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SEAL 4-Year Research and Evaluation Report Executive Summary

Center for Equity for English Learners, Loyola Marymount University

Wexford Institute

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Districts and schools in California serve nearly 1.2 million English Learners (ELs). Research shows that EL students face many barriers to obtaining an equitable, high-quality education¹ and that the quest for equity for ELs has been elusive². Mastery of 21st century skills and rigorous academic content remains stagnant and out-of-reach for EL students, and educators are faced with providing social-emotional, language, literacy, and cultural learning supports to address opportunity and learning gaps.

Over a decade ago, [the Sobrato Family Foundation](#) invested in the design and pilot of the [Sobrato Early Academic Language Model \(SEAL\)](#) with the belief that the best approach to positively impacting the lives of Silicon Valley immigrant, low-income families would be to improve the education of their children, specifically, English Learners/Dual language learners (ELs/DLLs). The SEAL PreK–Grade 3 Model was developed as a whole-school initiative to develop students’ language, literacy, and academic skills. Unique to the model is its systemic design that involves teachers, coaches, principals, district leaders, and families in order to weave instruction in all aspects of the school day where English Learners and native English speakers learn together. SEAL was first piloted in three schools from 2009–2014. Based on the pilot and its results, SEAL developed the SEAL Replication Model and began an expansion of its implementation with districts/schools across California beginning in 2013.

From 2015–2019 Loyola Marymount University’s [Center for Equity for English Learners \(CEEL\)](#) and [Wexford Institute](#) (Wexford) jointly conducted an external evaluation of the SEAL Replication Model in 67 schools in 12 districts that began implementing SEAL from 2013–2015. This Final Research and Evaluation Report of the statewide expansion of the SEAL Model represents the culmination of a multi-year developmental evaluation process. Central to this process has been the CEEL and Wexford Institute teams’ engagement in a series of inquiry cycles of iterative analyses with the SEAL Research and Evaluation Leadership Team³ to address the complexities of the SEAL Replication Model as they expanded implementation to additional districts and schools.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEAL Model: Final Report of Findings from a Four-Year Study

2020



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This comprehensive research and evaluation study spans four years (2015–2019) and responds to the research questions about leaders’ perspectives on SEAL’s long-term systems change focused on the needs of ELs and how SEAL improves teacher professional learning and educational outcomes of DLLs and ELs beyond the pilot study in a wider range of schools, districts, and communities across the state.

¹ Santibañez, L. & Umansky, I. (2018). *English Learners: Charting their experiences and mapping their futures in California schools* [Research brief]. Getting Down to Facts II. https://gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII_Brief_EnglishLearners.pdf

² Lavadenz, M., Armas, E.G., Murillo, M.A., Jáuregui Hodge, S. (2019). Equity for English learners: Evidence from four years of California’s Local Control Funding Formula. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 94(2), 176–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2019.1598113>

³ The SEAL Research and Evaluation Leadership Team was primarily comprised of the SEAL Founding Director, Executive Director, Director of Research and Evaluation, Research Associate, and Director of Innovation and Strategic Design

This study focuses on three key areas:

- **District and Site Support of SEAL Implementation:** Perceptions of administrators and instructional coaches about the alignment of leadership, professional learning, curriculum, instruction, and family partnerships with best practices for ELs. *Measures used:* Interviews and surveys of district leaders, principals, and instructional coaches.
- **Teacher development and implementation outcomes:** Changes in research-based EL instructional practices, as well as in teacher knowledge and skills. *Measures used:* classroom observations and teacher surveys.
- **Student outcomes:** English and Spanish language development for grades PreK-4, and English language arts and math outcomes for grades 3-4. *Measures used:* standardized assessments.

To anchor this 4-year SEAL Research and Evaluation project, the SEAL Research and Evaluation Leadership and Advisory Team created the SEAL Logic Model comprised of seven program components and their expected short- and long-term outcomes. The Logic Model was utilized to create and refine the critical research questions to help determine the effectiveness of the SEAL Model. Following development of the SEAL Logic Model, the Research and Evaluation Advisory identified the need to create a tool to gather information about SEAL's ability to build alignment and systemic capacity in and across SEAL districts. The Depth of Implementation Tool was developed over a 2-year period to serve as an evaluation measure as well as a self-assessment tool for SEAL schools and districts.

After delivery of comprehensive interim evaluation reports for the first and second year of the 4-year evaluation effort, the focus and analyses for this final report began to take shape. The SEAL Research and Evaluation Advisory Team agreed that the best way to deliver the story of the evaluation of the SEAL Model was through a series of research briefs organized around the three areas.

Results of the Four-Year Study



Leaders' Perspectives and SEAL Depth of Implementation (Briefs 1–5)

Articulation and Coherence. Overall, district leaders, principals, and coach-facilitators report high levels of articulation, coherence, and intentional planning for sustainability of the SEAL Model. **SEAL implementation has taken root in many schools and districts** and is still a work in progress in others. Most principals and districts report consistent levels of SEAL implementation but over a third report that SEAL implementation is partial in their sites.

Systemic efforts for EL Instructional Improvement. Over **90% of principals and district leaders agree** that SEAL implementation in their schools has led to instructional improvement for ELs.



Teacher Development and Implementation (Briefs 6–8)

Teacher Efficacy. SEAL teachers have a **greater sense of efficacy** about teaching and indicate that the SEAL model had an **overall positive impact** on their knowledge and skills to instruct English Learners.

Research-based Practices. SEAL teachers demonstrate **statistically significant increases** in their use of effective research-based classroom practices for English Learners as measured by the Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies (OPAL[®]). In addition, their teaching is more interactive, focuses on more problem solving and critical thinking, and actively engages students in more rigorous and relevant curriculum.

Bilingual Classrooms. SEAL teachers in bilingual classrooms exhibited higher levels of implementation and **statistically significant differences** for overall practices and rigorous and relevant curriculum when compared to structured English Immersion classrooms.



Student Outcomes (Briefs 9–12)

English Proficiency. SEAL schools averaged higher rates of poverty as compared to the statewide rate. Despite this, **and**, notably, study results reveal that SEAL English Learner students in grades 2, 3, and 4 **performed comparably or better** than California ELs in developing English proficiency. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of SEAL ELs at grades 3 and 4 scored at the two **highest levels of proficiency** on the annual EL assessment or were reclassified as fluent English proficient (RFEP), steps toward preventing them from becoming long-term English Learners (LTEL).

Bilingual Advantage. By grade 4, **English Learners in Bilingual programs (BIL) progressed at a greater rate** than the SEAL ELs in Structured English Immersion (SEI) programs. The bilingual advantage is evident given that SEAL ELs in bilingual programs entered kindergarten with significantly lower English proficiency levels than those in structured English Immersion programs. Additionally, Spanish speaking ELs in BIL programs continued to maintain or develop their Spanish language proficiency, while those in SEI suffered language loss in Spanish.

Academic Achievement. On academic assessments by grade 4, SEAL Redesignated Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) **students scored higher** than the combined group of English Only and Initially Fluent English Proficient students in SEAL schools, and better than California RFEPs.

Early Language and Literacy Development. Both SEAL PreK and TK children showed growth in oral language fluency and pre-literacy in both English and Spanish with **significant differences** in almost all areas, from annual pre to post assessment.

To uplift the most important take-aways and maximize usability of this report, findings are presented in a series of twelve research briefs organized into five sections. We invite you to explore the research briefs that follow as well as the conclusion and implications. This robust and rigorous research and evaluation process was intended to facilitate SEAL’s short-and-long term organizational goals. We hope that these findings will allow SEAL leadership teams to make data-based decisions for project management, decision-making, refinement, and expansion of the SEAL Model in the years to come.

This Executive Summary is based on the 4-Year External Research and Evaluation Study conducted by the Center for Equity for English Learners at Loyola Marymount University and Wexford Institute for the Sobrato Family Foundation.



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