandated universal screener, not a high-stakes summative assessment such as the WKCE or WAA-SwD. In April 2012, Wisconsin Act 166 was signed into law. The legislation requires the administration of an early literacy screener to all 5K students enrolled in Wisconsin district or charter schools; thus, there is no opt-out provision in the statute. Schools and districts should make every effort to screen all students, including students with disabilities. PALS was selected by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction not only because it met the legislative standards established by Act 166, but for its ability to provide educators with helpful information to guide instruction.

How does the administration of PALS 1-3 address the need to individualize the screener for young children?

PALS 1-3 was designed to be flexible, responsive, and accessible to meet the wide range of needs inherently found in children. The PALS 1-3 screener includes allowable practices for administration that are built into the screener. Teachers can use these allowable practices with any student during a PALS 1-3 administration. Students with disabilities will access PALS 1-3 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.

What is the difference between “allowable practices” as used by PALS 1-3 and “accommodations” and “modifications” for students with disabilities?

Allowable practices are supports that are built into the design of PALS 1-3 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.

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

PALS 1-3 allowable practices that are available to ALL students, including students with disabilities, include:

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

Accommodations also 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. Below are examples of accommodations that may be used for students with disabilities without risk of invalidating PALS 1-3 scores:

- 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.

Below are examples of modifications that may be used for students with disabilities, as determined by the individual student’s IEP team.

- Assistive technology for non-verbal students
- Braille text and altered instructions
- American Sign Language and altered instructions
- Use of a scribe

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 1-3?

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 1-3 is a screener 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 1-3 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 a reminder, 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 1-3 is a screener for instructional purposes, it is not necessary to include documentation specific to PALS 1-3 on I-7, IEP Participation in Statewide Assessments.

Who administers PALS 1-3 to a student with disabilities?

PALS 1-3 is a screener to be used for instructional planning around a student's reading and literacy instruction. Given the implications of least restrictive environment and access to general education curriculum and standards, most kindergarten students with disabilities will receive their reading and literacy instruction in the regular education setting. Classroom teachers who are primarily responsible for literacy instruction should administer PALS 1-3 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 the screener alone or collaboratively with the classroom teacher, in accordance with accommodations and modifications specified in the IEP. PALS 1-3 administration by other school staff that are not primarily responsible for a student's literacy instruction (e.g. paraprofessional, school psychologist, social worker) should be discouraged.

What if a student is unable to complete the PALS 1-3 screener?

For a very small percentage of students, not all PALS 1-3 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, the purpose of PALS 1-3 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 1-3 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.