

Using PALS Data

The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) is a research based screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring tool for students in grades 4K through 2nd grade. Wisconsin teachers use PALS to identify students at risk of developing reading difficulties, diagnose students' knowledge of literacy fundamentals, monitor progress, and plan instruction that targets students' needs. In addition to these uses, PALS data may play other roles in the education of students. This document identifies the main uses for PALS data and suggests situations where the use of PALS data should be limited.

*Appropriate Use of PALS Data

- **Identify students who haven't met the benchmark and are statutorily required to be provided intervention.** Students who do not meet the PALS benchmark are deemed to be at risk of reading difficulty and schools and districts are required to provide interventions or remedial services for these students. Wisconsin Statute 121.02(1)(c)3. states that the interventions or services provided the student shall be scientifically based and shall address all areas in which the student is deficient in a manner consistent with the state standards in reading and language arts.
- **Identify students who have met the benchmark but have one or more task scores below the benchmark and can benefit from intervention.** Students who meet the overall benchmark but miss one or more of the task benchmarks should be provided focused instruction in the areas where they were deficient.
- **Identify students who can be grouped together for small group instruction based on their similar performance.** Student data collected from PALS provides a direct means of matching literacy instruction to specific literacy needs. Small group instruction can be an effective classroom organization technique that could be utilized when groups of students present with similar needs.
- **Identify areas where overall classroom instruction or curriculum should be adjusted based on student performance.** If an entire classroom struggles with one or more tasks, the PALS results could be used by the teacher as a tool to guide and adjust future instruction. PALS provides a variety of lesson plan options that can be used to improve literacy instruction.
- **Using PALS data as a component of a Student/School Learning Objective (SLO).** PALS data are one source for developing SLOs that can be used for educator evaluation. For more information on developing and implementing SLOs go to: <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov/resources/slos>.

* PALS PreK does not include fall performance benchmarks for 4-year-old kindergarten students. PALS results may still be used to identify students who can be grouped together for small group instruction, identify areas where overall classroom instruction and curriculum should be adjusted, and as a component of a student/school learning objective.

Limitations with PALS Data

- **PALS data should not be used as an overall accountability measure.** PALS results are designed to identify students who are in danger of falling behind in their acquisition of literacy skills. PALS results are not intended to identify overall student reading proficiency. Overall student proficiency is not calculated until 3rd grade when students complete the Badger Exam. PALS is also not designed to predict Badger Exam performance but instead to identify students who are in danger of falling behind in their acquisition of literacy skills.
- **PALS results should not be used to make high stakes decisions about a school.** PALS data is not included on the school report cards as PALS is designed as a screener and not an overall summative measure of a school's performance.
- **PALS results should not be used to determine the overall effectiveness of a school or program.** Statements such as “our program is effective because 90% of our students meet the PALS end-of-year benchmark” are misleading because they fail to account for how much progress students made in the program. Also, mean score data for schools should not be used in an attempt to rank order school performance as the primary purpose of PALS is identifying individual student needs and not determining overall school performance.
- **PALS results should not be the only tool used to judge the overall effectiveness of a teacher or curriculum.** There are many variables that should be considered when evaluating overall effectiveness of a teacher or curriculum. Guidance on determining overall teacher effectiveness can be found at: <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov/teacher/teacher-evaluation>.
- **PALS results should not be the only data used when making retention or special education referral decisions.** PALS results should not be used as the sole reason for retaining a child in a grade level or for a special education referral. Grade level retention and special education referrals require more data than is available from administering PALS.
- **PALS data is insufficient to determine whether students are meeting grade-level expectations.** Students that meet the PALS benchmark are not guaranteed to be meeting grade-level expectations. The PALS screener is designed to identify students who are at risk of developing reading difficulties. It is not intended to identify overall student reading proficiency as PALS measures only some components of reading (primarily reading foundational skills such as concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency). More information from a variety of sources needs to be gathered to determine whether students are indeed meeting grade-level expectations.
- **PALS results from successive administrations should not be used as a growth measure for an individual student.** PALS is not designed as a growth tool because PALS results do not represent the full range of student performance. Many students are likely to perform above the highest threshold of performance and as a result any growth results derived from PALS would be limited.