

PAL® Quarterly



PAL® PEER ASSISTANCE LEADERSHIP
ORANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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PAL in Orange County

OCDE maintains a database of PAL Programs and school advisors in Orange County. As of September, 2007 there are 163 PAL Programs in 24 school districts, this includes:

- 89 Elementary Schools
- 43 Middle Schools
- 31 High Schools

APPLY TODAY

Outstanding PAL Program & Projects

Applications Due:
April 9, 2008

Applications available online at <http://pal.ocde.us>. Click on the 'Recognition Event' link.



Recruiting, Selecting, and Training Peer Leaders

It might seem a bit early to start thinking about your peer leaders for next year, but who you choose as your peer helpers is one of the most important elements to a successful program. Spring is the time to seek the help of others on your campus for recruiting, screening, and selecting your new peer leaders. If you already have an existing program, your outgoing peer helpers can help select their successors.

While the recruitment process varies from school to school, it is important to incorporate these key elements:

- The PAL group should be as diverse as possible, so that they mirror the school as a whole in terms of gender, ethnicity, and social and cultural subgroups.
- Conduct an informational meeting where the expectations for peer leaders are clearly communicated.
- Have candidates submit a formal application. Require candidates to secure recommendations from a teacher, counselor, administrator, or other faculty. Set firm deadlines for student responses during the application, faculty recommendations, and interview processes.
- Conduct personal interviews with each qualified candidate. Current peer leaders should be a part of the interview panel.

Incorporating these steps is time-consuming, but they will help you find students who are serious about participating, and it establishes early on that participation in the PAL peer helping program requires commitment.

Once your PAL group has been chosen, the students should receive training in self-awareness, understanding behavior, communication, listening, facilitation skills, decision-making/problem-solving strategies, referral resources, and project-specific information. Peer helpers should not perform a service without training for that service. The PAL curriculum recommends holding your initial training during the first four to six weeks (during class, afterschool, or on a weekend) of meeting with your students.

The PAL Curriculum

If you are new to PAL or are looking to revitalize your program, the PAL curriculum has just about everything you need, including:

- Introduction and Overview of PAL (Role of Peer Leaders, Confidentiality, etc.)
- Recruiting, Screening, and Selecting Students
- Student Training Curriculum
- Supplemental Materials (Student Application, Interview Questions, Permission Letter, etc.)
- Student Handbook (*middle & high school curriculum only*)

Still need help? Give OCDE a call at (714) 966-4358.

"At an early age, PAL taught me how to work well with others, how to manage my conflicts and frustrations, and how to be involved in school groups."

Melinda Oropeza
Patrick Henry Elementary School graduate
Anaheim City School District

PEER LEADER SELECTION

Kerri Slaughter, PAL Advisor
Imperial Middle School,
La Habra City School District

At Imperial Middle School, we have refined our recruitment process to ensure that we get a diverse and highly-qualified group of peer leaders. In late April, the current PALs visit the 7th grade classrooms to educate students about PAL's role on campus and to encourage them to apply for PAL for the upcoming school year.

Morning announcements, posters, and flyers are also made/posted in order to generate interest. In addition, teachers are asked to nominate students. All interested students are required to complete an application packet which contains a series of questions, a teacher recommendation form, and a request for an additional letter of recommendation from an adult.

Once applications have been submitted (we usually receive about 100), applicants are scheduled for an interview during lunch. Interviewers include a group of about three to four PALs and a staff member, usually a teacher. Interviewees are asked several questions and are judged on their enthusiasm, listening skills, and willingness to speak up.

PAL applicants are scored based on their interview, teacher recommendation form (which contains a score component), application, and other criteria (like grades and attendance). Primarily applicants with the higher scores are selected, although we do select a certain percentage of students (approximately 10-15%) whom we consider a "risk factor," but have shown potential leadership skills or because we feel the PAL program will benefit them. Generally about 25-30 students are chosen.

GETTING BOYS INVOLVED

Deborah Blashaw, PAL Advisor
Servite High School

According to a survey of PAL programs conducted in 2006, 61% of Orange County PAL peer leaders are female. Most PAL advisors would probably agree that it is a lot easier to recruit girls than boys. OCDE PAL staff recently spoke with Deborah Blashaw, PAL Advisor of Servite High School, an all boys private school located in Anaheim.

"Typically we have about 45 active members in our PAL program. Peer leaders are selected through a nomination process. We have the current PAL students visit classes at the start of the semester. They discuss leadership, the criteria to be in PAL, examples of PAL activities, and then ask them to nominate students that they feel would make a good peer leader. We assist the process by having school counselors and coaches encourage students that they feel are good role models to ask a friend to nominate them. The list of nominated students are posted for teachers to look at and comment on. If the nominated students are interested, they are interviewed by the current PAL students. We try to select students with varied interests (football players, tennis players, thespians, etc.), so that we are reaching all students and getting all perspectives which will help with planning projects."

We also asked Ms. Blashaw for some recommendations for generating and maintaining male student interest. She stated, "It's important that your PAL Program is perceived as cool by the student body. Talk to coaches at your school for recommendations for students. Also, talk to the strong female leaders on campus to recommend strong male leaders. In addition, it is important that you listen to and address the male concerns and issues they feel are important on campus, so their voice is being heard."

One of the hardest things in the recruitment process is telling students they were not selected. Here's how Belen "Bubba" Garcia, PAL Advisor at Patrick Henry Elementary School, Anaheim City School District and co-author of the PAL

FINDING A PLACE FOR ALL STUDENTS

Belen "Bubba" Garcia, PAL Advisor
Patrick Henry Elementary School, Anaheim City School District

Elementary Curriculum has dealt with this difficult task. "My secret is...is that they are all pals! Back in the old days of the 1990s, I would just grin and bear it and tell a kid sorry, but there just isn't enough room for everyone. I hated that feeling, so I decided to come up with different groups that could fit under the umbrella of PAL. When a student asks me if they can be a PAL, I tell them they already are a pal and its just a matter of time when they can be part of the big group." Some of the many activities that fit under the umbrella of PAL are Library Assistants, PAL Court (conflict resolution), Cross-age Tutoring, and the Green Team (campus cleanup). All students meet weekly and receive training in their specific project and in the PAL curriculum.

- Do you want to start a PAL Program at your school?
- Would you like OCDE staff to present PAL to your school or district?
- Are you a PAL Advisor who is retiring this year?
- Need help to improve your program?
- Do you know of a former PAL student that we could feature in future issues of the newsletter?

Call OCDE PAL today! (714) 966-4358

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