

PALS: Accommodations

PALS and Students with Disabilities

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

PALS is designed to be flexible, responsive, and accessible to meet the wide range of needs of young children. PALS includes allowable practices for administration that are built into the assessment. Teachers can use any of these allowable practices with any student if the practice is found to be helpful in determining the student's true literacy knowledge and abilities during PALS administration. There are no time limits for any of the PALS tasks. Most students with disabilities will access PALS through these allowable practices, similarly to their non-disabled peers. The use of these allowable practices does not require an IEP team meeting or IEP documentation.

For students whose needs require further support than the allowable practices provide, accommodations or modifications may be used with PALS to glean information about the student's current literacy knowledge.

What is the difference between "allowable practices" as used by PALS and "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 practices that are allowable for 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 providing accommodations. 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 are documented in the student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan). 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)

Modifications change what is being assessed and result in a nonstandard administration. Modifications must be documented in the student's IEP. The use of modifications of PALS are only considered by a student's IEP team after careful consideration of both allowable practices and accommodations, and should be consistent with day-to-day instructional methods, not introduced for the first time during assessment. Modifications may be used to obtain information to guide instructional planning (diagnostic and progress monitoring information) rather than for screening; the benchmarks will not be applied. The student's scores will show up on individual student reports, but not on group reports. See below for 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 during assessment.

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?

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.

Who administers PALS to a student with disabilities?

PALS is a tool for planning a student's reading and literacy instruction. Ideally, the person who plans that student's literacy instruction is the one to administer PALS, as this person is most likely to interpret the data accurately and use it immediately for instruction. Most 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 administer PALS either alone or collaboratively with the classroom teacher, in accordance with accommodations and modifications specified in the IEP. PALS administration by other school staff not primarily responsible for a student's literacy instruction (e.g. paraprofessional, school psychologist, social worker) should be discouraged.