Family Information Sheet for Literacy Screening in Virginia

What is literacy?
Literacy means that someone can read and write. The goal of reading is to be able to understand (comprehend) what one reads. Children need to be able to:
1. *decode* –blend sounds together to read words
2. *encode* – spell words
3. *understand and use language*

As children's skills improve in these three areas, they develop *fluency* and *comprehension*.

What is a screener?
A literacy *screener* (also known as a *test* or *assessment*) is designed to identify children at high risk for reading problems. If students are identified as needing additional support, they receive *intervention* (i.e., extra instruction) to help the student make progress. Early intervention is critical because research tells us that risk for reading difficulties can be detected as early as kindergarten. Additionally, *PALS* task scores allow teachers to target instruction to meet student needs.

What is *PALS*?
PALS is the Virginia Department of Education sponsored literacy screener that is designed to give a snapshot of critical literacy skills at a single moment in time. Rather than focus on all parts of literacy, *PALS* focuses on *decoding* and *encoding*. *PALS* does **not** offer a comprehensive picture of your child's literacy skills.

What do *PALS* scores mean?
PALS has *individual task scores* which show the number of items a student answered correctly on each task and an overall *Summed Score*. If a child's *Summed Score* is below the *Summed Score Benchmark*, the student is eligible to receive state dollars for intervention. There is a different *Summed Score Benchmark* for each grade-level and each time period (fall/spring). There is not a *Summed Score Benchmark* at Mid-Year. Mid-Year screening allows teachers to monitor students' individual task scores in between the Fall and Spring assessment periods.

If your child's *Summed Score* meets or exceeds the Fall or Spring benchmark, your child's individual task scores may still indicate that your child needs instruction in these particular areas.

If your child's *Summed Score* is below the Fall or Spring benchmark, this indicates that your child is *significantly* behind in basic literacy development and has been *Identified below the Summed Score Benchmark* by *PALS*.

Students who have and/or by their name have a Fall or Spring *Summed Score* below the benchmark and are required by the Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI) to receive 2.5 hours of additional instruction per week above and beyond regular classroom instruction. Divisions and schools may decide what intervention looks like and how to communicate the plan to families. The 2.5 hours may include time with a *person* or a *program*, or a *combination* of the two. *You may ask your child's school about EIRI intervention provided for your child.* The Virginia Literacy Partnerships Office provides a letter template that divisions and schools can use to give you additional information about your child's *PALS* scores.

Virginia Literacy Partnerships

What are spelling features?

Students spell a list of words as part of the screener. A student may get the entire word correct and/or parts of the word correct. Knowledge of the parts, or phonics features, is critical in encoding (spelling) and decoding (reading). By analyzing students' spelling, the teacher can determine what phonics features to teach and what features are already known. These features progress from easier to harder.

Features	Examples (words are not from assessment)
Beginning Sounds	<u>b</u>at, <u>m</u>an
Ending Sounds	ba<u>t</u>, ma<u>n</u>
Beg/End Sounds	<u>b</u>a<u>t</u>, <u>m</u>a<u>n</u> (must have both)
Digraphs	<u>sh</u>op, ba<u>th</u>
Blends	<u>tr</u>ap, fa<u>st</u>, <u>cl</u>am
Short Vowels (CVC)	d<u>a</u>d, p<u>i</u>t
Nasals	bu<u>mp</u>, ju<u>nk</u>
CVCe (silent e)	b<u>ake</u>, d<u>ime</u>
Long Vowels	l<u>ea</u>p, b<u>oa</u>t
R- and L- Influenced	g<u>ir</u>l, h<u>el</u>p
Ambiguous Vowels	p<u>ou</u>t, f<u>oi</u>l
Syllable Juncture	clo<u>s</u>ing, ra<u>ced</u>
Affixes	<u>mis</u>judge, quick<u>ly</u>
Derivations	align, perm<u>ission</u>