

As schools consider options for student learning and safety as they reopen for the 2020-21 school year, issues of screening and assessment have become more significant than ever. Given this year's unprecedented spring quarantine for most students, teachers face multiple unknowns, such as what skills may be missing for their incoming students, how wide the knowledge gaps are between them, and the effectiveness of previous or current virtual instruction. Many school districts have formed alternative plans in an effort to provide options for families or to be ready to pivot in response to another quarantine and sudden shifts between in-person and virtual learning.

Below, we offer information and recommendations by Illuminate PALS Literacy Specialists regarding literacy assessment in fall 2020, and the use of PALS for various purposes and in different settings.

The good news

In the face of all of this uncertainty, teachers and reading specialists who are preparing to teach students how to read and write can have confidence that some things stay the same.

Students still learn to read and spell in a predictable developmental continuum, albeit at different rates.

If we identify what they know today using PALS fall assessment or PALS Quick Checks, we can determine what they're ready to learn tomorrow, using PALS instructional resource charts and other research-supported sources about reading and spelling stages.

Students still need the same foundational literacy skills to learn to read as before.

Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, the ability to apply these in matching sounds to letters (or letter patterns) fluently, and a growing knowledge of how English spelling and print works, are necessary for all readers. These are "non-negotiables" when it comes to reading.

Students who are learning how to read, whether identified as "at risk for reading difficulty" or not, benefit from direct, systematic instruction in the skills above.

It's not necessary to label students as "at risk" or "below/above benchmark" to know what effective reading instruction looks like for all students.

While this year may look different from past years, planning and adjusting instruction according to ongoing assessment data collection has *always* been best practice.

When teachers plan instruction based on what students know and are ready to learn, rather than based on the previous year's "fall lesson plans," learning gaps are more likely to be addressed (rather than brushed under the rug to become root problems later).

Screening vs. diagnostic data

“**Screening**” refers to identifying students who are at risk for a significant reading difficulty, who need intervention instruction in order to be successful readers. Teachers use screening data to refer students to a school’s tutoring or intervention program, so they can receive additional literacy instruction on top of what they’re receiving in the classroom.

- Screening data usually involves the use of benchmarks -- cut points that, according to data analysis of large numbers of student data collected in a controlled, pilot setting, represent minimum competency for students to be able to benefit from literacy instruction without the support of intervention. We can have confidence in these cut points only when we use the assessment in a way that mimics the way it was used during the pilot as closely as possible.
- Screening data does not *necessarily* provide specific information about what a student knows, although the same data may be used for both screening and diagnostic purposes. A benefit of PALS is that screening and diagnostic data is collected in one sitting, reducing overall assessment time.

Teachers need “**diagnostic data**” -- that is, specific information about a student’s current knowledge and skills at the time s/he is assessed -- to identify specific areas of instructional need and to plan lessons and activities based on those needs.

- Given the uncertainties and unprecedented nature of spring 2020 instruction and attendance in most school districts, diagnostic information is especially important this coming fall in order for teachers to know where to start with returning students. The lesson plans each teacher usually uses during the first month of school may not be appropriate, if not based on the *current* instructional levels and knowledge of this year’s incoming students.
- While PALS benchmarks, and therefore screening data, are compromised when PALS is administered in a nonstandard way (such as remote administration), it may be possible for teachers to collect valuable information about what students know and need to learn (i.e., diagnostic data), using PALS materials in a video chat assessment setting, when in-person assessment is not an option.
- Note that when we refer to *diagnostic information* in this document, we mean something different than *diagnosis*. While PALS and other assessments can provide important *diagnostic information* about a student’s current literacy knowledge, there is no single assessment that can “diagnose” a specific reading disability, which requires multiple sources and types of diagnostic data and formal clinical evaluation.

Options for Use of PALS in Fall 2020 to Collect Screening and/or Diagnostic Data

Assessment goal	Setting/timing	Possible uses of PALS
<p>Screen students to identify risk of reading difficulty and identify students for participation in school/district literacy intervention program.</p> <p><i>All students</i></p>	<p>In-person administration</p> <p>Grades 1-8: Assess as early as 2 weeks after school begins.</p> <p>PreK/K: Wait at least 6 weeks after school begins.</p>	<p>Use standard fall administration of PALS according to the student's current grade level (e.g. PALS-K for a kindergarten student, PALS Plus using first grade benchmarks for a first grade student).</p> <p>For students in grades 1-8, if screening is your only assessment goal, consider using the screening-only option of PALS Plus to shorten administration time.</p> <p>In school districts where students did not receive typical instruction in the spring, it is expected that a higher-than-usual number of students will be "identified" by PALS as being at risk for reading difficulty.</p>
	<p>Remote (nonstandard) administration using PALS screening tasks Updated 9/15/20</p> <p><i>For use only when standard, in-person administration is not possible</i></p>	<p>This is a nonstandard form of administration, which may influence the validity of benchmarks. If standard, in-person administration is not an option for the fall, we recommend using screening data from the previous year to identify students who may require intervention. You may also attempt to administer many PALS fall screening tasks remotely, using the support materials found on the COVID19 Resources tile, and enter the scores after selecting the Remote/Nonstandard option for the student. While this will not alter the current "ID" status, a summed score will be generated if enough scores are entered, and you will be able to see which students' nonstandard scores fall below the typical/standard benchmark.</p>
<p>Identify current instructional needs of all students, so teachers can group students and plan instruction for the entire class.</p> <p><i>All students</i></p>	<p>In-person administration</p> <p>Grades 1-8: Assess as early as 2 weeks after school begins.</p> <p>PreK/K: Wait at least 6 weeks after school begins.</p>	<p>Use standard, or nonstandard/remote, fall administration of PALS for all students, completing all recommended diagnostic tasks for each student.</p> <p>Once complete scores have been entered, teachers can analyze PALS Fall reports to look for common skill knowledge and spelling stages among students, and plan instruction that targets what they are ready to learn next. Teachers should pay especially close attention to any individual task scores that are below the fall benchmark, and plan to spend more instructional time focusing on these specific skills.</p> <p>Teachers of grades 1-8 can also use the PALS class grouping function to create small, flexible groups based on instructional oral reading level and spelling stage. Once groups are formed, teachers can plan instruction in skills that matches each group's stage of reading/spelling development and instructional needs.</p>

	<p>Remote administration</p> <p>Grades 1-8: Assess as early as 2 weeks after school begins.</p> <p>PreK/K: Assess when the teacher has determined that the student is able to demonstrate literacy knowledge or skills via remote assessment without undue stress to the student.</p>	<p><u>Option 1:</u> Mark each student record as “Nonstandard - Remote” to allow for nonstandard administration and for selection of those tasks considered most relevant and easiest to administer remotely.</p> <p><u>Option 2:</u> Select PALS Quick Checks based on which skills are deemed most relevant and easiest to administer remotely.</p> <p>Teachers can find support materials for using Fall task items or Quick Checks remotely, by clicking on the <i>COVID-19 Resources</i> tile in their PALS Online accounts.</p> <p>Once scores have been entered, teachers can analyze Fall or Quick Check reports to look for common skill knowledge among students, and plan instruction that targets what they are ready to learn next.</p>
<p>Identify current instructional needs of students receiving intervention, so teachers and reading specialists can group students and plan instruction for the students most at risk for reading difficulty.</p> <p><i>All students who were identified as being at risk for reading difficulty by PALS or another reliable screening tool in the most recent (Fall 2019, Spring 2020, for Fall 2020) screening assessment window for which data is available.</i></p>	<p>In-person administration</p> <p>Grades 1-8: Assess as early as 2 weeks after school begins.</p> <p>PreK/K: Wait at least 6 weeks after school begins.</p>	<p>Use the data from fall standard <i>or</i> remote/nonstandard administration of PALS, having completed all recommended diagnostic tasks for each student.</p> <p>Once complete scores have been entered, teachers can analyze PALS Fall reports to look for common skill knowledge and spelling stages among students who have the “ID” symbol next to their names, and plan intervention instruction that aligns with, and is in addition to, classroom literacy instruction that targets literacy skills found to be delayed or disfluent. Teachers and interventionists should also pay especially close attention to any nonstandard scores that are below the standard fall benchmark, and plan to spend more instructional time with these students.</p> <p>Reading specialists, literacy coaches, special education coordinators, and ELL teachers can also use the school-level grouping function in the PALS Online System to create small, flexible groups at each grade level K-8, pulling students with similar instructional needs from different classrooms if needed. Once groups are formed, these school-level faculty can plan instruction in skills that matches each group’s stage of reading/spelling development and instructional needs.</p>
	<p>Remote administration</p>	<p><u>Option 1:</u> Mark each student record as “Nonstandard - Remote” to allow for nonstandard</p>

<p><i>Students are identified by PALS when their Summed Score falls below benchmark for the given assessment window.</i></p>	<p>Grades 1-8: Assess as early as 2 weeks after school begins.</p> <p>PreK/K: Assess when the teacher has determined that the student is able to demonstrate literacy knowledge or skills via remote assessment without undue stress to the student.</p>	<p>administration and for selection of those fall tasks considered most relevant and easiest to administer remotely.</p> <p><u>Option 2:</u> Select PALS Quick Checks based on which skills are deemed most relevant and easiest to administer remotely. Reading specialists and other faculty can find support materials for using Quick Checks remotely by clicking on the <i>COVID-19 Resources</i> tile in their PALS Online accounts.</p> <p>Once scores have been entered, teachers can analyze Fall or Quick Check reports to look for common skill knowledge among students, and plan instruction that targets what they are ready to learn next.</p>
<p>Identify specific literacy skills in which students are behind usual expectations for this fall, either because of quarantine condition, “summer slide,” or other challenge to reading/spelling development, so that these skills can be targeted in instruction.</p> <p><i>All students</i></p>	<p>Same as row above, but for all students.</p>	
<p>Discern between students who need Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3 instruction in literacy skills.</p> <p><i>Students identified by above assessment process(es) as needing additional</i></p>	<p>Tier 1</p>	<p>Students whose literacy instruction can be addressed during the regular classroom literacy block with explicit, direct instruction in the skill areas needed, whose Summed Score met benchmark on the most recent standard PALS assessment administered. These students may have individual task scores that indicate a need for additional instruction or emphasis with a specific literacy skill (e.g. letter sounds, reading rate, etc.).</p>
	<p>Tier 2</p>	<p>Students whose Summed Score fell below benchmark on the most recent standard PALS assessment administered. This group may also include some of the students described above in “Tier 1,” whose Summed Score met but came very close to the benchmark, or who have not shown adequate progress in learning skills with Tier 1</p>

<i>instruction in any specific literacy skills.</i>		instruction only.
	Tier 3	Students whose Summed Score fell well below benchmark on the most recent standard PALS assessment administered. This group may also include some of the students described above in “Tier 2,” who have not shown adequate progress in learning skills with Tier 2 instruction only.
Monitor progress in specific literacy skills to determine whether instructional methods (whether in-person or remote) are working. <i>All students</i>	Follow procedures above for in-person or remote administration of PALS or PALS Quick Checks to assess specific literacy skills. Progress monitoring can occur as often as every 2-3 weeks, once relevant instruction has begun.	Administer PALS Quick Checks and/or PALS Mid Year assessment to assess progress in specific literacy skills (letter sounds, beginning sound awareness, reading rate at a given level, spelling feature knowledge, etc.) Use the Reading Levels and Spelling Stages charts and other resources on the “Instructional Resources” tile in your PALS Online account to evaluate progress through each stage of reading and spelling, and the Quick Checks Criteria for Mastery chart to evaluate mastery of each foundational literacy skill.

What early literacy skills should receive special attention this fall, in terms of assessment and instruction?

Our Illuminate PALS Literacy Specialists recommend that teachers pay special attention to the following skill areas this coming fall:

Preschool and Kindergarten:

- Alphabet Knowledge (letter recognition and letter sound associations)
- Phonological Awareness (e.g., beginning sound awareness and matching sounds to letters)

First grade and higher:

- Mastery of, and fluency with, skills listed above
- Fluency with decoding words accurately, as indicated by:
 - Automatic word recognition (word has been accurately decoded so many times that student recognizes it immediately and in less than one second)
 - Reading rate (words per minute) with text at instructional oral reading level

Please defer to your state requirements, or district/school literacy coach or reading specialist, for additional or alternative recommendations.