

Florida Center for Reading Research

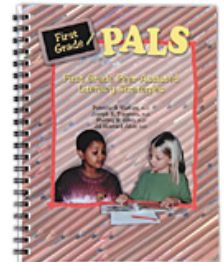
First Grade Peer-Assisted Literacy Strategies
(First Grade PALS)

What is First Grade PALS?

First Grade PALS was developed to enhance the regular school reading curriculum, not replace it. For three 35-minute sessions each week for 16 weeks, the entire class engages in *First Grade PALS* and each pair of readers can be working on different lessons and reading different stories. *First Grade PALS* is designed to increase students' time engaged in reading. Each *First Grade PALS* session incorporates two separate tutoring routines. The first routine, entitled Sounds and Words, is a set of code-based activities that follow a direct instruction model and include the components of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. The second routine, Story Sharing, provides each pair the opportunity to interact with text to promote fluency and comprehension. Included in the *First Grade PALS* manual is all of the information and materials needed to implement PALS in a first grade classroom, including scripted lessons and reproducible lesson sheets.

The lesson sheets for *First Grade PALS*, called Sounds and Words, consists of 57 separate lessons developed to provide systematic, explicit instruction in alphabetic skills as well as strategies designed to ensure that these skills are integrated into the act of reading connected text. During Sounds and Words, pairs conduct four activities during 15 minutes. If there are any new sounds or words introduced in the lesson sheets, the teacher presents them before this routine begins. The four activities consist of (a) Letter-Sounds, (b) Hearing Sounds, (c) Sounding-Out, and (d) Sentences and Stories.

After Sounds and Words is completed, the pair engages in Story Sharing for the remaining 15 minutes. The goal of Story Sharing is to teach students basic orientation towards text and to develop comprehension. Story Sharing involves three activities: (a) Pretend-Read, (b) Read-Aloud, and (c) Retell. Each of these activities revolves around a piece of children's literature chosen by the teacher with the only restriction being that the text must be at the Coach's independent reading level.



Is First Grade PALS aligned with Reading First?

First Grade PALS includes four of the five critical components of reading instruction. The Sounds and Words lessons are systematically designed and focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. The Story Sharing aspect of *PALS* includes practice that increases fluency, such as repeated readings, and comprehension, such as Story Retell. Story Sharing may also increase vocabulary during Pretend Read due to the discussion of the story, but there is not evidence to support this assumption. Teachers are able to listen to each student at least once every two weeks when they circulate and listen to pairs of students read for a few minutes during each *PALS* session. There is no Professional Development that accompanies *First Grade PALS*, however, the manual is easy to read and follow. It does not teach every phonics element and skill, but instead focuses on getting students "up and going" with beginning reading.

Research Support for First Grade PALS

Since 1994, *First Grade PALS* has been empirically studied in five separate studies in two different locations (see Mathes, Howard, Allen, & Fuchs, 1998; Mathes, Grek, Howard, Babyak, & Allen, 1999; Mathes, Torgesen, & Allor, in press; Mathes & Babyak, in press). Results of these studies have indicated that the lower-achieving students participating in *First Grade PALS* make significantly greater gains on multiple measures of reading progress than those low-achieving students in contrast classrooms. This includes reading measures in phonological awareness, reading fluency, word identification, nonsense word reading, comprehension, and concepts of print. The results for the average and high-achieving students have also been positive although not as strong as for the low-achieving students.

The research base to support use of *First Grade PALS* is very strong. The studies that have evaluated its use in first grade classrooms have employed random assignment to instructional and control groups, and standardized measures of reading have been used to evaluate outcomes. In addition to the quantitative data that supports the effectiveness of this program, a variety of qualitative information has also been collected about its use in the classrooms. Both teachers and students report that they enjoy participating in *First Grade PALS*. The majority of teachers find the *PALS* manual clear and easy to follow, however, they do claim that the most difficult part of the process is teaching the routines to the students. Teachers feel that *First Grade PALS* is a feasible instructional alternative to reach the needs of the diverse learners in the classroom. They claim that they will utilize *First Grade PALS* in the future and that it contributes to the social interaction and reading confidence in students. Additionally, students report that *First Grade PALS* is enjoyable and that it helped them in becoming better readers.



Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *First Grade PALS*:

- Systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency.
- When implemented as intended, students increase their time engaged in reading and reading related activities.

Which Florida counties had schools that implement First Grade PALS?

Leon County 850-487-7147

For More Information

<http://www.sopriswest.com/swstore/product.asp?sku=661>

References



Mathes, P.G., Babyak, A.E. (in press). The effects of peer-assisted learning strategies for first-grade readers with and without additional mini-skills lessons. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*.

Mathes, P.G., Grek, M.L, Howard, J.K., & Allen, S. (1999). First-grade peer-assisted learning strategies (First Grade PALS): A tool for preventing early reading failure. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 14*, 50-60.

Mathes, P.G., Howard, J.K., Allen, S., & Fuchs, D. (1998). Peer-assisted learning strategies for first-grade readers: Making early reading instruction responsive to the needs of diverse learners. *Reading Research Quarterly, 33*, 62-94.

Mathes, P.G., Torgesen, J.K., & Allor, J.H. (in press). The effects of peer-assisted learning strategies for first-grade readers with and without additional computer assisted instruction in phonological awareness.

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Date Posted: November, 2002

Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

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