



Orange County Department of Education
Educational Services Division



PAL® Peer Assistance Leadership
Frequently Asked Questions

What is PAL?

- A peer-to-peer youth development program for students in grades 4-12.
- An evidence-based curriculum that builds skills in self-awareness, understanding behavior, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, decision making and problem solving.
- *The mission of PAL is to develop youth leaders who connect with their peers to create a caring, safe, and supportive school environment for all.*

How do PAL peer leaders support their school and community?

PAL follows the [Positive Youth Development](#) model, where students partner with school staff to plan, implement, and evaluate their program's activities and projects. The activities PAL students conduct should meet the needs of their student body and campus. Therefore, PAL responsibilities can differ from school to school. What all PAL groups have in common is that peer leaders focus on engaging their peers and supporting a positive school environment. Examples of PAL activities include:

- New student transition and outreach
- Peer mentoring
- School-wide engagement activities
- Cross-age mentoring
- Youth-led campaigns
- Service learning projects
- Health promotion activities (e.g. mental health supports, alcohol/drug prevention)
- Small group lessons on targeted topics, such as conflict resolution and positive behavior

Please note that some of these activities require specific training beyond the PAL curriculum.

How are PAL peer leaders selected?

We highly recommend an application and interview process when choosing your PAL students. PAL peer leaders should reflect a microcosm of the student population. PAL students are peer mentors, so the student population should be able to look at the PAL group and find someone whom they can identify with. PAL students will learn and grow in leadership skills and do not have to be existing student leaders.

Is the PAL program a club or a class?

Elementary PAL programs are operated as clubs that can include students in grades 4-6. High school and middle school PAL programs can be operated as a club or a class. Peer leaders in clubs and classes are trained using the evidence-based PAL curriculum.

How are PAL peer leaders trained?

Once peer leaders have been selected, they should be provided with quality training focused on the knowledge and skills they will need to be effective peer mentors. The evidence-based PAL curriculum builds skills in self-awareness, understanding behavior, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, decision making and problem solving. Training should include demonstration, skill development, practice, and critique. Additional training is necessary to provide specific services in areas such as, tutoring, mental health, alcohol, tobacco and violence prevention, and conflict mediation. When and where to train peer leaders depends on the school's schedule and how the program is operated (club or class). Ideally, we suggest providing the initial leadership training in a large block of time, which allows the PAL students to get to know each other and bond as a group. While training should be provided throughout the year, some suggested possibilities for the initial training are:

- A retreat format, such as a Friday from 12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. and Saturday from 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
- Two consecutive Fridays from 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
- Training during the first two to three weeks of the class.

How can PAL peer leaders support school-wide initiatives?

As trained peer leaders, PAL students can provide universal and targeted support for their peers in the areas of behavioral and social and emotional learning. As the PAL group represents a microcosm of the school community, trained PAL students with strong academic skills can provide targeted academic support as tutors. PAL activities can directly support the following school-wide initiatives:

- Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Social and Emotional Learning
- Local Control and Accountability Plan Priorities-Positive School Climate and Student Engagement
- Tobacco-Use Prevention Education (TUPE)

What are the responsibilities of a PAL advisor?

The primary responsibility of a PAL advisor is to provide ongoing training and guidance to peer leaders as they plan, implement, and evaluate campus activities. Additional responsibilities include:

- Complete the full two-day certified PAL advisor training facilitated by the Orange County Department of Education (offered for elementary or middle/high school).
- Collaborate with the school administrator and school leadership team to develop a vision of the role PAL will play on campus.
- Promote the program and solicit suggestions from the student body and staff on a variety of students who represent the entire school population and would be a good fit as peer leaders.
- Use the evidence-based PAL curriculum to train student leaders.
- Work with PAL students to determine the needs of the campus and how PAL can best support those needs.

How can school administration provide support for their PAL program?

- Review the [PAL Standards of Practice](#).
- Understand how PAL follows a [Positive Youth Development](#) model.
- Understand how PAL students are chosen and the importance of selecting a group of students who represent a microcosm of their school community.
- Work with the PAL advisor(s) to define the vision of peer leadership on their campus.
- Provide support in the logistics of training peer leaders.
- Provide support in the ongoing professional development of the PAL advisor(s).

How does OCDE support school site PAL programs?

The Orange County Department of Education provides the initial elementary and secondary PAL Advisor Training for school staff to start and implement a certified PAL program. Training information can be found on the PAL website at ocde.us/pal. After the training, OCDE continues to provide the following resources and optional opportunities for PAL advisors and their programs:

- Monthly PAL advisor newsletter
- Monthly PAL advisor meetings
- Student workshops
- PAL Leadership Days for student leaders
- Quarterly program engagement challenges
- Student training certificates
- Outstanding PAL Program and Outstanding PAL Advisor Awards
- Peer leader year-end survey

Where can I get more information about the PAL program?

Visit the PAL website: www.ocde.us/pal. For further information about starting a program, please contact Deirdre Hill, Project Liaison at dhill@ocde.us.