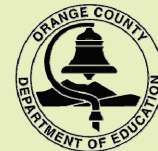


# PAL® Quarterly



WILLIAM M. HABERMEHL  
County Superintendent of Schools

PAL® PEER ASSISTANCE LEADERSHIP  
ORANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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## Magnolia School District NETWORKING IN ACTION

Magnolia School District's (MSD) Prevention Coordinator, Teali Fielder, holds PAL Advisor meetings three times a year. All nine schools in this district have PAL programs. At their first meeting of the school year, advisors discussed best practices and selected (with site administrator input) new school wide focus activities for the school year based on their Caring School Community curriculum.

The structure of each of the nine MSD programs is unique. They range in size from twenty to sixty plus students and include 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Some schools have one PAL advisor, while others have three. However, there is a common thread of activities in all of their PAL programs, including new student transition, some or all Red Ribbon Week activities, and conflict peer mediation. In addition, each PAL program plans activities that meet the needs of their individual schools. The support that the MSD and their Prevention Coordinator provides helps PAL advisors stay connected throughout their busy school year.

If your school or district would like assistance in starting district wide PAL meetings, please contact Deirdre Hill, OCDE PAL Consultant at (714) 642-2772.



## PAL Advisors Q & A

For this last issue of the school year, we asked six long-term PAL Advisors to answer questions regarding their experience with PAL. Our goal was to gain insight into their motivation, expertise, and wisdom. Special thanks to all the advisors who shared their thoughts and ideas. Below are the profiles of the advisors that participated in the interviews and on the next page you will find the questions and their answers.



### Nancy Curtis, Elective Teacher

Sycamore Junior High School, Anaheim Union High School District

Years in Education – 38

Years as a PAL Advisor – 19



### Patricia Hale, 3rd Grade Teacher

Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, Anaheim City School District

Years in Education – 11

Years as a PAL Advisor – 6



### Kathy Hath, Counselor

Corona del Mar High School, Newport Mesa Unified School District

Years in Education – 13

Years as a PAL Advisor – 11

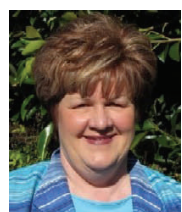


### Kay Ostensen, Counselor/Psychologist

Thurston Middle School, Laguna Beach Unified School District

Years in Education – 20

Years as a PAL Advisor – 16



### Gail Smith, English Teacher

La Vista Continuation School, Fullerton Joint Union High School District

Years in Education – 36

Years as a PAL Advisor – 16



### Debbie Varon, 2nd Grade Teacher

Lord Baden-Powell Elementary School, Magnolia School District

Years in Education – 23

Years as a PAL Advisor – 6

The printing and distribution of this newsletter is made possible by the CarMax Foundation.

# PAL Advisor Q & A

PAL® PEER ASSISTANCE LEADERSHIP  
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## What has motivated you to stay involved with PAL?

**PH:** I love to see the positive side of our students and to see the students outside the academic setting.

**NC:** I truly believe PAL makes a difference in a student's life. The skills a student learns in PAL are life skills, and while other classes may teach by modeling, students in PAL learn by doing. My motivation is also validated when students come back and say PAL was the best class they had, and they have now chosen a profession because of our class. WOW! That is really fantastic because sometimes you never know, as a teacher, whether you are actually reaching them.

**GS:** I am motivated to stay in PAL because I see the difference the program makes in the lives of my students. For many, their reason for coming to school is PAL class. I also love watching the PALS grow as they reach out to children to assist them.

## How has PAL impacted your school?

**DV:** Our program has grown over the last four years and has evolved into more than just conflict mediation. The students really enjoy helping other students, especially those students who are younger.

**PH:** PAL makes students feel more connected to our school and improves school spirit.

**KO:** PAL has changed the climate of the school, making it a more positive place with fewer conflicts, and a welcoming environment for new kids.

## What is your most memorable PAL moment?

**KO:** We had a student who had a life threatening illness as a young child. Last year, he was selected to present an award and seeing him up at the podium, having overcome such obstacles to be one of the nicest young men EVER, made us all cry...his grandparents, mom (a teacher), and dad, who were all in the audience.

**GS:** One year, one of my big, burly PAL students played Santa for severely mentally challenged children. There was a 7-year-old child at the school who just laid in her crib each day and never acknowledged anyone. Santa took her in his arms as if holding an infant. She actually smiled, leaned into him, putting her head and body against his chest. She let out a pleasant, little sound. The teachers were crying and said she had never shown any affection or response to human touch before, nor uttered a sound. It was so heart warming. The teachers, my PALS, and I just sobbed and started hugging each other and ended up in a group hug with Santa who was humming to this child with a huge smile on his face.

**KH:** One of the PAL students came up with the idea of putting on an Appreciating Diversity Day and wanted to implement it on a grand scale (no starting small and working into it). The principal at the time had told us if it didn't work out, we could not bring it back the following year. We had a wide range of topics being discussed and many were fairly controversial. The entire school was going to participate, and it took months to plan and coordinate. When the day was finally over, it was a resounding success! The look on the face of the PAL student who created the event and the accomplishment the all the PALS felt stays with me to this day. It is still one of our biggest events 9 years later.

## What has been your biggest challenge with PAL over the years and how did you overcome it?

**DV:** My biggest challenge with PAL is not having enough time with the students. The positive part is that every year we are getting better and more efficient so we can accomplish more and more. I have taught students to take roll, complete duty calendars, pass out information and help with presenting. This has made the meetings go faster and we can fit more in.

**PH:** It is hard to find the time to organize PAL activities, and it is important to reinvent and tweak activities to make them new and exciting.

**KH:** As the years have passed, student's schedules have become more impacted. They are all doing so much and trying to squeeze things into an outrageously packed schedule. It is still a constant challenge but what we have done to help is assign each PAL student a clear event/job to be in charge of. They know that during the year it is their responsibility to make sure that event is successfully carried out.

## Why do you think your PAL program has lasted throughout the years?

**NC:** I think we do a lot of fun activities on campus. PAL students are well-known and students tell other students to take PAL, because it is a fun class. We also get a lot of support from our administration, which is really important in sustaining an elective.

**KO:** Continuity with the advisors and fresh ideas from the kids. It is the favorite part of my job!

**KH:** We have a rigorous selection process that helps us pick only the most motivated students. Each year the senior students are actively involved in the selection of the new group. Even current students have to try out again to be on PAL the following year, so their motivation stays strong all year. Additionally, the PAL group is considered an esteemed group on campus so kids want to be on it.

## What advice do you have for PAL advisors who are starting out?

**DV:** My advice would be to start small and slow. Choose one or two activities but make them fun and engaging. Try to get support from other staff members and your principal, because you will need that. And, the best thing to have is a partner in crime. It is so much easier when you have another staff member to help you.

**NC:** My advice for PAL advisors is to tailor the program to the needs of your school, as well as doing the activities that he/she is comfortable with. For example, I do "rap" sessions, where we get in a circle and talk about issues and problems. This is not something everyone feels comfortable with or has training for, but it works for me. Also, the more activities (hands on activities) done, the more students will actually learn.

**GS:** Provide PALS with activities and assignments that make them feel like they are accomplishing positive results. Incorporate numerous ice-breaker exercises to ensure that PALS become comfortable with one another. Share the leadership responsibilities with students so they can learn these skills and they can feel gratified and proud of themselves and of their success in leading others.

- 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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