



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

BRIEFING

# **EARLY INTERVENTION READING INITIATIVE**

**PRESENTED TO THE  
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

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## **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

The Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI) was initially established by the 1997 *Virginia Acts of Assembly*, Chapter 924, Item 140, to serve either kindergarten or first grade students. During the 2000 General Assembly, this initiative was expanded to serve kindergarten through third-grade students.

## **PURPOSE**

The Early Intervention Reading Initiative is designed to reduce significantly the number of children with reading problems through early diagnosis and immediate intervention. As a result of the intervention services, the essential reading skills of the identified students will be improved by the end of each grade level, kindergarten through third grade.

## **FUNDING**

Funding is provided for the development and implementation of assessment instruments, and for the intervention services for those students needing additional instruction.

- To develop the diagnostic instruments and support program implementation, the Virginia Department of Education has contracted with experts in reading-instruction and reading-research at the University of Virginia to develop the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) instruments, to establish a system that provides data-driven information and instructional resources to school divisions, and to collect statewide data on students' PALS results.
- Since 2003, the base budget for PALS has remained at \$950,000.
- School division allocations are calculated using the state's share of providing two and one-half hours of additional instruction each week for an estimated number of students in each school division at a student-to-teacher ratio of five-to-one.

**Table 1. Funding to School Divisions**

<b>Biennium</b>	<b>First Year</b>	<b>Second Year</b>
2000-2002	\$14,052,542	\$12,372,527
2002-2004	\$9,115,922	\$10,416,959
2004-2006	\$10,926,314	\$11,028,354
2006-2008	\$10,172,555	\$14,339,348

- Direct aid funds are disbursed by the Department of Education to school divisions that choose to participate. Localities are required to match these funds based upon the composite index of local ability-to-pay.
- For 2006-2007, the estimated number of students in each school division was determined by the percentage of students who were identified to receive services based on the results of the diagnostic assessment (PALS) administered in the prior school year (spring 2006).
- School divisions that chose not to participate in the program in kindergarten through grade three during the 2005-2006 year, but did choose to participate in kindergarten through grade three in 2006-2007 did not have the assessment results to determine funding and are therefore funded based on the number of students in grades kindergarten through grade three who are eligible for the federal free lunch program.
- Governor Kaine introduced an amendment to the Early Intervention Reading Initiative budget for the 2007-2008 fiscal year that allowed more students to be served at an increased state cost of \$4.1 million. The amendment increased the number of students to be served in grades 1 and 2 from 50 percent to 100 percent of the eligible students.
- Beginning in 2007-2008, there is funding to serve 100 percent of the eligible students in kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2, and to serve 25 percent of the eligible students in grade 3.

## RESEARCH SUPPORTING THE READING INITIATIVE

- Longitudinal research indicates that students at risk in grade one continue to be at risk in grade four (Juel, 1988), and that the gap between grade-level expectation and actual achievement becomes wider each successive year (Stanovich, 1986).
- Explicit, intensive instruction is an essential feature of effective interventions for struggling readers, including students with learning disabilities (National Reading Panel, 2000).
- The critical variables determining the success of early reading interventions intended for at-risk students pertain to the intensity, duration, and supportiveness of instruction; the timing of the intervention; the student teacher ratio; the knowledge base of the intervention teacher; and the content of the intervention (Foorman and Torgesen, 2001).
- Early intervention in grades one and two is more effective than later intervention because intervention at grade three and beyond requires greater intensity and more hours to be successful, and reading fluency rates are difficult to normalize (Torgesen et al., 2001; Torgesen, 2002).

## **PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS LITERACY SCREENING (PALS)**

- Through a contract with the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, the reading initiative provides participating divisions with the diagnostic screening instruments, PALS-K and PALS 1-3 (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening).
- These criterion-referenced instruments assess the knowledge and skills of the kindergarten through grade three reading Standards of Learning in the categories of phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, decoding, encoding, word analysis, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension.
- The specific skills assessed in these areas are based on current reading research and are consistent with the “essential components of reading” noted in *Reading First*, Title I, Part B, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

## **PALS-PREK SCREENING INSTRUMENT**

- In 2001, through funding under the Virginia Preschool Initiative, PALS-PreK was developed by the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. In 2002 and 2003, continued funding was provided through the federal Reading Excellence Act grant.
- Since 2003, funding for PALS-PreK has been determined annually based on the availability of non-general funds. If funding is available, PALS-PreK is provided at no cost to all state-funded preschool programs and is available for purchase by any other preschool educational program.
- The six literacy tasks within the assessment are rhyme, alphabet knowledge, beginning sounds, print and word awareness, rhyme awareness, and name writing.

## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

- When the program began, all students at each grade level were screened in the fall, using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) instruments or an approved alternate screening instrument. All students at the participating grade levels not meeting established passing criteria on the screening instrument were provided intervention and were re-screened at the end of that school year.
- Screening requirements changed beginning in the 2002-2003 school year. The screening window for grades one through three was moved from a fall-to-fall window to a spring-to-spring window. This allows intervention services for all students in grades one through three to start at the beginning of the school year or during the summer, and eliminates the problem the fall screening window created for year-round schools or schools that start before Labor Day.
- Those students attaining the “high benchmark” of reading one grade or more above grade level in grade one were no longer required to be screened. These students are clearly performing above grade-level expectations and are unlikely to need additional reading interventions in the future.
- Additional information about the screening process is provided in Appendix A.

**PROGRAM PARTICIPATION – DIAGNOSTIC SCREENING**

- Beginning in 1997-98, 89 percent of the school divisions participated in EIRI.
- In 2006-2007, 100 percent of the school divisions were participating.
- Since the implementation of EIRI in 2001-2002, the number of students screened with the PALS assessment in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 has increased each year.
- Each year since 2001, nearly a quarter-of-a-million children have been screened to identify early reading problems; on average more than 41,000 children have received services under EIRI each year since 2001.
- In participating school divisions, between 84 and 88 percent of students in second grade have been screened with PALS since 2002-2003. The lower percentage of students reflects changes in program requirements that did not require screening for second grade students who previously scored at the “high benchmark” range.
- Although the mandatory screening requirement for grade 3 was dropped in 2002-2003, over 30,000 third-grade students have been screened each year as school divisions appreciate the benefits of the initiative.
- Additional information about student participation in EIRI are provided in Appendices B, C, and D.

**PROGRAM PARTICIPATION – ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTION**

- Since 2001, between 35,000 and 47,200 students in grades kindergarten through 3 have been identified to receive additional instruction under the EIRI program.
- Each year since 2001, an average of 15 percent of students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 2 in participating school divisions were identified to receive additional services.
- Additional details are provided in Appendices E and F.

## **INTERVENTION SERVICES**

- Intervention services for students identified below the benchmark are provided in addition to the students' regular reading instruction. For most students, the recommendation for intervention services is two and one-half hours per week.
- Participating divisions design their own intervention models to provide reading instruction consistent with their current reading program, reading research, and staff availability.
- Intervention services currently being used include: one-on-one or small groups working with a reading specialist, a trained instructional assistant, or a volunteer tutor under the supervision of a qualified teacher usually in a pullout program; computer-based tutorials; before- or after-school tutorials; and summer school programs.
- The Department of Education has provided technical assistance to divisions on effective methods, strategies, and programs that scientifically-based reading research indicates are effective.

## PROGRESS OF STUDENT COHORTS THAT RECEIVED INTERVENTION

**Table 2. Progress of a Cohort of Kindergarten Students Receiving Intervention**

School Year	Students Identified for Intervention in Fall of Kindergarten*	Spring Kindergarten PALS Status for Fall-identified Students	
		Met Spring Kindergarten Benchmark	Did Not Meet Spring Kindergarten Benchmark
2003-2004	16,735	8,415 (50%)	8,320 (50%)
2004-2005	15,269	7,415 (49%)	7,854 (51%)
2005-2006	14,117	7,279 (52%)	6,838 (48%)

\*Table includes only those students with both fall and spring scores in the PALS database. Percents are rounded.

- Table 2 shows the relative growth from below PALS benchmark status to above PALS benchmark status for a cohort of kindergarten students who participated in PALS testing in the fall and spring.
- Approximately 50 percent of students identified for intervention upon entering kindergarten are no longer identified as needing additional literacy instruction in spring of kindergarten; this rate has been fairly consistent for the past three years.

**Table 3. Progress of a Cohort of First Grade Students Receiving Intervention**

Time period	Students Identified for Intervention in Spring of Kindergarten*	Spring First Grade PALS Status for Students Identified in Spring Kindergarten	
		Met Spring First Grade Benchmark	Did Not Meet Spring First Grade Benchmark
Spring 2003 to Spring 2004	7,341	3,616 (49%)	3,725 (51%)
Spring 2004 to Spring 2005	7,043	3,089 (44%)	3,954 (56%)
Spring 2005 to Spring 2006	7,226	3,365 (47%)	3,861 (53%)

\*Table includes only those students with both spring Kindergarten and spring First Grade scores in the PALS database. Percents are rounded.

- Table 3 shows relative growth from below PALS benchmark status in spring kindergarten to above PALS benchmark status in spring of grade one.
- Between 44 percent and 49 percent of students identified for intervention at the end of kindergarten are no longer identified as needing additional literacy instruction in spring of grade one; this rate has been fairly consistent for the past three years.

**Table 4. Progress of a Cohort of Second Grade Students Receiving Intervention**

Time period	Students Identified for Intervention in Spring First Grade*	Spring Second Grade PALS Status for Students Identified in Spring First Grade	
		Met Spring Second Grade Benchmark	Did Not Meet Spring Second Grade Benchmark
Spring 2003 to Spring 2004	6,156	2,196 (36%)	3,960 (64%)
Spring 2004 to Spring 2005	7,103	2,013 (28%)	5,090 (72%)
Spring 2005 to Spring 2006	7,628	3,359 (44%)	4,269 (56%)

\*Table includes only those students with both spring Grade One and spring Grade Two scores in the PALS database. Percents are rounded.

- Table 4 shows the relative growth from below PALS benchmark status in spring first grade to above PALS benchmark status in spring of grade two.
- Between 28 and 44 percent of students below benchmark at the end of grade one are no longer identified as needing additional literacy instruction in spring of grade two.

## PROGRAM IMPACT

- The Early Intervention Reading Initiative has enhanced the English Standards of Learning by clearly specifying reading benchmarks for students in grades kindergarten through grade three, thus ensuring statewide consistency.
- Since fall 2000, an average of 21 percent of the kindergarten students have been identified to receive reading intervention services. The number of kindergarten children requiring intervention has decreased each year since fall 2003.
- In 2005-2006, the grade 3 reading test was restructured to remove the multiple choice section on writing mechanics, and focus solely on reading comprehension. In essence, a new baseline was set for subsequent reading assessments, with an 84 percent passing rate.
- The statewide grade 3 passing rate in reading for all students rose from 65 percent in 2000-2001 to 84 percent in 2005-2006, which represents a 19 point gain overall.

<b>Grade 3 English/Reading Pass Rates on Statewide Assessments</b>									
<b>1997-1998</b>	<b>1998-1999</b>	<b>1999-2000</b>	<b>2000-2001*</b>	<b>2001-2002</b>	<b>2002-2003</b>	<b>2003-2004</b>	<b>2004-2005</b>	<b>2005-2006</b>	<b>Change from 2000-2001 to 2005-2006</b>
55%	61%	61%	65%	72%	72%	71%	77%	84%	19

\*Third-grade students in the 2000-2001 school year included the first cohort of students to benefit from four full years of the EIRI program.

- While the performance of all students on the grade 3 reading assessment has improved over time, the achievement gap has closed noticeably between white students and other groups whose performance has typically lagged behind, as illustrated in the table below.

Grade 3 English/Reading Pass Rates on Statewide Assessments							
Student Subgroup	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004**	2004-2005	2005-2006	Change from 2000-2001 to 2005-2006
All Students	65	72	72	71	77	84	19
White Students	73	80	79	79	82	88	15
Asian Students	74	82	82	81	84	90	16
Black Students	46	55	58	56	67	73	27
Hispanic Students	53	59	62	62	68	79	26
American Indian Students	70	78	78	71	76	86	16
Students with Disabilities	34	51	54	47	54	71	37
Students Identified as Disadvantaged	*	55	57	57	65	74	19*
Limited English Proficient Students	45	55	56	60	68	77	32
Students Identified as Migrant	19	45	47	70	65	71	52
Other Students	67	77	73	73	80	84	17

\*Data on the performance of disadvantaged students were first collected in 2001-2002. The change is from 2002-2006.

\*\*The lower scores for some subgroups in 2003-2004 may be attributed to the fact that this was the first year the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* required all special education students to take the SOL tests with or without accommodations for the grade level enrolled regardless of their instructional grade level.

## SUPPORT FOR THE INITIATIVE - PALS OFFICE

The PALS office at UVA serves the goals of Virginia's EIRI by:

- Developing all PALS screening instruments and ensuring their technical adequacy;
- Producing, printing, and distributing all screening materials for teachers' use;
- Supporting approximately 15,000 teachers in using the PALS screening instruments to plan and implement literacy instruction;
- Maintaining a telephone hotline and e-mail system for teachers and administrators (over 6,000 phone calls on the PALS hotline and over 3,000 e-mails in the 2005-2006 school year);
- Hosting the annual district representative meeting for EIRI participants which includes EIRI news and updates as well as professional development trainings; and
- Maintaining an online score entry and reporting system available through the PALS Web site: (<http://pals.virginia.edu>)

The PALS office also provides:

- A system of online score entry (data collection) and score histories for approximately 250,000 students annually;
- A system that allows student scores to be transferred online within Virginia to maintain complete PALS assessment records;
- An online version of the assessment (PALS Online Assessment Wizard) where teachers score the assessment online during screening;
- A range of interpretative reports that help teachers plan literacy instruction, group students for instruction, and monitor students' progress over time, including individual-, class-, grade-, school-, and district-level reports;
- Data for download so that school districts may conduct further and more specific analyses at the local level;
- A library of literacy activities on the PALS Web site that are linked to specific areas of need; and
- A host of literacy resources for teachers and parents on the PALS Web site.

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A. PALS Fall and Spring Assessment 2007-2008**

	<b>Fall</b>	<b>Fall Reading First Schools*</b>	<b>Spring</b>	<b>Spring Reading First Schools*</b>
<b>Kindergarten</b>	All students screened	All students screened	All students screened	All students screened
<b>First Grade</b>	Students who are new to Virginia public schools and students who received summer intervention are screened	All students screened	All students screened	All students screened
<b>Second Grade</b>	Students who are new to Virginia public schools and students who received summer intervention are screened	All students screened	All students without a "high benchmark score" are screened	All students screened
<b>Third Grade</b>	Students who are new to Virginia public schools and students who received summer intervention are screened	All students screened	All students take the SOL test	All students take the SOL test

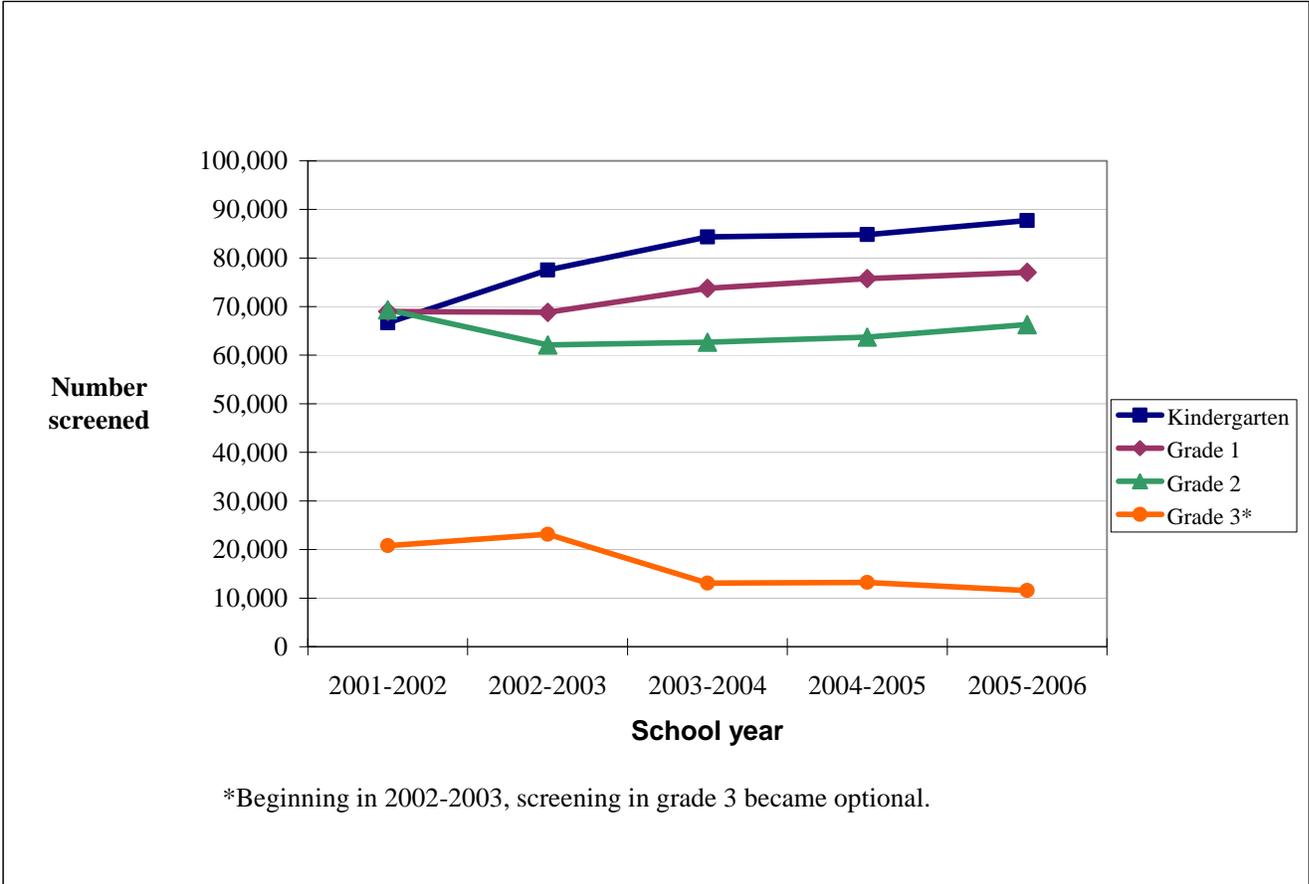
\* As a requirement of the federal Reading First grant, Reading First schools must screen all students.

**Appendix B. School division participation**

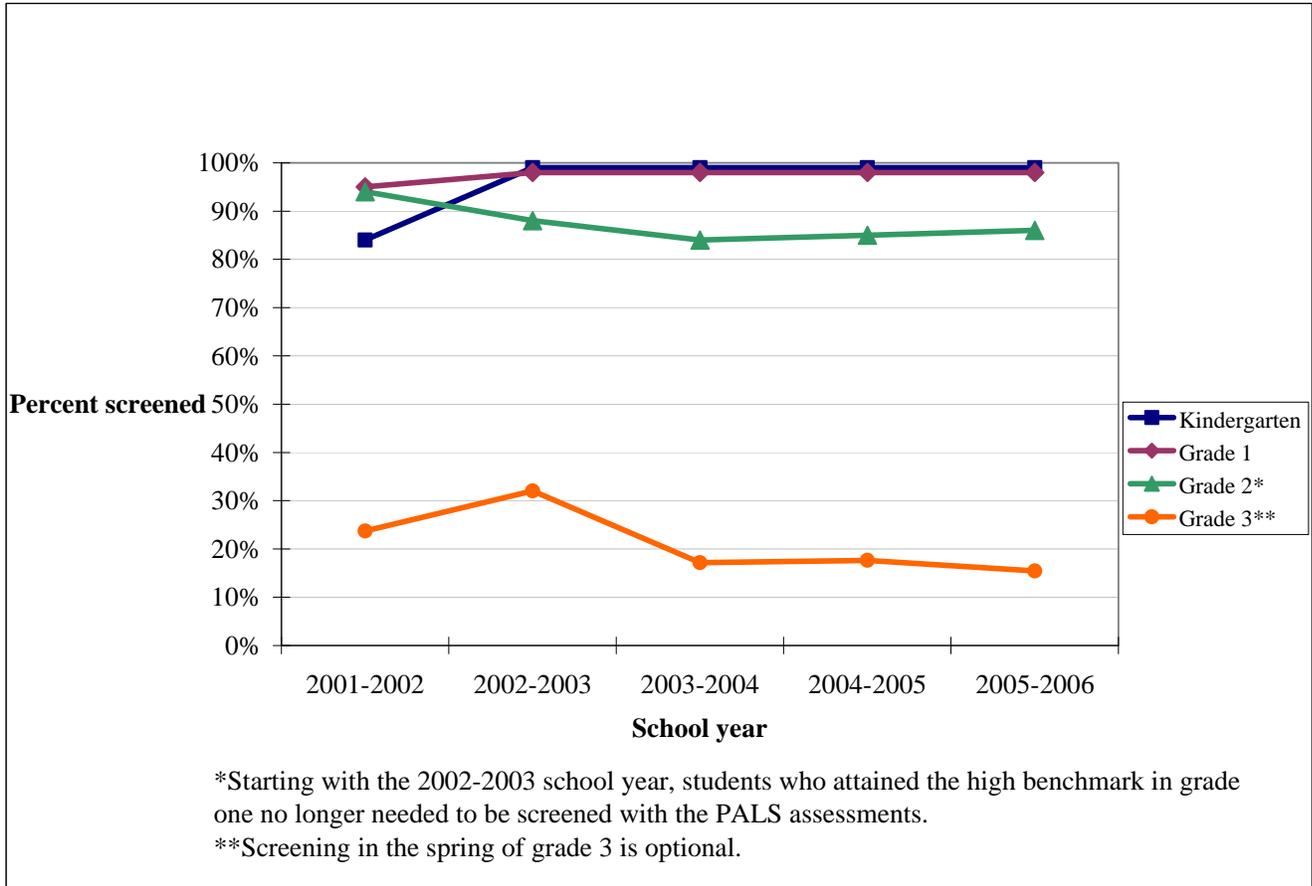
Divisions	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02
# Participating	117	126	129	129	128
% Participating	89	95	98	98	97
# Not Participating	15	6	3	3	4
% Not Participating	11	5	2	2	3
Total Divisions	132	132	132	132	132

Divisions	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07
# Participating	130	131	130	131	132
% Participating	98	99	98	99	100
# Not Participating	2	1	2	1	0
% Not Participating	2	1	2	1	0
Total Divisions	132	132	132	132	132

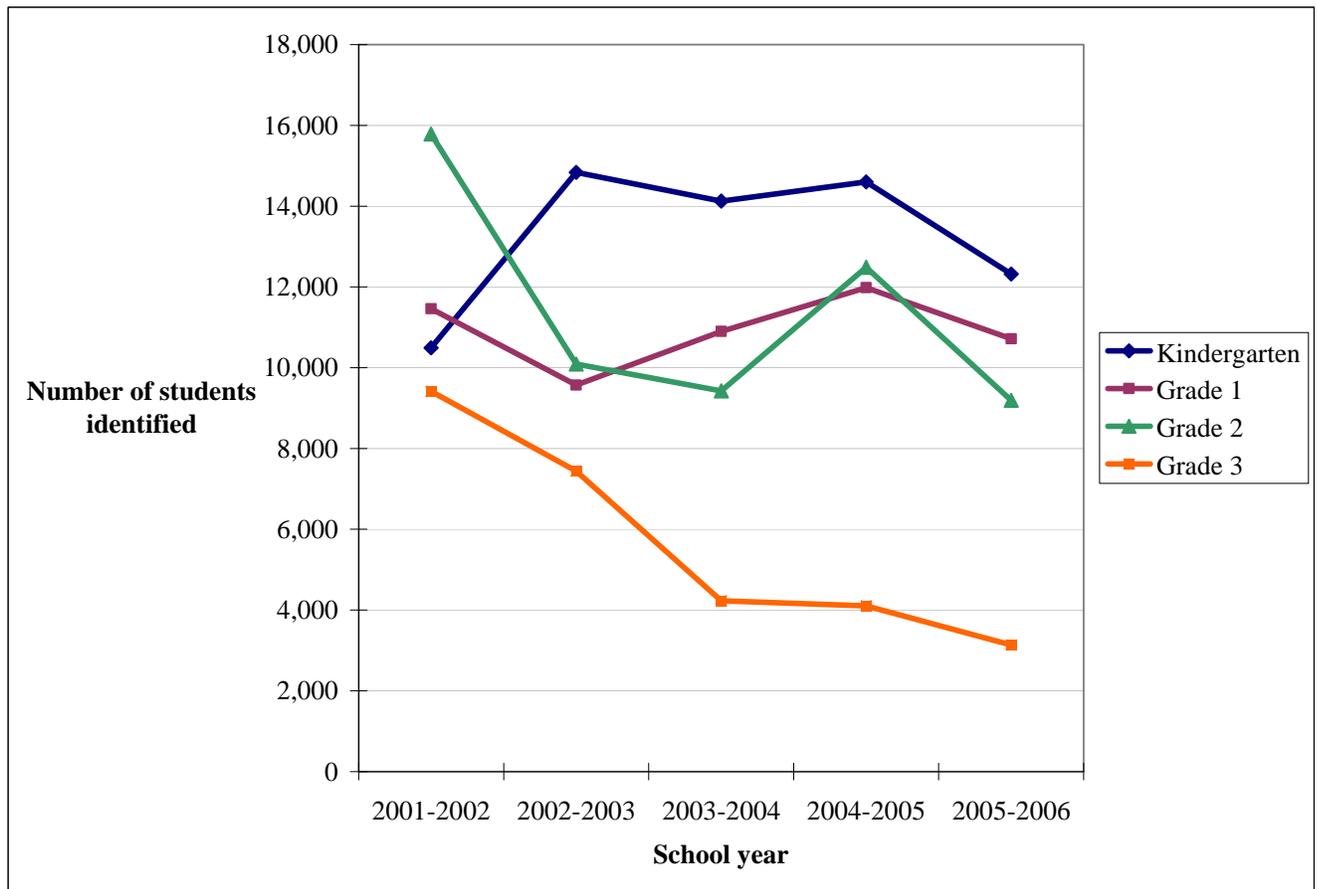
**Appendix C. Number of students participating in PALS assessment in the indicated grade level in participating school divisions**



**Appendix D. Percent of students participating in PALS assessment in the indicated grade levels based on total enrollment in participating divisions**



**Appendix E. Number of Students Identified to Receive Additional Instruction based on PALS screening in spring of each school year**



**Appendix F. Percent of Students Identified to Receive Additional Instruction based on PALS screening in spring of each school year**

