

**Parkmead Active Learning School
(PALS)**

Policies & Procedures

(Updated December 2015)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	MISSION STATEMENT.....	1
II.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
III.	ADMINISTRATION.....	2
	A.General Membership.....	2
	B.PALS Board.....	3
	C.Board Responsibilities.....	4
	D.Board Composition.....	5
	E. Board Qualifications.....	5
	F. Board Term of Office.....	5
	G.Nominating Committee.....	6
	1. Composition.....	6
	2. Nominee Selection Considerations.....	6
	3. Nominating Procedures.....	7

IV.	COMMUNICATIONS POLICY	7
	A.Minutes.....	8
	B. Newsletter	8
V.	FAMILY PARTICIPATION	8
	A. Program Support	9
VI.	FINANCES	10
	A. General Financial Procedures	11
	B. The Budget.....	11
	C. Parent Contributions.....	11
	D. Fundraising.....	12
	E. Grant Acquisitions	12
VII.	MEMBERSHIP	12
	A. Informational Meetings.....	12
	B. Application Procedure: Prospective Families	13
	C. Number of Spaces; Priorities; Lottery; Wait	

List.....	13
D.Orientation of New Families.....	14
E. Confirmation of Re-enrollment.....	15
F. Wait List Families.....	15
G.Kindergarten Deferral.....	15
H.Enrollment Adjustments.....	15
1. Increase in Program Size.....	16
2. Reduction in Program Size.....	16
3. Change in Grade Level.....	17
4. Reinstatement After Program Reduction.....	17
I. Withdrawal from PALS.....	18

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Policies & Procedures
Updated 2012**

Approved by Walnut Creek School District (“WCSD”) Governing Board in June, 2012. These Policies and Procedures amend and supersede all prior versions.

I. MISSION STATEMENT

At Parkmead Active Learning School (“PALS”), students, teachers, and parents work together in a teacher-directed, parent-assisted, hands-on educational program. Love of learning, academic excellence, and enhanced self-esteem are emphasized in a supportive, non-competitive environment designed to encourage the formation of life-long independent learning skills. The PALS program fosters an atmosphere of conscious cooperation, with the stated goal of creating a positive continuum between home, school, and the world at large.

II. INTRODUCTION

PALS was established in 1988 under the authority of the Governing Board of the WCSD pursuant to the California Education Code, Sections 58500-58514 as an intentionally created alternative public elementary school program emphasizing love of learning, academic excellence and enhanced self-esteem. *The policies set forth in the California Education Code and established by the WCSD supersede the Policies & Procedures in this document.*

PALS incorporates the curriculum in use throughout the WCSD and adheres to approved grade-level requirements in a teacher-directed, parent-assisted format. Under an open, non-discriminatory enrollment policy, PALS draws students from throughout the community. In conformity with the guidelines established by the WCSD at the program’s outset, all enrolled families sign a student enrollment letter indicating that they understand the program’s goals and the need for participation to support the program.

PALS shares the Parkmead Elementary School campus. PALS families have formed the PALS Parent/Teacher Organization (“PTO”) as the legal entity for the parent organization. PTO members participate in Parkmead school-wide programs and events, and a PALS PTO liaison may attend meetings of the Parkmead PTA Board. An elected, eight-position PALS PTO Board (the “PALS Board”) meets at a minimum six times during the school year to address issues relating to the program.

PALS Policies & Procedures will be reviewed and updated as needed. Changes in procedures will be approved by vote of the General Membership and are subject to final approval by the WCSD Governing Board. The WCSD conducts an annual review of the PALS program.

III. ADMINISTRATION

These Policies & Procedures have been developed to facilitate the decision-making process. All decisions made by the PALS Board and the General Membership are guided by the PALS Mission Statement.

The Governing Board of the WCSD authorizes PALS to function within the provisions of the California Education Code sections 58500-58514, “Alternative Schools.” Decisions concerning issues including, but not limited to, physical plant arrangements, grade-level expectancies, WCSD educational policies, personnel issues and Parkmead community activities are made by the WCSD administration. The Parkmead School Site Principal is also the PALS administrator, appointed by the WCSD Governing Board.

A. General Membership

The “Members” of the PALS General Membership are the PALS teachers and the parents or legal guardians (“Parents”) of currently enrolled PALS students. Parents are requested to donate time and attend General PALS Membership Meetings (“General Meetings”). General Meetings are an important forum for dissemination of information and discussion of issues. Parents may attend non confidential portions of PALS Board meetings. Individual concerns relating to PTO business may be addressed at these meetings. Agenda items, including requests for action on specific issues, must be submitted to the PALS President prior to the appropriate meeting.

Each PALS teacher and each family is allotted one vote. At the General Meetings the Members vote on the following:

- Policy & Procedures amendments,
- Annual budget approval and additional expenditures of more than \$500,
- PALS Board slate,
- Recommendations to administration concerning changes in grade level and/or number of classes offered, and
- Resolutions representing the General Membership.

Before voting, the Members have the opportunity to express opinions, explore options and attempt to reach consensus. A majority vote of the Members present at a General Meeting is required to pass General Membership resolutions.

However, the Members may only amend the PALS Policies & Procedures by a 2/3 vote of all Members present at a General Meeting, or, at the discretion of the PALS Board, by 2/3 vote of all Members responding to a written ballot, using numbered ballots. Prior to any amendment to the PALS Policies & Procedures, notice of the proposed amendments must be provided to the Members.

B. PALS Board

The PALS Board consists of eight positions, including a President who votes only in case of a tie. All positions may be shared, but each position has only one vote. The positions are:

- President,
- Vice President,
- Communication,
- Volunteer Coordinator,
- Treasurer,
- Ways & Means,
- Secretary, and
- Membership.

A quorum is five Board members (holding different positions) and action is taken by majority vote of Board positions present at a meeting.

The PALS Board votes on:

- Expenditures in addition to the budget under \$500;
- Recommendations from all committees, other than the Nominating Committee;
- Recommendations to the Members concerning General Membership decisions;
- Recommendations to administration and teachers;
- The use of ballots to amend the Policies & Procedures;
- Fundraising activities;
- Public relations; and
- Enrichment programs.

The PALS Board recommends an annual budget to the Members for approval. The PALS Board develops agendas for General Meetings and supplies Members with written notification of content before each meeting. The PALS Board, together with the Parkmead Community School PTA, is responsible for ensuring that full communication takes place between the two programs (e.g., through joint meetings, representatives from both programs, etc.). A PALS parent, elected by the Parkmead parents, sits on the School Site Council as a voting PALS liaison. The PALS Board solicits input from and facilitates communication among the teachers, parents, WCSD Governing Board and administration. Closed sessions for portions of PALS Board meetings may be called for reasons of confidentiality related to student matters including, but not limited to student enrollment in PALS, as authorized by Education Code § 35146, and must be reflected in the PALS Board Minutes.

The PALS Board President develops PALS Board meeting agendas and distributes them to PALS Board members, teachers, and the Principal in advance. The PALS Board President meets with the Principal monthly or as needed. Whenever possible, other PALS Board members may attend these meetings. Only the President or his/her designated representative may formally represent PALS to the teachers, principals, and community.

PALS teachers, under the direction of the Parkmead Site Principal, decide and direct the implementation of program philosophy and WCSD curriculum. The teachers meet with the PALS Board President and Vice President regularly as needed. Each Level teaching team attends at least one General Meeting each year. The teachers meet together for planning purposes at least once annually.

C. Board Responsibilities

The following summarizes the core duties and responsibilities of the Board positions. Full descriptions are set forth in Board position binders and may be modified by the Board.

President: provides leadership to the PALS PTO and presides over PALS General Meetings and PALS Board Meetings.

Vice President: attends PALS Board and General Meetings, coordinates enrichment activities, and assists and represents the President as needed.

Communication: responsible for publicizing the activities of the PALS program, public relations, and communications with the PALS community via the PALS website.

Volunteer Coordinator: works closely with room parents as well as enrichment and event coordinators to match volunteers to volunteer opportunities. The volunteer coordinator also acts as a community liaison, linking PALS to our greater community through community events and volunteer opportunities.

Treasurer: responsible for collection and disbursement of funds that are designated for PALS; responsible for providing documentation to government agencies (IRS, Franchise Tax Board, etc.) as necessary.

Ways & Means: responsible for fundraising activities that benefit PALS and the whole school.

Secretary: takes minutes for all PALS Board and General Meetings and makes them available to the PALS membership; responsible for all necessary correspondence on the PALS Board's behalf and for keeping a list of PALS alumni.

Membership: responsible for recruiting new families for PALS by providing information about PALS to prospective families, arranging informational meetings and participating at the lottery to place new families; provides guidance to new families through orientation meetings, communication, and other support activities.

D. Board Composition

The PALS Board shall have a representative from each level.

E. Board Qualifications

To be considered for a PALS Board position, you must have at least one child in the PALS program. Incoming PALS parents are eligible to serve on the PALS Board.

F. Board Term of Office

The newly elected board members assume their responsibilities for the upcoming year by June 1. PALS Board members may serve a maximum of three consecutive years on the PALS Board, and the President and Vice President may only hold

their respective specific positions two consecutive years. Parents from the same family should not concurrently serve in more than one PALS Board position.

G. Nominating Committee

1. Composition

The Nominating Committee consists of eight PALS Members, including a non-voting Chair who is responsible for keeping the current PALS Board informed of the Nominating Committee's progress. The current PALS Board President, Vice President and Family Commitment Board Member select the chair, four committee members, and an alternate. Teachers select three committee members, one from each level, who act as liaisons between the teachers and the Nominating Committee. At least two Nominating Committee members must be current or past PALS Board members. Individuals interested in serving on the upcoming PALS Board may not serve on the Nominating Committee. The alternate shall vote in the absence of a voting member.

2. Nominee Selection Considerations

In creating its slate for the PALS Board, the Nominating Committee shall be guided by the overall best interests of the PALS program, the Mission Statement, and the following five factors:

- Previous board/school responsibilities, and/or other responsibilities, that are appropriate to the position. For the office of President, previous board or significant school responsibilities are recommended;
- Knowledge of and dedication to the PALS program and its goals, including the various roles of teachers, parents and staff in carrying out those goals, in general and as expressed in the PALS Mission statement;
- Ability and willingness to give PALS priority and commitment including attendance at meetings, and understanding of the commitment involved in effectively carrying out those duties;
- Fairness, objectivity and concern for the well-being and overall best interests of the PALS program;

- Understanding the importance of teamwork. Commitment to being part of a team and capacity to lead when necessary to carry out the objectives of the PALS Board.

3. Nominating Procedures

In March, all PALS Board positions shall be publicized. An application deadline shall be established and the PALS Board job descriptions and applications shall be made available to interested parties. The Nominating Committee shall convene in early April to create a slate of qualified candidates. The Nominating Committee shall report positions for which there are no qualified applicants to the Members and only accept new applications for those specific positions. The Nominating Committee shall finalize the slate and report it to the PALS Board and Members for review prior to the May General Meeting.

At the May General Meeting, the Nominating Committee shall formally present the slate to be voted on by the Members. In the event the slate is not approved, nominations of qualified candidates shall be accepted from the floor. The Members shall vote on the non-contested positions as a slate, and then vote on the contested positions individually.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Communication is important to the PALS program. Communication issues include, but are not limited to, public relations, PALS website, email communications relating to PALS, in-program communication and documentation of PALS activities.

At the start of each academic year, the PALS Board shall formulate protocol and/or operating procedures relating to the use of email communications among the membership to promote and ensure civility in communications relating to PALS business. The PALS Board shall also formulate protocol limiting the use of mass mailings and distribution lists to school-related business, and otherwise setting appropriate guidelines for the membership's use of email communications. Input from administration, teachers, and parents is considered in assessing the current communication issues and needs, and establishing goals to address those needs.

The Communication Board Member and the Secretary are responsible for communication issues according to the following guidelines:

All written material relating to operating procedures, protocols, legal affairs or other official school or Board business to be distributed under PALS imprint (such as on school stationary or employing the PALS logo, whether in-house or intended for a larger audience), must be approved by the PALS Board President and the Parkmead Principal before printing. Final discretion regarding content rests with the Principal. This paragraph is not intended to restrict or govern informal email or other communications among the membership, such as coordination of class activities or other communications unrelated to policies, procedures and official business or legal affairs, as long as such communications do not contravene these Policies & Procedures or any operating procedures and are in accordance with the policies of the WCSD.

A. Minutes

The Secretary distributes the minutes from the General Membership Meetings (“General Meetings”) by way of publication on the PALS website.

PALS Board meeting minutes become official upon review and approval by the PALS Board at the next board meeting. Copies of the PALS Board meeting minutes are published on the PALS website.

B. Newsletter

The Communication Board Member may publish a periodic newsletter on the PALS website or through email. The newsletter may contain any news relevant to the program and other features at the discretion of the editor, subject to approval by the President and Principal. Copies of the newsletter are distributed electronically to PALS families, the Principal, PALS teachers, the WCSD Governing Board members, the Superintendent and the Director of Curricular Development. The newsletter is posted on the PALS website.

V. FAMILY PARTICIPATION

The WCSD has approved certain policies permitting Parkmead Active Learning School to function as a district alternative education program. One of the primary criteria defining PALS as an alternative is a request that all enrolled families contribute time and energy in support of the program’s goals. Participation is an important aspect of the program.

Given to new families, the New Student Enrollment Form defines the importance of each family’s participation in supporting the PALS program, teachers, and

students and outlines the number of donated hours requested from each family. To confirm enrollment, parents must sign the New Student Enrollment Form and return it by the enrollment deadline.

As part of re-enrollment each year, PALS families must sign a Family Participation Letter confirming student enrollment for the next academic year and acknowledging the importance of program participation and support.

PALS requests that each family contribute 60 hours per academic year (an average of 6 hours per month) to the program and encourages families to attend the monthly General Meetings. Program support may be achieved through classroom support, committee work, at-home projects, or other volunteer opportunities.

A. Program Support

Program support materials can be found on the PALS website, a hard copy may be provided upon request.

VI. FINANCES

To achieve the program's goals and objectives, the PALS PTO generates funds to be used during the school year. These funds are obtained through parent contributions, fundraising and grant acquisitions. Approval of expenditures by the PALS Board and Members must be guided by the program's Mission Statement.

A. General Financial Procedures

PALS PTO operates as a non-profit Parent/Teacher Organization, incorporated in California. All PALS PTO funds are maintained by the PALS Treasurer. PALS parents are strongly encouraged to contribute to the PALS PTO. All PALS PTO financial procedures and guidelines are governed by the PALS Policies & Procedures.

The Treasurer will develop a yearly budget with input from the PALS Board and the teachers. The budget is then presented at a General Meeting for approval prior to the end of the school year. The PALS PTO will procure all necessary insurance.

The Long-Range Finance Committee consists of the PALS Vice President, the Treasurer and the Ways & Means Board Member.

B. The Budget

Individual PALS teachers receive yearly allotments based on estimated enrollment as one fixed segment of the budget. Once the budget is approved by the Members, the PALS Board may authorize disbursements of funds in accordance with a working budget. Any additional expenses in excess of \$500 must be approved by a majority vote by the Members at a General Meeting. Individual parents may be reimbursed for program expenditures only with prior written approval of item and amount by a PALS teacher or the PALS Treasurer with PALS Board authorization. All PALS financial records and ledgers are available for parent review at any time.

C. Parent Contributions

The annual PALS parent contribution drive is conducted by the PALS Ways & Means Board Member. The PALS Board establishes an amount as a recommended voluntary parent contribution figure for the school year, which facilitates early budget preparation and enables the teachers and the PALS Board to most effectively plan for the use of funds. Classroom money is collected separately from the parent donation drive by the Room Representative. These monies are used for each individual teacher's classroom needs.

All financial or material contributions to the PALS program are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law and are handled through the PALS Treasurer. The PALS Treasurer will issue receipts, for tax purposes, for all cash or material contributions. In accordance with established policy, no receipts will be issued for checks received for contribution purposes.

D. Fundraising

The parent voluntary contribution figure is enhanced by fundraisers held throughout the year. As the year proceeds, the PALS Board reviews funds generated through this effort and may make adjustments to the working budget.

Ideas and suggestions for fundraising may be presented to the Ways & Means Board Member who will then present ideas consistent with the long-range plan to the PALS Board for approval. Fundraising efforts will be coordinated with the

Parkmead Community School,PERC, and WCEF pursuant to our joint decision-making guidelines.

E. Grant Acquisitions

The PALS program actively pursues appropriate grants. The PALS Members are encouraged to inform the Ways & Means Board Member of any appropriate grants that may be available to the program. The Ways & Means Board Member presents grant ideas consistent with the long-range plan to the PALS Board for approval. Any grants limited to one per district or school, or involving commitment of WCSD time, personnel, or resources should first be cleared through the Parkmead Site Principal.

VII. MEMBERSHIP

In recognition of the unique family-centered nature of the program, PALS policy addresses the issues of membership and enrollment as affecting families rather than individual students. Enrollment in PALS is available to all WCSD students, under an open, non-discriminatory membership policy.

A. Informational Meetings

The Principal and members of the PALS Board will hold at least 2 informational meetings prior to the start of the next school year. These meetings will be advertised via informational flier published in both English and Spanish and will be distributed district-wide each January. The flier will set forth the date(s) of the informational meeting(s) and application timeline. The informational meeting(s) provide an overview of the program's philosophy, application procedure and establish the deadline for submission of applications. All prospective PALS parent/guardian are encouraged to attend.

To avoid disruption, observation of classes in session is not encouraged.

B. Application Procedure: Prospective Families

A separate application is required for each child wishing to enter the PALS program. Families must submit their applications by mail during the application period. Applications must be postmarked by the established deadline. Multiple applications from an individual family may be mailed in one envelope.

C. Number of Spaces; Priorities; Lottery and Wait Lists

There is often a demand for admission into the PALS program that is in excess of the number of available spaces in each grade level. Fall class lists are established in the spring and are filled to the WCSD's projected class size guidelines.

WCSD Residents: Openings remaining after placement of eligible students from PALS Families and wait list students are filled by WCSD students. If the number of applications received by the established deadline is greater than the number of openings available, a lottery will determine placement in the PALS program and on the wait list. When names are drawn, the Parkmead Site Principal and two PALS Board members must be present. If students withdraw after class lists are established, their positions are offered to students on the wait list. If openings are still available after exhausting all lists they will be filled at the discretion of the Site Principal.

In the case of multiples (twins, triplets, etc.), each child will be treated as an individual. As such, a separate application will be required for each child. If there is a lottery, each child will be entered into and chosen as an individual. Should one child be given a spot and another placed on the waitlist, sibling priority will take effect on the first day of school. On that day, the sibling on the waitlist will move ahead of lottery waitlist children and will have sibling priority.

The order of sibling priority is based on a lottery held at the start of each academic year.

Out-of-District Students: New out-of-District families must attend an informational meeting and apply according to the PALS enrollment schedule for WCSD students. Allen Bill applicants will be admitted at the discretion of the WCSD administration only after it is determined that spaces are available in individual classrooms, following the same practices and schedule as all other WCSD Allen Bill Inter-District Transfer requests. Other out-of-District students will be eligible for placement only when openings remain after WCSD residents and Allen Bill students have been placed.

1. Number of Kindergarten Spaces. The number of available Kindergarten spaces for a given year is determined after accommodating entering Kindergarteners who are siblings of students who are currently enrolled in PALS at the start of their sibling's kindergarten year.

2. In the event that the number of entering Kindergarten siblings exceeds the number of available spaces, a blind lottery of all eligible Kindergarten siblings will be conducted to determine the class list.
3. Number of Spaces in Other Grades. The number of spaces available in other grade levels is determined after accommodating the currently enrolled students (a) who are promoted to the next grade, (b) whose families have returned the current year's Family Participation Letter, and (c) whose family has confirmed re-enrollment of the currently enrolled sibling for the ensuing school year. If space is available beyond these guidelines, priority would be given to siblings first and then openings filled from the wait list.

D. Orientation of New Families

Orientation is held each year, at which time the new families are welcomed. Orientation is designed specifically to welcome new families to the PALS community and is open to all enrolled PALS families.

E. Confirmation of Re-enrollment

PALS Families will complete a Family Participation Letter to confirm re-enrollment for continuing students by mail. Any currently enrolled student who does not confirm re-enrollment according to PALS policy will not be placed in the program the following year.

Continuing PALS students who have submitted their Family Participation Letter will be placed in the program based on WCSD policy.

F. Wait List Families

The Parkmead Site Principal will maintain ongoing wait lists for each class. If a student enrolls in another District opt-in program he/she will be removed from the waitlist and must re-submit an application the following year.

Siblings of currently enrolled PALS students will be placed at the top of the waitlist based on the date of their enrollment.

When space becomes available after the school term has begun, the family at the top of the wait list will be notified and provided a period of 24 weekday hours after notice is received to accept or decline the opening. If the wait list family does not accept within such time period their place on the wait list is forfeited and the opportunity will be presented to the next family on the wait list.

G. Kindergarten Deferral

In the event that prior to the last day of the prior school year the parents of an entering PALS kindergartener who has been duly admitted to the program decide it is in the best interest of the child to defer entrance into the program until the next school year, such family will be placed on the wait list for the next year and will be given priority immediately behind siblings of currently enrolled PALS students.

H. Enrollment Adjustments

PALS draws students from throughout the community. The program serves the needs of the WCSD, while operating on the campus of a neighborhood school. After the placement lottery, in order to address the needs of the program, WCSD, and the school site, adjustments to class size may be made at the discretion of the Parkmead Site Principal (PALS teacher and Board input is encouraged). Every effort is made to follow PALS established membership policies & procedures, including signing the Family Participation Letter. The signing of the Family Participation Letter entitles the family to PALS membership voting privileges for the year and sibling priority for future enrollment.

1. Increase in Program Size

The overall PALS average class size should conform to the current WCSD class size limits. When a space becomes available after class lists have been established, families from the wait list are given a twenty-four hour weekday decision-making period. If this period is waived, the family’s decision is considered final. When program placement is offered and refused, the application is nullified. PALS cannot guarantee placement if a child needs to change grade levels after class lists are formed.

2. Reductions in Program Size

If State or local law mandate, or WCSD policy or regulation requires reduction in class sizes, such reduction shall occur by requiring students to leave the PALS program within each affected grade level in the following order until the required reduction is achieved:

1. Children from families who volunteer to leave;
2. Children from interim families (families who may have been placed in the PALS program on a temporary basis to bring class size up to WCSD average);
3. Out-of-district children
4. Children residing in the WCSD (including Allen Bill Children)

Reductions made from out-of-district children, Allen Bill children, and children who reside in the WCSD will be based on the date of child's entry into the PALS program within each category of situation (out of district, Allen Bill, WCSD). The last child to enter the program will be the first to leave. If children have the same entry date, order will be determined by lottery. The Parkmead Site Principal and two PALS Board members must attend this lottery. The reinstatement list will be maintained in the order of last out, first in.

3. Reinstatement After Program Reduction

Families of students required to leave the PALS program due to a mandatory reduction in class size will be placed on the reinstatement list. After a reduction in class size, places in a PALS classroom may become available because of attrition, program reconfigurations, etc. Students on the reinstatement list will be offered these spaces before children on the wait list. This reinstatement shall occur as follows (sibling priority is not a criteria on the reinstatement list);

1. Children residing in the WCSD (including Allen Bill Children)
2. Out-of-district children.

Families will be contacted for re-enrollment based on the same order as on the reinstatement list. Students will maintain a place on the reinstatement list until one of the following occurs;

1. Student is reinstated back in the program
2. Student is enrolled in a district other than the WCSD
3. Parent(s) / Guardians of the student request in writing that the student be removed from the Reinstatement List
4. Student is promoted from the 5th grade.

Families of students on the reinstatement list are not required to attend annual informational meetings to maintain their eligibility on the reinstatement list.

I. Withdrawal from PALS

Those wishing to withdraw from the PALS program are required to fill out a “Withdrawal Form” available in the school office. The form must be signed by the Parkmead Site Principal and acknowledged by the PALS Board President.