

PALS General FAQs



Planning for Assessment

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

PALS provides recommended assessment windows that mirror those used during the piloting process when benchmarks were established. General guidelines are that schools begin screening two weeks after the start of the year for first-through-eighth grade students and six weeks after the start of the school year for PreK and K students. Teachers should complete the PALS assessment within any contiguous two-week period during that assessment window.

Why does PALS recommend waiting until six weeks after the beginning of the school year to begin assessing PreK and kindergarten students?

Waiting for six weeks after the start of the school year prior to begin assessment ensures that students have a chance to become acclimated to the school environment prior to the assessment. Waiting allows for a more accurate indication of student performance, limits the number of students who are mistakenly identified as needing extra services.

Are districts expected to assess all students with disabilities?

Please check with your PALS District Rep for guidelines for assessing students with disabilities.

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. Teachers should make sure that they are familiar with the provisions in a child's IEP before assessment begins and that the information regarding disability status and administration method on each Student Information page is updated as needed in the PALS Online System.

Who is required to take the PALS assessment, and what is the process for students who have specific assessment needs (for instance, students who have been absent, students who have special needs, students who are homeschooled, or students who are classified as English Language Learners or as having Limited English Proficiency)?

Your PALS District Representative is the person designated in your district to facilitate PALS implementation and communication regarding local or state policies. Please check with your PALS District Representative for information about any policies or resources your state or district may provide for students with specific assessment needs.

What else do PALS District Representatives do?

In addition to communicating local and state policies regarding PALS, PALS District Representatives may manage the ordering and distribution of PALS materials, update accounts in the PALS Online System, submit student data uploads for your district, communicate upcoming deadlines and information updates, and share PALS district-level reports. They may also be responsible for organizing PALS training and professional development.

Materials

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

Form A and Form B are equivalent forms. They assess the same skills, but use different items. For example, both forms assess spelling/phonics using the same tasks, but using different words. Schools use the same form per school year for both fall and spring. Schools can alternate forms in alternate years.

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

You will use the same Form in spring that you used in the fall. The Mid-Year assessments for PALS-K and PALS Plus are always Form C, and do not alternate. PALS-PreK has only one form for all three assessment windows.

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 are included in the PALS Teacher Set that is shipped to you. The only exception is the Mid-Year materials. These must be downloaded from the PALS Online System and printed at the district or 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 literacy instruction. Reading specialists and ELL teachers are encouraged to assist the primary classroom teacher, although they are not generally encouraged to conduct the assessment unless they are the ones planning most of the literacy instruction for the student.

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 require Mid-Year assessment or to use them only for certain students. 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 their students. 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 assessment. Furthermore, teachers are usually in the best position to make sure the data is immediately applied to literacy instruction.

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 before bringing the task to a close.

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

You must enter scores for all required tasks during fall and spring administration, since scores for required tasks are used to identify students who are considered to be at risk of developing difficulty with reading. During the Mid-Year assessment, each task is optional, unless otherwise specified by your school or district policy. Nonstandard administration allows for the omission of certain tasks when necessary, but is only permissible if it is designated in a student's IEP. Regardless of whether administration is standard or nonstandard, record a score of "0" only 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:

- Share how 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 included, the benchmark scores associated with each task, and the scores obtained by their child.
- Explain what specific information is yielded by these scores that helps you plan literacy instruction for the class and for their child.
- Identify the literacy instructional practices 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.
- 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.

What recommendations can I give parents for supporting their child's literacy development?

Encourage parents of emergent readers to read with their children, to sing songs and rhymes with their children, to 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.

Interpreting and Using PALS Results

I'm finished with my PALS assessments, 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 PALS online tutorials and courses, offered at pd.casenex.com, provide suggestions for how to use your data to effectively group students for instruction. In addition, instructional activities that are tailored to target specific literacy skills are embedded within the PALS Electronic Lesson Plans that are available for download from the PALS Online System (see the "Planning Instruction" tab on each teacher page). 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 PALS Online Score Entry & 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 to help you adjust or intensify instruction. It is important to note the tasks on which the student scored below or close to the Individual Task benchmarks, since these will be areas to target for instruction. Growth may be easily monitored at the task level for some skills. 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 Cow History, and Student Growth reports for both Oral Reading Spelling/Phonics. PALS Quick Checks can also be administered in between screening windows. Quick Checks are brief assessments that monitor a student's progress with a specific skill, and are ideal for students who are receiving literacy intervention.

What steps should our school take to provide interventions or services to students who are identified by PALS as being at risk for developing difficulty with reading?

Students who are identified as at risk for a reading difficulty should continue to receive targeted intervention, in addition to high-quality, differentiated literacy instruction. 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. The PALS Electronic Lesson Plans provide an evidence-based framework for small-group instruction, both for regular classroom instruction and for literacy intervention. Monitoring progress using Quick Checks can help in determining the focus, intensity and duration of instruction that targets specific literacy skills. Teachers will be able to access both the PALS Electronic Lesson Plans and PALS Quick Checks through the PALS Online Score Entry & Reporting System.

How do I use PALS data to plan instruction for students who are reading and spelling at or above grade level?

All students should be receiving literacy instruction that targets their instructional levels in reading and spelling. PALS provides diagnostic information for all students up through an eighth grade instructional reading level and for all developmental stages of spelling. This level of diagnostic data enables you to group all students appropriately for small-group differentiated instruction in reading and word study. Please refer to the PALS Electronic Lesson Plans and General Resources section, both on the Planning Instruction tab, for guidance in planning balanced literacy instruction for students at all instructional levels.