Programs in Brief:

**PALS - Peer Assisted Learning Strategies**

**What is the program?**

PALS is a systematic class-wide reading program for students in kindergarten to grade 6. PALS builds reading fluency and comprehension skills through a set of activities that students are engaged in for 35 – 45 minute sessions, 3 – 4 times a week. The classroom teacher provides the initial lesson followed by a prescribed lesson with materials provided. This is followed by students working in pairs to practice and reinforce the skills taught.

In PALS, students work in pairs to help each other improve their reading skills. In partner reading, the higher level reader is called the “first reader” and the lower level reader is called the “second reader” who coaches and monitors the first reader. If the first reader makes a mistake, the second reader uses a special “correction procedure” to help the reader fix the mistake.

The roles of reader and coach are switched for each activity throughout the lesson. Students working in pairs help to motivate each other by awarding themselves ‘points’ for completing activities. As the students work in these pairs, the teacher’s role is to monitor and provide assistance to help the students improve their reading.

In the grade one PALS program, students are involved in teacher directed whole-class lessons. These lessons focus on: saying sounds in a series of letters, sounding out a series of phonetically regular words and then reading those words without stopping between sounds, reading a series of common sight words, and reading sight words grouped into phrases to promote fluency.

Stories are also a component of the lessons where previously learned words are incorporated, and students can practise reading these stories fluently. In order to increase fluency and word recognition through timed reading and self monitoring, the pairs also play a Speed Game at the end of each lesson to practice new words and build fluency.

In the grade 2 – 6 PALS reading program, the students are also involved in teacher directed lessons and then work in pairs. Students read stories and answer questions, and provide corrective feedback through a series of activities. PALS for these

**Why does this matter?**

- Reading skills are a basic foundation for other learning skills. It is important to use reading intervention strategies that have good evidence that they are effective.

- Reading intervention strategies that use a variety of strategies may produce better outcomes than programs that only focus on one or two strategies.

- Effective reading intervention strategies that focus on all students in a classroom may reduce subsequent referrals to more costly interventions—providing earlier and easier intervention.

Programs in Brief articles can be found at: [http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/e-best/](http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/e-best/)
grades consists of four activities: Partner Reading, Retell, Paragraph Shrinking, and Prediction Relay. The students each have an opportunity to read for five minutes while the coach marks points and corrects mistakes.

How is the program delivered?

PALS combines proven instructional principles and practices and peer mediation so that research-based reading and math activities are effective, feasible, and enjoyable. PALS is a version of whole class peer tutoring. Teachers identify which children require help on specific skills and who the most appropriate children are to help other children learn those skills.

Using this information, teachers pair students in the class, so that partners work simultaneously and productively on different activities that address the problems they are experiencing. Pairs are changed regularly, and over a period of time as students work on a variety of skills, all students have the opportunity to be "coaches" and "players."

PALS creates peer learning pairs in a classroom, each geared to the individual student's needs, instead of a single, teacher-directed activity that may end up addressing the problems of only a few children. The strategy also creates opportunities for a teacher to circulate in the class, observe students, and provide individual remedial lessons.

PALS is designed to complement, not replace, existing reading and math curriculum, and can be used as a component of basic literacy blocks. PALS is a 25- to 35-minute activity implemented 2 to 4 times a week.

Who is the program aimed at?

PALS is intended for all students in the classroom, and is compatible with other reading programs. In 2011-2012, PALS was piloted in five schools in the HWDSB.

What's the evidence the program works?

The PALS program was developed by the Kennedy Centre for Human Development at Vanderbilt University. For detailed information about the research supporting the PALS program, see http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/

The PALS program is listed as having “strong evidence of effectiveness”, the highest rating available in the Best Evidence Encyclopedia at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Research and Reform in Education. It received this ranking in both the elementary mathematics and the beginning reading categories.

The What Works Clearinghouse found PALS to have “potentially positive effects” on students whose primary language is not English and who have limited English speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills.

For further information about the effectiveness of the PALS Program see:
