Playground Activity Leaders in Schools

“There is always room for one more.”

Supervisor Handbook
P.A.L.S. Program Objectives

P.A.L.S. is a playground leadership program offered by Peel Health that encourages all children to participate in activities regardless of their gender, size, or ability. P.A.L.S. was developed after a review of existing playground leadership programs and consultation with other health departments.

A Public Health Nurse (PHN) trains staff and students to implement the program. School staff then supervise the program with the PHN providing ongoing support. Students from grades 4 to 6 with leadership qualities are trained to act as playground activity leaders for younger students. These students will plan and lead fun and safe activities on the playground.

The objectives of the P.A.L.S. program are to:

**Increase physical activity**

The amount of physical activity children participate in has decreased significantly over the last 15 years and childhood obesity is a growing public health concern. Daily physical activity has a positive effect on student performance and academic achievement as well as attitude, behaviour and creativity.


**Decrease conflict and reduce the incidence of playground bullying**

The most common place for bullying is on the playground. “Bullying is a crime of opportunity;” if children are bored, there is a lot of opportunity for them to engage in bullying behaviour (Debra Pepler). Organized and fun activities at recess can decrease bullying incidents.

**Provide leadership opportunity for students**

Opportunities to explore and develop competencies enhance a child’s self-esteem. Skill development provided through the program includes communication, problem-solving, organization and co-operation, as well as leadership.
Supervisor(s) Responsibilities

Supervisor(s) can be the principal, vice principal, teachers, other staff (CYW, BTA) or parent volunteers. Ideally the school should have a minimum of two supervisors to help do the following:

• Promote program with potential P.A.L.S. leaders. (see page 3)
  ➢ Determine the grades eligible to apply. The P.A.L.S. leaders are generally chosen from Grade 4-6 students.
  ➢ Provide students with program information and outline commitment.

• Select the P.A.L.S. leaders. (see page 4)
  ➢ Have interested students complete the application form.
  ➢ Provide selected P.A.L.S. leaders with a copy of the Parent Permission form.

• Arrange the leader training dates in conjunction with the PHN.
  ➢ Ensure at least one supervisor attends the training sessions.
  ➢ Book space for the training, library and gym.

• Launch the program in your school. (see page 6)

• Develop a schedule for the leaders. (see page 9,10)

• Provide support and mentoring during regular meetings with P.A.L.S. leaders.
  ➢ You may wish to meet weekly for the first month.
  ➢ Allow time for positive and negative feedback.
  ➢ Spend time problem-solving and include them when making decisions.
  ➢ Spend time learning new games.

• Supervise and support leaders on the playground.

• Maintain the program through incentives, recognition and celebration. (see page 12)
The leader recruitment process can be handled in a variety of ways. Review the suggestions below or develop an alternative plan that meets your schools needs.

1. Consider inviting all grade 4-6 students to an upbeat informative assembly.
2. Have the P.A.L.S. supervisors meet with each class.
3. Prepare a one page information sheet outlining how the P.A.L.S. program will run in your school and schedule time to answer questions.

**Program information:**

Key information to be shared when recruiting leaders:

- **Pump up the volume! Be enthusiastic about P.A.L.S.**
  - Begin by asking them whether they like to play games on the playground.
  - Share some of the games (skipping, ball, and tag). You may wish to demonstrate a few.
  - Talk about their role in teaching younger children how to play.

- **Review the objectives of the program (see page 1).**
  - Highlight P.A.L.S. as a leadership opportunity and a chance to make a difference in their school by decreasing bullying behaviour and increasing physical activity.

- **Review program commitment**
  - When the program will run (i.e. noon hour recess or during nutrition breaks)
  - Determine the number of days per week leaders will be scheduled.
  - Commitment to keep up with school and homework
  - Emphasize how children look up to leaders and the importance of role modeling positive behaviour every day.
  - Provide an overview of the training.

- **Application and selection process**
  - Communicate the number of leaders that will be chosen.
  - Distribute copies of the application and parent permission forms.
  - Communicate the due date for completed forms.
  - Share when and how leaders will know if they have been selected.
Selecting Leaders

- Recommended age is Grade 4 to 6
- Recruit 30-50 students for each training group – take into consideration how many days per week leaders will be on the playground and the ratio of leaders to participating students.
- Plan for 10-15 leaders on schoolyard at each recess.
- Choose a mix of students:
  - Assertive
  - Sociable, enthusiastic
  - Bullying behaviours in the past
  - Target of bullying or marginalized
- Choose a mix of males and females
  - Male leaders tend to choose more physical games.
  - Female leaders tend to choose quieter activities.
  - Having a mix of leaders will offer a variety of activities for males and females.
- Select students who have the ability/willingness to role model positive behaviours.
- Select students with a willingness to learn problem solving skills.
- Build on any existing leadership programs offered in the school.
Leader Training

Training is approximately 3 – 4 hours in length:

- Initial training day: two and half hours plus a break
- Lunch meeting: one week after initial training day

Initial training day:

Part One: 1 hour

- Leader handbook (in the library or room with tables)
  - Welcome and ice breaker activity
  - Qualities of a leader and leadership styles
  - Communication skills
  - Bullying
  - Fair play
  - Safety on the playground

Recess or lunch break

Part two: 1 1/2 hours

- Games (gym or outside)
  - Set up 3-4 stations (skipping, tag, ball games, etc.).
    The PHN will bring the equipment.
  - Divide the P.A.L.S. leaders into 3-4 equal groups.
  - Allow an equal amount of time at each station.
  - Each group will rotate through each station.

Lunch meeting

- Conflict resolution scenarios and discussion
- Introduce new games if time permits.
- Review leader commitment and schedule

Ongoing weekly or biweekly meetings are essential for problem-solving, encouragement, and learning new games.
Launching the program in your school

Each school may choose to launch the program in a different way. Here are a few ideas:

**Introduce the program and P.A.L.S. leaders at an assembly.**
- Use questions to increase the students’ interest in having fun on the playground. e.g. How many of you are sometimes bored at recess?
- Tell the students about the program.
- Introduce the P.A.L.S. leaders and have them wear the P.A.L.S. pinnies.
- Have the leaders demonstrate a few of the games they will be playing.

**P.A. announcements (see page 7 and 8)**
- Remind the students often about P.A.L.S., especially when it is first initiated.
- Inform students about the types of games they will be playing and where they can find them on the playground.
- Remind students everyone is welcome to play the games.
- Share the motto: “There is always room for one more”.

**Arrange a play day to orient the students to the various games.**
- Set up different stations in the school yard or the gym (e.g. skipping, ball games, marbles, elastics, tag, etc.).
- Schedule classes for a designated period of time.
- Have the classes rotate through the stations to learn games from each category.
- Have the P.A.L.S. leaders work in pairs.

**Introduce games during gym or one class at a time during recess.**
- Teach the games during gym class using stations as outlined above.
- If you decide to train during recess, arrange a training schedule for classes.
- Select a few P.A.L.S. leaders to train the scheduled class while other leaders play games with classes already trained.
I’m lovin’ P.A.L.S.  (To the tune of the “I’m lovin’ it” - McDonald’s jingle)
Submitted by Silverthorn Elementary School

Da da da da da, I’m lovin’ P.A.L.S.
P.A.L.S. is here! And “I’m lovin’ it”. Today at (time), you’ll get a change to find out all about it! P.A.L.S. student leaders will be on the playground in their bright red pinnies to play great new games and have lots of fun.
So remember,
Da da da da da, I’m lovin’ P.A.L.S.

P.A.L.S. cheer
Submitted by St. Gregory’s

Gimme a P! Gimme an A! Gimme an L! Gimme an S!
What have you got?
P.A.L.S.!
What’s that again?
P.A.L.S.!

The P.A.L.S. student leaders will be out on the playground today at (time) so look for their bright red pinnies. Join them to play some cool games!

P.A.L.S. Chant

We’re P.A.L.S. leaders and we’re here to say, we offer fun and games most every day. When we’re out you’ll always know, by our bright red pinnies that almost glow!
Out on the playground, we’re meeting new friends. The fun never stops and the games never end.
So come out and meet us, we’re always around. We’ll be out at recess, all over the playground.
P.A. Announcements (continued)

P.A.L.S. two way conversation

1 Hey (name)!
1 What is it (name)?
1 Have you heard of this great new thing at our school? It’s called P.A.L.S.
1 P.A.L.S.? What’s that?
1 Well, today at (time) the P.A.L.S. student leaders will be out on the playground in bright red pinnies to teach us lots of cool new games.
1 Really? That sounds great!
1 Yeah, and they’ll be out on the playground (specify when) to show us even more games. They play tag and ball games and jump rope and more.
1 Wow! Well now that I know what it is, I’ll be there for sure! I hope everyone comes out for this! It sounds amazing!

P.A.L.S. poem

You know their name and you know their colour!
They’re fantastic and fun, like no other!
The P.A.L.S. help make our recess swing!
Come on out, and don’t miss a thing!

P.A.L.S. are here and they love to play!
They make the most of every day!
They play great games and have tons of fun!
And they love to play with everyone!

Come on over and join the games!
Meet new people and learn new names!
P.A.L.S. can’t wait to run and play!
So come and see them, don’t delay!

That’s right everyone, the P.A.L.S. will be out today on the playground from (time) to (time) doing their P.A.L.S. thing. Look for the bright red pinnies and come on over to have some major fun!

P.A.L.S. have returned

Guess what everybody? The P.A.L.S. leaders are back! They will be out on the playground for another fun filled session of ball games, tag, skipping and jumpsies (or specify day’s activity). They’ll be out today from (time) to (time) teaching excellent new games. Just look for the bright red P.A.L.S. pinnies and come out and join the fun.
Some P.A.L.S. supervisors have found scheduling leaders the most challenging part of the program. Every school operates differently and will have to create a schedule to meet their needs. Here are a few points to consider when developing the schedule. Don’t be afraid to experiment or ask your school PHN for suggestions that have worked in other schools.

• Determine how many days per week the P.A.L.S. program will be offered.
  ➢ Some schools offer the program every day while others may choose to run the program four days and have one day available for meetings and introducing new games.

• Decide if the program will run at recess and lunch or just at lunch.

• Ask leaders to submit their choice of days and the names of one or two individuals they would like to work with.
  ➢ A choice of days allows the leaders to participate in other lunch time activities.
  ➢ Leaders will enjoy the program more if they are working with a friend.
  ➢ Tell leaders you will try to meet as many requests as possible, however it will be impossible to meet all requests.

• Create teams based on the number of days the leaders are assigned each week.
  ➢ Assign a few older students to each team.
  ➢ Assign a mix of males and females.
  ➢ Assign a colour or name to each team.
    E.g. program offered five days/week with leaders assigned two days/week:
      ➢ Blue team for Monday and Wednesday lunch
      ➢ Green team for Tuesday and Thursday lunch
      ➢ Red team for Friday and as the back up team

• Consider switching days for the teams each month so the Friday group has an opportunity to be P.A.L.S. leaders two days per week.
  ➢ Before making schedule changes take into consideration the timing of other clubs or teams the leader may have committed to on their non-scheduled days.
Scheduling Leaders

• A well-designed play space can help reduce conflict.
  ➢ Designate areas of the playground for each station (see below).
  ➢ When developing the schedule split the team for the day into stations.
    E.g. Blue team: three leaders for ball games, three leaders for tag, two for
    skipping, two for jumpsies and two for tarmac games
    (if your school has tarmac activities).
  ➢ Assess the level of game popularity and make adjustments to the number assigned
    to each station.

• To improve communication with leaders, assign a supervisor to each team.
  ➢ This will decrease the number of leaders each supervisor is responsible for making
    the P.A.L.S. program more manageable.
  ➢ P.A.L.S. leaders will know who to inform if they are away or have a concern they
    wish to discuss.

• Back-up leaders
  ➢ The back-up team would be asked to fill in if a leader is away sick or on a
    school trip.
  ➢ Back up may also be used to replace a leader who has a short term commitment
    such as extra practice for a play or playoffs for a team.
  ➢ P.A.L.S. leaders are responsible for notifying the supervisor if they are away or
    unable to fulfill their duty.

• Decide if the P.A.L.S. leaders will be involved if there is indoor recess.
  ➢ Assign each P.A.L.S. leader a class for indoor recess.
  ➢ The P.A.L.S. leader would be expected to provide indoor
    recess activities to their assigned class.
Leader Visibility – Pinnies

It is important to ensure leader visibility on the playground. Peel Health created a one size fits all pinnie (for this purpose). Schools interested in using the pinnies for their P.A.L.S. program will receive 12 pinnies, one time only. Peel Health will not be responsible for replacing lost pinnies.

Pinnies will be made available to schools that have:

➢ completed the P.A.L.S. training.
➢ signed the partnership agreement.

Pinnies are red with white printing.

The P.A.L.S. pinnies were produced with the support of the Peel Heart Health Network.
“Recognition is a valuable motivator, since positive reinforcement enhances self-esteem, personal growth, and a sense of belonging.” When participants and leaders are recognized they show greater commitment to the program and you are likely to see increased participation. The following are some ideas:

**Leader Recognition**

**Certificate of Completion** - given by PHN for completing training

**Playground Leader of the Week**
- Certificates
- Announcements (assemblies or P.A.)
- Classroom and/or Bulletin Board Postings
- Consider creating a visual that can be added to each week. For example, a P.A.L.S. garden filled with flowers or trees with each petal or leaf having the name of a P.A.L.S. leader of the week.

**Material Awards** - prize draws for leaders who have consistently fulfilled their obligations
- Prizes (Monthly or Weekly) – pencils, notebooks, erasers
- Coupons, ribbons, stickers
- Team Achievement Award

**Year End Pizza Party**

**Celebrations** - Celebrate successes at leader meetings to keep the group motivated:
- Share success stories, ideas, new games
- Picture wall/brag book

**Participant Recognition** - Recognize those who consistently participate in the program (play games, assist leaders with clean-up, etc.)
- P.A.L.S. Tree in school (every consistent participant is a leaf of the tree)
- Sportsmanship/Spirit Awards
- Announcements at assemblies
- Participant stickers
Safety on the Playground

Playground safety is a shared responsibility. Here are some tips to help you and your P.A.L.S leaders to understand the role you play in keeping the playground a safe and fun place to be!

- Meet with students to discuss safety considerations that are specific to your school.
- Discuss the importance of following general safety rules such as: respecting people's space on the playground, adjusting play according to the age of the players, waiting your turn and avoiding pushing or rough play.
- Encourage the storing of equipment in its appropriate carrying case, so that it does not become a hazard.
- Remind leaders that they need to be good role models for the younger children. Remember to be a good role model yourself.
- Keep tag and ball games in separate areas of the playground to prevent collisions.
- Ensure there is adequate supervision on the playground and that playground staff are easily visible.
- Intervene immediately if bullying behaviour takes place.
- Emphasize the importance of promptly obtaining the assistance of a supervisor if an injury occurs or they have a safety concern.

Weather Considerations

Although each school board will have specific policies addressing extreme weather conditions, here are some guidelines to keep in mind:

- Remind parents and students of the importance of sunscreen, wide brimmed hats and sunglasses as protection from sun exposure.
- Encourage students to pick less strenuous games and activities on hot days.
- Encourage rest periods preferably in shaded areas on hot days.
- Observe board policy on days of extreme weather conditions and consider the use of indoor games.
- Remind parents and students to dress warmly during winter months, cover any exposed skin by wearing insulated boots, coats, mittens, hats and scarves.
- Help students to assess icy conditions on the playground and avoid those areas.
- Remind students to promptly change out of wet clothing.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia, frostbite, sunstroke and heat exhaustion.
Playground Equipment List

When organizing the playground equipment consider using a mesh bag or small tote. Ensure whatever you choose is light weight and easy to carry. Organize the equipment according to how you designed your playground. For example, if you have a skipping station, place all the skipping ropes in one bag. Repeat the same process for ball, jumpsie ropes and tag games.

- Skipping Ropes ~ 7 foot rope (4 or 5)
  ~ 14 foot or longer (4 or 5)
  ~ rubber skipping ropes are best
- Balls ~ tennis balls (4 or 5)
  ~ plastic balls or dodge balls (4 or 6)
  ~ red/white/blue bouncy balls (10 - 12)
- Jumpsies/Yogi Ropes ~ 4 or 5 (can be made from sewing elastic)
- Kerchief or plush toys – hand size (2 or 3)

Optional:

- Marbles (2 or 3 bags)
- Jacks (3 or 4 sets)
- Smooth stones (1 bag)

Approximate cost of the equipment is $100.00

* If you are unable to find equipment at local stores, consider purchasing equipment through equipment supply catalogues.

Reference List

Deb Cockerton, Youth Counsellor, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board


The Canadian Intramural Recreation Association of Ontario.

Recess Revival: An Implementation Guide to an Active Playground

Middlesex-London Health Unit.

P.L.A.Y. Peer Leadership for Active Youth.

Durham Region.

Peers Running Organized Play Stations (P.R.O.P.S.)
The P.A.L.S. program was first piloted in 20 Schools in Peel, in 2003. Based on the feedback received from students and teachers we have been able to both improve the program and assess its effectiveness. Here are some highlights from the evaluations.

**Objective 1 - Increase physical activity**

- 55% of program supervisors felt that student activity levels had increased “somewhat” and 40% reported activity levels as having increased “very much”.

- 49% of the student leaders report they each played games with 5-10 students at any one time, with 11% reporting 11-15 students, and 11% reporting 16-20 students. “I learned about how much exercise you can get by playing the games.”

**Objective 2 - Decrease conflict and reduce the incidence of playground bullying**

- 81% of supervisors felt that inappropriate verbal behaviour had decreased “somewhat” or “very much.” 89% felt that inappropriate physical behaviour had decreased “somewhat” or “very much.”

- Supervisor comments –
  - “The number of ‘Blue Sheets’ for inappropriate behaviour in the primary/junior grades has decreased significantly.”
  - “Uninstructed time at lunch was the problem. Organized activities kept the students occupied and with less time to get into disputes/trouble.”

- Student comments – “From being involved in P.A.L.S., I learned:
  - we can make bullying stop if we do this every year.”
  - P.A.L.S. has stopped bullying.”

**Objective 3 - Provide leadership opportunity for students**

- 66% of supervisors felt that the student leaders had showed leadership skills “very much,” with 100% reporting students showing “somewhat” or “very much” responsibility.
P.A.L.S. Outcomes

• 87% of P.A.L.S. student leaders would recommend being a leader to others.

• Student comments – “From being involved in P.A.L.S., I learned:
  ➢ leadership and how to organize things.”
  ➢ you can be school leaders and set a good example for the younger people.”
  ➢ I have the talent to be a leader and kids look up to me.”

Program improvements

Both the supervisors and leaders were asked for program improvement suggestions after the first year. The following is a brief synopsis of some of the issues.

More games: 31% of P.A.L.S. leaders felt they needed to learn more games to keep participation high. Supervisors concurred.
Response ~ More games taught at training sessions, emphasis placed on the importance of regular P.A.L.S. meetings, monthly Peel Health E-mails to supervisors with new games. 75% of supervisors stated that they used the E-mailed games. To come: games in a book format.

Changes to training: Supervisors suggested splitting the training into two sessions as there was too much content for students to learn in one session.
Response ~ two training sessions created. Implemented break in middle of first session.

Schedules/Organizing: 42% of supervisors stated that they needed help with scheduling.
Response ~ Additions made to handbook outlining scheduling alternatives. Sample schedules are also available.

Equipment: Both leaders and supervisors felt more and better use of equipment was necessary.
Response ~ Suggestions made for organizing equipment and for getting funds from school council and administration.

Keeping leaders and participants motivated: Any program can fall by the wayside without incentives and recognition.
Response ~ Additions to program including P.A. announcements, pinnies, new games, tattoos, and increased PHN support when requested.
# Playground Activity Leaders in Schools (P.A.L.S.)

## STUDENT APPLICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Grade:</th>
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**Your teacher’s name:**

1) **Why do you want to be a Playground Leader?**

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

2) **Some activities I have helped with (at school, home or elsewhere) are:**

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3) **What do you think P.A.L.S. can do for your school?**

    __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________

   **Applicant’s signature:** ________________________________

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**TEACHER REFERENCE:** Please have a teacher complete this part.

**I think _______________________________ would do a good job as a Playground leader because:**

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   **Teacher’s signature:** ________________________________

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Adapted from: Playground Leadership Program, Canadian Intramural Recreation Association & Peers Running Organized Play Stations (P.R.O.P.S.), Durham Region
Dear Parent/Guardian,

[Child’s Name] is initiating a ‘Playground Activity Leaders in Schools’ program (P.A.L.S.)

Your child has expressed interest in being a leader in the P.A.L.S. program. A Public Health Nurse will provide a leaders training workshop. The workshop will teach the student leaders how to plan and lead fun and safe activities on the playground for students in Grades 1-5. We believe the opportunity for young people to participate in structured playground activity:

- Promotes physical activity during leisure time
- Reduces bullying behaviour on the playground
- Provides children with leadership opportunities

Please sign the application form and return it to: ____________________________

If you have further questions, feel free to contact a P.A.L.S. supervisor.

Sincerely,
P.A.L.S. Supervisors and the Public Health Nurse (Peel Health)

I give my permission for my child to be a part of P.A.L.S.

STUDENTS NAME: ____________________________
(Please Print)

PARENT SIGNATURE: ____________________________ DATE: _____/_____/_____