# Superintendent’s Memo #173-20

  
**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA   
Department of Education**

DATE: July 10, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Changes to the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Preschoolers (PALS-PreK) Fall Term and Testing Windows

The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Preschoolers (PALS-PreK) is a measure of young children’s early literacy development. This tool is used by the Commonwealth as a part of quality preschool education programming. According to the [Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) Guidelines](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/preschool/vpi/2020-2021-vpi-guidelines.docx), localities are required to use the PALS-PreK instrument in the fall and spring for all four-year-old students. PALS PreK focuses on foundational literacy skills that are predictive of early reading success.

Young children need daily experiences that intentionally support their literacy development. As the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) endeavors to ensure all children are provided a firm foundation for future school success, early learning assessments, including PALS-PreK, are essential to making young children’s learning needs visible to the teachers who support them. Information from PALS-PreK helps teachers work strategically to create opportunities that build upon young children’s strengths and guide areas needing more focused attention and support. PreK data are designed to support this type of intentional and high-quality PreK experience and are particularly important for the Commonwealth's most vulnerable populations of children.

VDOE is working closely with the [Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)](https://pals.virginia.edu/) office to ensure flexible options for administering the PALS-PreK assessment this fall. We are continuing to work on specific details and answers to the questions we know you will have. However, to support planning, we want to share the following decisions and flexibilities. The key parameters for the fall testing window are summarized here:

**PALS-PreK Assessment Administration**

**Administration of PALS-PreK assessment resumes this fall for four-year-old students in preschool programs (required for VPI programs)**

Due to COVID-19 school/preschool program closures, there was no PALS-PreK administration during spring 2020. To ascertain the most current estimate of students’ foundational literacy skills at prekindergarten entry, teachers will be able to administer the PALS-PreK assessment to four-year-old students during the fall 2020 testing term. The PALS office will be providing guidance on how PALS-PreK can be administered with social distancing protocols in place (e.g., a student and teacher sitting six feet apart and/or assessing students while wearing masks).

**Note:** In accordance with [Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) Guidelines](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/preschool/vpi/2020-2021-vpi-guidelines.docx), teachers are required to administer PALS-PreK to all four-year-old students once in the fall and once in the spring.

**Extended Fall Term and Flexible Testing Windows**

**Change: The fall PALS-PreK assessment term will open on July 15, 2020 and will extend through November 19, 2020. Within this fall term, divisions will have flexibility in determining their assessment window.**

The fall term for the 2020-2021 school year will begin Wednesday, July 15, 2020 and remain open through November 19, 2020. This extended fall term gives more time to assess students. Within the term, there is also flexibility in how the assessment window is scheduled. Divisions can decide to run their testing window as they traditionally have (i.e., the window opens after six weeks of instruction and assessments are completed within any contiguous 10-day instructional period during their four-week assessment window). Alternatively, divisions can use the full length of the assessment term as their assessment window, and even begin testing prior to children re-entering school for the fall. During selected testing windows, school divisions will make decisions based on the needs of their communities to determine how they will administer PALS-PreK assessments to each student.

If you have questions regarding this preliminary guidance, please contact Tamilah Richardson, Associate Director of Early Childhood Learning, by email at [Tamilah.Richardson@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Tamilah.Richardson@doe.virginia.gov) or by telephone at (804) 225-4781. Questions regarding the PALS online services should be addressed to Beth Williams, PALS Project Manager, by email at [PALS@virginia.edu](mailto:PALS@virginia.edu) or by telephone at (888) 882-7257.

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