PEER ASSISTED LEARNING STRATEGIES (PALS): GRADES K & 1

Research Shows
- Students in kindergarten benefit from decoding and word recognition instruction. *(Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005)*
- K-PALS promotes early reading skills in kindergarten students, including those with disabilities. *(Fuchs, Fuchs, Al Otaiba, Thompson, Yen, McMaster, Svenson, & Yang, 2001)*
- Students receiving K-PALS out performed students in the teacher-led instruction and control groups on a measure of word reading. *(Fuchs, Fuchs, Thompson, Svenson, Yen, Al Otaiba, Yang, McMaster, Prentice, Kazdan, & Saenz, 2001)*

K-PALS Activities
K-PALS sessions typically last 20–30 minutes and are conducted at least three times per week. A session consists of two types of activities: Sound Play and Sounds and Words. The table below highlights the reading games or tasks for each activity and the skills they address.

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K-PALS sessions are highly structured and follow a prescribed sequence:

1. The teacher conducts whole-group instruction in which he or she leads the students through the *Sound Play* activity. Only one of the five *Sound Play* games (listed in the table above) will be implemented during a session.
2. The teacher briefly introduces the *Sounds and Words* lesson. A new sound is introduced in every other lesson. With the exception of “x,” all letter sounds are introduced.
3. The student pairs complete the *Sounds and Words* lesson.

The sounds introduced in *Sound Play* activities often correspond to those that will be practiced in the *Sounds and Words* activities. In the examples below, note that the corresponding *Sound Play* and *Sounds and Words* lessons focus on the same sounds (i.e., “at” and “an”).

**First Sound Game**
Skill: Phonological Awareness – Identifying first sounds in words

Implementation Procedure: Each lesson page features pictures of common animals and objects. The teacher (i.e., Coach) says the name of the object(s) on the left-hand side of a given row followed by the first sound of those object(s). The Reader (i.e., student) selects the object in the right-hand column that has the same beginning sound and says its beginning sound.

Example: In the example to the right, the Coach would say, “*Apple, /a/, alligator, /a*. What starts with /a/, hat or ax?” The Reader should then answer, “*Ax, /a*. Note: The teacher may reinforce the skill by saying, “*Good. Let’s review the /a/ words. Apple /a/, alligator /a/, ax /a/*.”

Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach says the correct word and pronounces its first sound.

**Last Sound Game**
Skill: Phonological Awareness – Identifying last sounds in words

Implementation Procedure: Each lesson page features pictures of common animals and objects. The Coach says the name of the first two objects in a given row followed by the last sound in that word. The Reader then selects the object from the right-hand column that has the same ending sound, speaking the word.

Example: In the example to the right, the Coach would say, “Cat, /t/, boat, /t/. What ends with /t/: apple or foot?” The Reader should respond by saying, “Foot, /t/.”

Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach says the correct word and pronounces its last sound.

**Rhyming Game**
Skill: Phonological Awareness – Rhyming

Implementation Procedure: This activity requires the Reader to decide which word in a pair belongs to the same family as two previous words.

Example: In the example to the right, the Coach would say, “Cat, mat. What rhymes with cat and mat, bat or carrot?” The Reader should answer “Bat.”

Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach says the correct word.

**Clap the Syllables**

Skill: Phonological Awareness – Segmenting words

Implementation Procedure: Each lesson page features pictures of common animals and objects. The Reader claps the number of syllables in a given word.

Example: In the example to the right, the Coach says, “Clap mitten.” and the Reader responds, “mit [clap] ten [clap].”

Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach claps for each syllable.

**Guess My Word Game**

Skill: Phonological Awareness – Segmenting and blending words
Implementation Procedure: Each lesson page features pictures of common animals and objects. The Coach points to the boxes on the lesson sheet and says each corresponding sound. The Reader points to the boxes, says each sound, and pronounces the word. Example: In the example to the right, the Coach points to the boxes and says /c/ /a/ /t/. The Reader repeats the process and then pronounces the word “cat.”
Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach points to the boxes near the picture, pronounces each sound, and then says the word.

What Sound?
Skill: Decoding
Implementation Procedure: For each lesson, individual target sounds appear in a box with a key picture that has been introduced in the Sound Play activities. The Coach points to each letter and asks, “What sound?” The Reader responds. The Coach praises the Reader at each star (e.g., “Good job.”).
Note: A new sound is introduced every other lesson.

Example: In the example to the right, the Coach begins by pointing to the letter “a” in the top row and asks, “What sound?” The Reader responds /a/.
Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach corrects the error by saying, “Stop. That sound is __. What sound?” After the Reader responds with the correct answer, the Coach says, “Good. Go back and read that line again.”

What Word?
Skill: Sight word recognition
Implementation Procedure: The Coach points to the sight word on a lesson page and asks, “What word?” and the Reader responds.

Example: In this example, the Coach begins by pointing to the word “I” and asking, “What word?” The Reader responds with “I.” They continue this process for each word.

Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach corrects the error by saying, “Stop. That word is _____ What word?”

After the Reader responds with the correct answer, the Coach says, “Good. Go back and read that line again.”

**Sound Boxes**

**Skill:** Decoding simple words

**Implementation Procedure:** Students learn that words can be sounded out using letter sounds practiced in their earlier lessons. Each letter in a word appears in a sound box. The Coach says, “Read it slowly.” The Reader slowly reads the sound of each letter while touching the letter in each box. The Coach then says, “Sing it and read it.” The Reader “sings” the word by blending the sounds together. The Reader then reads the word quickly.

Example: In the example to the right, the Coach says, “Read it slowly.” The Reader touches each letter in the word “cat” and says the sounds /c/ /a/ /t/. The Coach says, “Sing it and read it.” The Reader sings the word “cat” and then reads the word quickly.

Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach corrects the error by saying, “Stop. That word is ______ [slowly blending the letter sounds, for example “mmmaaat”]. What word?”

After the Reader responds with the correct answer, the Coach says, “Good. Go back and read that line again.”

**Reading Sentences and Books**

**Skill:** Decoding and word recognition

**Implementation Procedure:**

- Sentences contain the decodable words and sight words that the students have practiced. During sentence reading, the Coach says, “Read the sentence,” and the Reader points to each word as he or she reads.
- Books are selected by the teacher and should contain decodable words as well as sight words that the students have already learned. The Coach reads first, stopping at the end of each sentence. Then the Reader reads the same sentence. This process continues until the dyad has completed the book.
Example: In this example, the Coach says, “Read the sentence.” The Reader points to each word, beginning with “Tom,” as he or she reads.

Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach corrects the Reader by saying, “Stop. That word is ______. What word?”

After the Reader responds, the Coach says, “Good. Go back and read that line again.”

PALS Activities for First-Grade Students
The first-grade teachers at Washington Elementary are excited to learn that PALS for first-grade is highly structured: The lessons are sequential, and the skills learned are cumulative. Additionally, it picks up where K-PALS leaves off. More specifically, PALS for first grade helps students to:

- Decode and comprehend text
- Read more fluently
- Perform better on standardized and informal reading tests

Research Shows
- PALS can improve the fluency and comprehension skills of first-grade students. *(Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005)*
- Students participating in first-grade PALS experience greater growth in reading performance than do students who receive traditional classroom instruction. *(Calhoon, Al Otaiba, Greenberg, King, & Avalos, 2006)*

First-Grade PALS Activities
First-grade PALS sessions typically last about 40 minutes and are conducted at least three times per week. The sessions begin with approximately five minutes of whole-group instruction during which the teacher introduces new sounds, sight words, and vocabulary words (i.e., rocket words) and conducts a segmenting and blending activity.

Following this brief introduction, peer pairs work on two main activities: *Sounds and Words* and *Partner Reading*. The table below highlights the reading games or tasks for each activity and the skills they address.

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<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Games and Tasks</th>
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<td><strong>Sound and Words</strong></td>
<td><strong>Phonological Awareness and Decoding</strong></td>
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<td>21 minutes</td>
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<td><strong>Sounding Out</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Stories</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Speed Game</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Partner Reading</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fluency and Word Recognition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reading Books</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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</table>

**Saying Sounds**
Skill: Letter-sound correspondence  
Time: 3 minutes
Implementation Procedure: In each lesson, the new sound or sounds appear inside boxes. The Coach points to each letter and asks, “What sound?” The Reader responds.

Example: In the example to the right, the Coach begins by pointing to the letter “a” and asks, “What sound?” The Reader says /a/.
Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach corrects the error by saying, “Stop. That sound is __. What sound?”

After the Reader responds with the correct answer, the Coach says, “Start the line again.”

**Sounding Out**
Skill: Blending
Time: 5 minutes
Implementation Procedure: With each word in the lesson, the Coach prompts the Reader to “Sound it out.” The Reader does so, and the Coach says, “Read it fast.”

*Note: Each lesson contains eight to ten words that the teacher introduced during the whole group blending and segmenting activity.*

Example: In this example, the Coach says, “Sound it out,” and the Reader says /a/ /t/. The Coach then says, “Read it fast.” The Reader says “at.”

Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach corrects the error by saying, “Stop. That word is ______ (sounds out word). ______ (reads word quickly). Sound it out. Read it fast.”

Once the Reader sounds it out, the Coach says, “Start the line again.”

**Sight Words**
Skill: Sight word recognition
Time: 4 minutes
Implementation Procedure: During each lesson, the Coach points to the first word and says, “Read the words.” The Reader responds.

*Note: Beginning with Lesson 20, sight words are grouped into short phrases in order to promote fluency.*
Example: In this example, the Coach points to the phrase “to see one” and says, “Read the words.” The Reader says the phrase and continues until all phrases have been read.
Corrective Feedback Procedure: If the Reader makes a mistake, the Coach corrects the error by saying, “Stop. That word is ______. What word?”
The Reader pronounces the word, and the Coach says, “Start the line again.”

**Stories**
Skill: Decoding and sight word recognition
Time: 5 minutes
Implementation Procedure: Once the teacher has introduced new and reviewed the previously introduced rocket words, he or she models how to read the story quickly and correctly while the students follow along on their lesson sheets. The Coach then prompts the Reader to “Read the story.”

Example: In this example, two rocket words appear on the right side of the page. The Coach says, “Read the story,” and the Reader begins by reading the title then proceeds through the entire story.
Corrective Feedback Procedure:
- If the Reader gets stuck, the Coach silently counts to three before saying the word. The Reader then repeats the word and continues reading the story.
- If the Reader says the wrong word, the Coach says the correct one. The Reader then repeats the word and continues reading the story.

**Speed Game**  
Skill: Fluency and Word Recognition  
Time: 6 minutes

![Speed Game Card](image)

Implementation Procedure: At the end of each *Sounds and Words* lesson, each student reads the same word list or story three times, always starting at the same place. For approximately the first half of the lessons, the students read sight words and have 30 seconds to complete each trial. Later in the year, the students read stories, still having 30 seconds to complete each trial. The students’ goal during the second and third trials is to increase the number of words read.  
Corrective Feedback Procedure:

- If the Reader gets stuck, the Coach silently counts to three before saying the word.
- If the Reader says the wrong word, the Coach says the correct one. The Reader then repeats the word and continues reading the story.

**Reading Books**  
Skill: Fluency and word recognition  
Time: 10 minutes

Implementation Procedure: Using a book provided by the teacher, the Coach begins to read, pointing to each word as he does so. Next, the Reader reads the same page. Once the pair has completed the book, they switch roles. After each member of the dyad has read the book two times (four times, total, per dyad), the teacher gives them a new book.

*Note: Partner Reading is introduced around week 10 (i.e., Lesson 30).*

Corrective Feedback Procedure:

- If the Reader gets stuck, the Coach silently counts to three before saying the word. The Reader then repeats the word and continues reading the story.

• If the Reader says the wrong word, the Coach says the correct one. The Reader then repeats the word and continues reading the story.

**Pair Students**

The teachers at Washington Elementary have learned that PALS systematically pairs students so that each dyad consists of one higher-performing reader and one lower-performing reader. For both kindergarten and first grade, the teacher ranks his or her students based on reading performance. Because students in early grades have limited reading skills, many researchers and teachers use the Rapid Letter Naming (RLN) test, a measure of letter recognition and a fairly reliable measure of future reading performance. However, the method of pairing students for each of these two grade levels is somewhat different. See the examples below to learn more about each.

**Kindergarten**

The teacher pairs the highest-performing student with the lowest-performing one. The teacher then pairs the next highest-performing student with the next lowest-performing student, and so on until all students have been paired.

**First grade**

The teacher divides the rank-ordered list in half and pairs the top high-performing student with the top low-performing one (and this might include pairing a student with a disability [e.g., learning disability in reading, intellectual disability] with one without a disability). The process continues until all of the students have been paired.

Students remain with the same partner for approximately four weeks. After that time, each of them is paired with another student based on performance as well as a number of other pertinent considerations, such as the students’ social skills and their individual learning needs. Of course, student pairs may be changed at any time if a pairing proves unsuccessful. The table below outlines several reasons that student pairs might need to be altered, either temporarily or permanently.

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<th>Reason</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<td>Student academic needs</td>
<td>The discrepancy in the students’ abilities is too large to accommodate learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior issues</td>
<td>The student pair has difficulty following instructions and the PALS rules, creating a disruptive environment.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Student incompatibility | The stronger reader does not work well with the struggling one, showing disrespect or offering inappropriate feedback.
---|---
Absenteeism | One student is absent for the day.

**For Your Information**
It is often the case that a classroom contains an odd number of students, leaving one student without a partner. In such an instance, teachers may need to create a group of three students (a triad). When such a grouping becomes necessary, teachers might wish to keep the following considerations in mind:

- Each student can serve as the Coach for one of the three activities and the Reader for the remaining two.
- One student with average or above reading and social skills can be assigned to a triad but serve as a “floater,” filling in for other students when they are absent.
- It is better to place higher- or average-performing students in triads than it is to assign struggling readers to these groups because students in triads have fewer opportunities to practice their reading.

**Prepare Materials**
Before they train their students to use PALS, the teachers at Washington Elementary want to be certain that all their materials and resources are in place. They are excited to learn that practically all of the materials they need to implement PALS in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms are contained in their respective manuals.

*Note: These manuals can be ordered through the PALS Website: [http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/](http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/). A nominal fee covers printing and shipping.*

**Kindergarten Materials**
During her evaluation of the K-PALS manual, Mrs. Doris, a kindergarten teacher, finds that there are 72 Sound Play (i.e., phonological awareness) and 72 corresponding Sounds and Words (i.e., decoding lessons). In addition, there are four introductory lessons, scripts for the lessons, a K-PALS rules poster, a student assignment chart, and a point sheet. Aside from the materials in the manual, Mrs. Doris needs to make certain that she has:

- A timer to monitor the time for each activity
- Folders to hold each pair’s K-PALS lessons and point sheets
- Books (later in the year)

First-Grade Materials
Ms. Chandler, a first-grade teacher, discovers that the first-grade PALS manual includes 68 teacher-directed lessons and 70 Sounds and Words student lessons. Much like the kindergarten teacher, Ms. Chandler notices that the manual includes a Speed Game Star Chart, and a point sheet. In addition to these materials, Ms. Chandler will need:

- A timer to monitor the time for each activity
- A calculator to tally team points
- Folders for each pair’s PALS lessons and point sheets
- Books of various reading levels for Partner Reading (later in the year)
- A Speed Game incentives bag

Because most of her first-grade students have already or will soon develop basic reading skills, Ms. Chandler also displays three items—recommended by the manual—on her PALS bulletin board. Teachers can opt to use the versions provided in the PALS manual, to create their own personalized versions, or to use those created by Ms. Chandler. Click on each of the items below for a printable copy.

As she prepares materials for her students, Ms. Chandler ponders the type of books she will choose for the pairs. She now knows that:

- Books should reflect the reading level of the lower-performing reader (i.e., the weaker reader should be able to read the text with no more than 10 errors for every 100 words).
- Repeated reading of a book is beneficial because it leads to greater reading fluency and comprehension. However, because it is important to expose the students to a variety of books, books should be redistributed among pairs at a minimum of once per week.
- Books should be relatively short so that students have an opportunity to read through a book at least twice during the Partner Reading activity.

**Train Students**

Before they can effectively implement PALS, the kindergarten and first-grade teachers at Washington Elementary must first ensure that their students are adequately trained. Reviewing the PALS manuals, they learn that the training is divided into multiple sessions, which allows the teachers to gradually introduce their students to the rules, classroom procedures, and peer-mediated activities. They also observe that the training for each grade level is different.

**K-PALS Training**

In the case of K-PALS, training consists of four introductory *Sound Play* lessons and eight training lessons in which the teacher models the PALS rules, activities, and correction procedures in a whole-group format. Initially, the teacher serves as Coach while the students act as Readers and respond to the Coach’s prompts in unison. Gradually, the teacher allows opportunities for individual students to act as the Coach in this whole-class format. Finally, the students begin to work in pairs, tutoring each other while the teacher monitors and provides corrective feedback. View the video below to observe a teacher introducing K-PALS procedures to her kindergarten classroom (time: 1:47).

**First-Grade PALS Training**

The first-grade teachers will spend the first two weeks of PALS training their students. These trainings will occur four times each week and last between 15 and 30 minutes. During these two weeks, the students will learn the PALS procedures and how to perform the *Sounds and Words* activities. Once training is complete and the students have implemented PALS independently for

at least eight weeks, the teacher introduces Partner Reading. The training for this activity should occur over two sessions and will take approximately 15 minutes per session.

**Training Procedures**

The teachers of Washington Elementary decide to train their students during the regularly scheduled reading period. In order to successfully teach their students about PALS, they make sure to:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1. Discuss the PALS approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teachers introduce PALS, highlighting its advantages and benefits. They explicitly explain what the strategy is for, how it is used, and under what circumstances it is effective. In addition, the teachers:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Define terms that are specific to PALS (e.g., Coach, Reader, peer pairing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explain rules that apply during the implementation of PALS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Describe the procedures for a PALS session</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Model PALS activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teachers model the set-up procedures and each reading activity. Additionally, through presentations and role-playing, the teachers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate the role of the Coach, most importantly how to provide corrective feedback, while the students perform the role of Reader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highlight appropriate social behaviors for students working in pairs</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Allow time for guided practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once the students understand the basic principles of PALS, the teachers allow them to practice what they have learned. During this time, the teachers guide their students through the process as they:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in each of the PALS reading activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice gathering and putting away their materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rehearse moving to partners, if needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Provide opportunities for independent practice

When students have become more familiar with each of the activities, the teachers monitor their practice and provide instructional feedback. They make certain that the students:

- Perform the activities correctly
- Provide appropriate corrective feedback
- Maintain positive social interactions
- Follow the PALS rules

Implement with Class

After they’ve been trained, students should be ready to independently implement PALS. Though students in both grades will engage in PALS sessions three times a week, the length of those sessions varies: kindergarten sessions are 20 minutes, and first-grade sessions are 35–40 minutes. (This includes both the teacher-led and peer-partner activities.) In order to create a consistent and predictable schedule for their students, the teachers at Washington Elementary conduct PALS sessions during their daily reading times. They implement PALS at the same time and on the same days each week. For example, Mrs. Doris conducts PALS from 10:00 to 10:20 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

As for the actual implementation, several notable differences between the two grade levels regarding teacher-led instruction, student responsibilities, and implementation tips are worth exploring. Click the links below for more details.

K-PALS Implementation

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<th>Teacher-led Instruction</th>
<th>K-PALS Implementation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During each session, the teacher leads the students through the Sound Play activity, which may address sound identification, rhyming, blending sounds and segmenting words. During each session, the teacher introduces the Sounds and Words activity, reminding students about K-PALS procedures they</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher completes the lesson sheet at least one time acting as the Coach while the students (i.e., Readers) respond in unison.

### Student Implementation

**Roles:**
- The higher-performing student:
  - Acts as Coach first (to provide guidance)
  - Gets and returns PALS folders
- The lower-performing student:
  - Serves as Reader first
  - Gets and returns pencils

**Procedures:**
- Each time the Reader completes a *Sounds and Words* task, the Coach marks one happy face. Then the students switch roles and repeat the process.
- The students repeat each task at least four times (i.e., two times per student).

### Implementation Tips

The *Sound Play* and *Sounds and Words* lessons correspond and should be completed in the same session. Because students’ ability levels vary, pairs may work on different lessons. However, because the teacher-led *Sound Play* activities correspond to the *Sound and Word* activities, it is recommended that most students work on the same lesson.

### First-Grade PALS Implementation

**First-Grade PALS Implementation**

**Teacher-led Instruction**
- During each session, the teacher conducts approximately five minutes of whole-group instruction to:
  - Introduce new sounds, sight words, and rocket words,
  - Review old rocket words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Implementation</th>
<th>Roles:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The higher-performing student:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acts as Coach first</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reads first during the <em>Partner Reading</em> activity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The lower-performing student:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serves as Reader first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reads first in the <em>Sounds and Words</em> games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures:</td>
<td>Each time the Reader completes a section of the lesson sheet, the Coach marks one happy face and five points. Then the students switch roles and repeat the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When the Reader completes a book, the Coach marks five points. Then the students switch roles and repeat the process. The students read the book at least four times (i.e., two times per student).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Implementation Tips    | Because students’ ability levels will vary, pairs may work on different lessons. However, it is recommended that most students work on the same lesson. |

**Monitoring**  
During every session, teachers should take care to spend time monitoring each student pair. As the teacher moves about the classroom, he or she should provide corrective feedback and remind students to use the correction procedures. During this time, the teacher may award bonus points to those students who work together in a cooperative manner, stay on task, and use PALS procedures correctly.

**Research Shows**  
- Teachers and students are able to implement the PALS approach with fidelity.  
  
  *(Fuchs, Fuchs, Thompson, Al Otaiba, Yen, Yang, Braun, & O’Connor, 2001; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005)*  
- Teachers report that:

• They enjoyed implementing PALS and were very satisfied with the approach. 
  (Calhoon, Al Otaiba, Greenberg, King, & Avalos, 2006; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005)
• Their students worked hard during PALS sessions. 
  (Calhoon, Al Otaiba, Greenberg, King, & Avalos, 2006)
• K-PALS fit nicely into the “existing language arts program and required little 
  preparation time.” (McMaster, Kung, Han, & Cao, 2008)
• Students in PALS classrooms, report that they enjoy the activities, like working in pairs, 
  and believe that they can read better. 
  (Calhoon, Al Otaiba, Greenberg, King, & Avalos, 2006)

Motivate Students and Maintain Interest
The primary-grade teachers at Washington Elementary know that the majority of their 
kindergarten and first-grade students are beginning readers. They realize that they will need to 
motivate these young students to correctly implement PALS and will have to work to maintain 
their interest, especially as the year progresses. They also recognize that the students will benefit 
from frequent encouragement. As they read through the PALS manuals, they notice that the 
motivational component varies for each grade level.

Kindergarten

In K-PALS, the lesson sheets contain two types of built-in motivators and prompts. First, the 
What Sound? section of the lesson sheet contains stars. When the Reader encounters a star, he or 
she pauses, and the Coach offers praise. Second, each section of the lesson sheet contains four 
happy faces. The student pair completes each section four times, twice per student, and each time 
a Reader completes a section of a lesson, the Coach circles one happy face (i.e., one point).

The teacher also gives each student pair a point sheet. As the teacher monitors the students 
performing the PALS activities, he or she can also mark bonus points on the students’ point sheet for:
• On-task behavior
• Cooperation
• Correct use of K-PALS procedures

First-Grade

As with the K-PALS sheets, the first-grade PALS lesson sheets contain stars to prompt the Coach to praise the Reader. Also, each time a Reader completes a section of a lesson, the Coach colors or circles one happy face, along with five points (see the lesson sheet on the right).

Unlike students participating in K-PALS, first-grade PALS students have additional opportunities to earn points both as pairs and individually. In the Partner Reading activity, the Coach marks five points for the pair after the Reader has completed reading a book. During the Speed Game, individual students read as many words as possible in the first trial and then are given two opportunities to beat that score.

If a student succeeds in doing so, he or she colors in a star on the Star Sheet. When the student has earned six stars, the sheet can be exchanged for a small prize (e.g., pencil, bookmark).

The first-grade teachers at Washington Elementary are also excited to learn that first-grade PALS incorporates a friendly classroom competition in which pairs are assigned to one of two teams and earn points through participation. As they prepare for this competitive component of PALS, there are several things the teachers should be sure to consider.

**Awarding Bonus Points to Peer Pairs**

In addition to giving points for the completion of each section of the lesson sheet, teachers can award bonus points for the correct completion of the Sounds and Words and Partner Reading activities. Additional bonus points can be granted to those students who work well with their partners.

Teachers can also allot bonus points to those students who follow PALS rules, appropriately use correction procedures, remain on task, and cooperate. When they do so, teachers should be sure to let the students know why they are receiving the points. Teachers might choose to announce who has earned bonus points during transition times, thus signaling to other students that they may need to work on certain aspects of their reading or social behavior. At the end of each week, the student pairs report their points. The teacher tallies each team’s points and announces the first- and second-place teams. The second-place team is treated to a round of applause, and the first-place team is more roundly cheered.

**Assigning Students to Teams**

Teachers should form new teams approximately every four weeks to coincide with the assignment of students to new pairs. To the extent possible, teachers should make certain that their teams are matched in ability. If there is an uneven number of pairs on the teams, the teacher can:

- Assign the extra pair to one team and average each team’s scores (i.e., the total number of points earned, divided by the number of pairs)
- Add one pair’s points to both teams’ scores

**References**


**Web Resources**


The Promising Practices Network, a project of the RAND Corporation, offers a wealth of information related to Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS). Included here is an overview, a summary of key evaluation findings, and links to available online resources.


This Website developed and maintained by the Kennedy Center at Vanderbilt University is a hub for information and resources related to Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS). Featured are links to resources regarding professional development in math and reading, a helpful FAQ, teacher materials (including classroom videos of PALS implementation), and an annotated bibliography.