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Section 5 – Conclusion: Implications for Replication, Sustainability, Future Research and Policy

Center for Equity for English Learners, Loyola Marymount University Wexford Institute

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Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) Model: Final Report of Findings from a Four-Year Study

2020



SECTION 5 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

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Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) Model Research and Evaluation Brief, Section 5 – Conclusion

Year 4
Final Report
2020

SEAL 4-Year Research and Evaluation

Conclusion and Implications for Replication, Sustainability, Future Research, and Policy

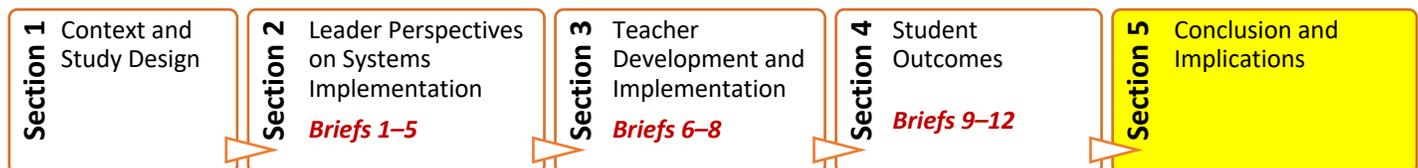


Loyola Marymount University’s [Center for Equity for English Learners](#) and the [Wexford Institute](#) conducted an external evaluation of the [Sobrato Early Academic Language \(SEAL\)](#) Replication Model from 2015–2019. This comprehensive research and evaluation project employed a developmental evaluation process (Patton, 2015)¹ and focused on three sets of studies: (1) Leader Perspectives and Depth of Implementation, (2) Teacher Development, and (3) Student Outcomes.

This Final Research and Evaluation Report of the statewide expansion of the SEAL Model represents the culmination of the multi-year evaluation focused on replication in 67 schools in 12 districts. The SEAL Research and Evaluation Final Report is comprised of five sections presented in a series of briefs (see Figure 1) to maximize usability for multiple stakeholders. Section 5 is comprised of highlights from the collaborative evaluation process and a review of major findings. We also present implications for SEAL Model replication, sustainability, future research, and policy.

Figure 1

SEAL Research and Evaluation Final Report Overview



The Collaborative Evaluation Process

The unique partnership between the SEAL program developers, leaders, and external evaluators led to the creation of the SEAL Research and Evaluation Advisory that represents SEAL’s commitment to continuous improvement. During the 4-year evaluation period, the SEAL Model underwent numerous and iterative refinements, and yet the SEAL Logic Model² stood as a solid yet underused tool for setting program goals and for measuring progress towards the goals. Finalized in 2015, the SEAL Logic Model was based both on Systems Theory and a Socio-Constructivist Theory of teaching and learning. The Logic Model identifies inputs as well as short- and long-term outcomes. Based on the Logic Model, the Research and Evaluation Advisory prioritized 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 in a wider range of schools, districts, and communities across the state. Researchers followed a cross-sectional,

¹ Patton, M. Q., McKegg, K., & Wehipeihana, N. (Eds.). (2015). *Developmental evaluation exemplars: Principles in practice*. Guilford publications.

² The SEAL Model incorporates seven components as described in the SEAL Logic Model. For more information see Section 1 – Figure 4.

sequential mixed-methods design for evaluating the implementation of the SEAL Model and co-developed the Depth of Implementation (DOI)³ Tool for measuring systems change which is key for long-term sustainability of the SEAL Model. The instruments and procedures for data collection included the DOI Tool, interviews with SEAL District Leaders, school leaders, coach-facilitators, and teachers, as well as observations of SEAL classrooms using the Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies (OPAL[®])⁴ for evaluating classroom practice. Instruments for assessing student outcomes included the California state assessments: the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC), and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress–Smarter Balanced Assessments for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics (SBAC). Additionally, the LAS Links Español[®], and the Language Proficiency Assessment for Early Learners (*pre*LAS[®]) were used to assess student outcomes. This comprehensive research and evaluation project rendered encouraging findings that can inform future implementation of the SEAL Model.

Highlights of Major Study Results

This section provides a summary of key results for each of the three sets of studies.

Leader Perspectives on Systems Implementation

SEAL systemic implementation efforts are deeply rooted in some sites and still a work in progress in others.

As a systemic reform effort, the SEAL Model can be viewed as a large-scale, school-wide replication model, in which a lead agency like SEAL acts as a “hub” to support the adoption of its model by a network of districts and schools.⁵ These networks are described by researchers as lead agencies, schools, and districts “linked together by a common design for learning, working, and leadership.” Rather than rapid adoption of the model, this type of improvement model is, “a long-term enterprise in which program providers and schools collaborate to produce, use, improve, and retain practical knowledge” (Peurach & Glazer, 2011). Researchers identified variability as typical in large-scale implementation; variations can occur around factors related to all of the areas of the Depth of Implementation Tool (DOI). Accordingly, we variability as well as similarities in implementation are apparent in SEAL districts and schools. SEAL implementation has taken root in many schools and districts and is still a work in progress in others. Yet, 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

The SEAL Model increases teacher efficacy and improves knowledge and skills to instruct English Learners.

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. 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

³ The SEAL Depth of Implementation (DOI) Tool is used to reflect on and record evidence for levels of implementation of the SEAL Model. To access the SEAL DOI Tool, see Section 2 – Appendix A.

⁴ Lavadenz, M. & Armas, E. G. (2010, 2012). *The observation protocol for academic literacies: Conceptual framework and validation report*. Center for Equity for English Learners, Loyola Marymount University. The OPAL[®] is a validated classroom observation measure that consists of a standard framework based on four EL research-based domains: (1) Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum, (2) Connections, (3) Comprehensibility; and (4) Interactions. See SEAL Classroom Observation Research & Evaluation Brief 6 for more information.

⁵ Peurach, D.J. & Glazer J.L. (2011) Reconsidering replication: New perspectives on large-scale school improvement. Springer Science + Business Media B.V. https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Peurach_Glazer_2011_JEC.pdf

is more interactive, focuses on more problem solving and critical thinking, and actively engages students in more rigorous and relevant curriculum.

Student Outcomes

The SEAL Model appears to impact student English proficiency, academic achievement, and early language and literacy development especially in bilingual settings.

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. 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. By grade 4, English Learners in Bilingual programs (BIL) progressed at a greater rate than the ELs in Structured English Immersion (SEI) programs. 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 and post assessment.

Findings point to implications for continued replication and sustainability of the SEAL Model related to district and site leaders as well as program components of the SEAL Model. Further, limitations around the research design employed in this current effort combined with the findings that it rendered also point to implications for future research around the SEAL Model. These implications are specified in the remaining sections.

Implications for Replication and Sustainability

Applications of the Depth of Implementation Tool

Intentional use of the Depth of Implementation (DOI) Tool has the potential to generate evidence-based data to help ongoing monitoring, refinement, and sustainability of the SEAL Model. SEAL DOI protocols and procedures will need to be consistently applied, requiring strategic planning and support for those engaging in the process. As indicated in Section 2 of this report, SEAL DOI rater and training sessions can be strengthened by the use of sample artifacts, evidence, videos, or other data sources to discuss variation in SEAL Model implementation while calibrating ratings. Specific practices around data use and the DOI can be achieved both in district convenings and site-leader convenings and these practices may require more specific agreements made with districts and principals to increase principal participation in those activities, which along with other SEAL support activities could help to strengthen the use of data for continuous improvement and sustainability. Variability in the frequency of principal participation in the SEAL activities in which they are expected to participate (principal convenings and instructional rounds) may be related to the level of implementation of SEAL at their schools. Principal and district leader convenings are helpful forums, providing participants with opportunities to dialogue and share across DOI areas and indicators and lead to action steps to operationalize the SEAL model and move SEAL sites to *consistent implementation* or toward *sustainability*.

Leadership Role Considerations

Analysis of site-leader perspectives illuminate implications for district and site-leader role group considerations. This set of studies included three key leadership role types: SEAL Coach-Facilitators, district leaders, and site principals.

Our survey data indicated that SEAL Coach-Facilitators need assistance in addressing the barriers they encounter to support teachers. Central to their role, Coach-Facilitators need support in balancing multiple roles and in helping to build relationships with teachers. The role of the SEAL Coach-Facilitator can be further strengthened by deepening their knowledge of the SEAL Model and practices, helping to manage responsibilities, and leveraging school/district support. In general, SEAL Coach-Facilitators need more opportunities to collaborate with site and district leaders to support the implementation of the SEAL Model.

District leaders and principals cited three main areas of need in order to move to the *sustainability* level of SEAL implementation: (1) creating more coherence with SEAL and other initiatives across grade levels; (2) including into grades 4-6 in some schools; (3) providing time for planning to support districts and schools in renewing systemic support. It appears that sustainability is being addressed through districts' Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), but continued support from SEAL is needed for implementation and sustainability at the school and classroom levels.

Mediating implementation is a must when replicating the SEAL Model in districts of all sizes (large and small). Key SEAL leadership personnel, such as District Relations Administrators or Lead Trainers, play a critical role in systemic implementation processes and differentiating role group support. This needs to be done on the operational level, to work with all levels of the system to produce, use, improve, and retain practical knowledge about how to operationalize the SEAL model for the greatest positive effects on students, families and educators.

The researchers acknowledge that district-leader and principal data were collected before SEAL schools moved to distance and hybrid learning options during March 2020 in response to COVID 19. Professional development and collaboration among educators are even more critical now to ensure teachers have increased capacity to continue to adapt their use of SEAL strategies for a virtual environment to safeguard rigorous instruction for ELs. To support research-based instructional decision making for English Learners during this time, it is also essential that the role of formative assessments be aligned with SEAL instructional strategies to monitor student progress and reduce learning loss for ELs while increasing equitable learning opportunities. Additionally, because remote learning requires that parents support instruction at home, SEAL schools may need to increase engagement with families to expand these partnerships for children's virtual learning.

Focused and Sustained Professional Development (PD) for Teachers

The results from the study on PreK and TK growth has implications for the PD provided to early childhood educators, specifically, those serving children who are Spanish-speaking. These results show the importance of implementing instructional practices that foster growth in both children's Spanish and English language development to prevent language loss and promote bilingualism and biliteracy. Previous research, along with policy documents from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education, underscore the critical role of high-quality instruction in early childhood, bilingualism, and home language for young children's development. The SEAL model, as highlighted by the results of this study, shows

promise in addressing both the training needs of early childhood educators by providing high quality training that focuses on evidence-based instructional practices that foster home language development, bilingualism and biliteracy.

The SEAL research-based model presents an opportunity to operationalize the seven elements of the SEAL Logic Model to support focused and sustained PD. SEAL leadership and implementation teams must consider factors such as: articulation of the SEAL Model across grade level, PD Module content and progression, delivery mechanisms, supports for teachers, and sustainability plans for teachers new to the program.

Results from SEAL classroom observations highlight the need for additional PD where teachers can identify strategies and practices that refine and expand teacher capacity to engage students in problem solving and critical thinking activities. All SEAL teachers, particularly those implementing Structured English Immersion (SEI) programs, can benefit from opportunities to plan and reflect on how to incorporate cross-linguistic resources in the classroom and leverage the use of primary language resources. In addition, teachers would benefit from expanded opportunities to participate in PD focused on differentiation of language development practices. Our analysis of SEAL classrooms in SEI and BIL programs also highlighted the need for PD opportunities for teachers to maximize student engagement and student leadership opportunities so that instruction is not exclusively teacher lead.

Findings imply that there is a great need for more consistent and intentional opportunities for classroom observations by coaches and instructional leaders, inclusive of feedback session to support teachers in the implementation of SEAL practices. SEAL teacher survey results affirm a collective will to engage in expanded opportunities to participate in collaborative observation sessions where instruction is modeled by other teachers at advanced/expert levels of implementation or by Coach-Facilitators or peers.

Implications for Future Research

Research Design Considerations

Using mixed methodologies that connect student progress with other variables along with contextualized descriptions show promise in “telling the SEAL Model story.” Case studies and other mixed methods research designs and methodology considerations include:

- Data collection procedures to assess implementation, sustainability, and impact of SEAL
- Earlier and systematic uses of the SEAL Depth of Implementation tool in interviews and surveys, similar to its use in the 4-year research and evaluation
- Ongoing development and refinement of tools to measure students’ learning experiences to augment state standardized assessments
 - Formative and summative assessments for benchmarking language and literacy growth
 - Analysis of student work samples to determine growth that are developmentally, linguistically and culturally appropriate
- Ongoing development and refinement of tools to document student experiences, confidence, and joy of learning
- Ongoing development and refinement of tools and measures to collect family engagement data

To address issues of broad variability of schools within any given SEAL study, research design considerations could focus groups of schools that are similar in selected variables. These variables may include, but are not limited to: (1) their EL enrollment (demographics, typologies, primary languages, language proficiency at Kindergarten); (2) teacher, principal and district lead turn-over rate; district and school support of SEAL alignment to classroom instruction throughout the school day; (3) district and school degree of commitment to fully supporting professional development, including that for incoming teachers; and, (3) the types and rates of family engagement.

Research Focus Area Considerations

Future research may also include strategic development of differentiated studies on program types in SEAL districts and schools to describe and assess the overall quality of bilingual, dual language, and structured immersion programs, and in relationship to the designated and integrated English language development.

Other valuable research and evaluation areas to consider include understanding how to best build on gains children make in PreK and TK to increase growth in grades K through 3, following students beyond grade 5 to examine longer-term outcomes, and learning how to better support long term ELs and ELs with special learning needs.

A series of longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of the SEAL model on student outcomes are possible. These include comparative analyses with non-SEAL students on variables such as graduation, reclassification, as well as other achievement data.

Studies of the overall sustainability at the district, school and classroom level along with longer-term studies on teachers' practices and use of SEAL strategies are also considerations for future research. These could be inclusive of an examination of how designated and integrated ELD are implemented within the SEAL Model and how SEAL instructional strategies are employed across content areas.

Implications for SEAL to Advance District Policies on Teaching and Learning English

The implementation of the SEAL model is a local district policy decision; as such it requires district-level administrators to “cascade” the vision and goals for SEAL implementation across district systems and to the larger community. District and site leaders in these evaluation studies confirmed their support of both.

Based on the sets of studies in the evaluation of the SEAL Model replication across the 12 districts and 67 school sites, implementation that addresses local policy shifts is essential to implementing the SEAL model. Policy shifts that occurred during this research and evaluation effort centered around three key areas of local policy and decision-making:

- 1) Alignment of English Learner initiatives and professional learning to avoid perceptions of SEAL as “add-on”
- 2) Allocation of human and fiscal resources (e.g. time, staffing, etc.)
- 3) Ongoing internal evaluation using data and tools to assess sustainability

The SEAL Model may also position districts and sites to respond to study findings that show students in bilingual/dual language programs (BIL) making similar or greater progress as students in Structured English Immersion programs (SEI) in 2018-19, even as they performed significantly lower than SEI at Kindergarten.

The SEAL Model may also position districts and sites to respond to study findings that show students in bilingual/dual language programs (BIL) making similar or greater progress as students in Structured English Immersion programs (SEI) in 2018-19, even as they performed significantly lower than SEI at Kindergarten. Districts have this and other research evidence to support moving ahead with bilingual programs for ELs. Findings also support a conclusion BIL programs play a crucial role in lessening language loss and increasing development of the home language. In considering the importance of nurturing bilingualism and biliteracy in young children before they lose knowledge and use of the home language, there needs to be greater encouragement and incentives for districts and schools to adopt, maintain and improve bilingual programs for their students.

The SEAL Model is designed as a systemic school reform with the potential to align programs and practices for English Learners, strengthen district and site infrastructure to support professional learning, and impact student language and academic achievement. As the SEAL Model continues to evolve, it presents a need for continued refinement and articulation of non-negotiable components of the model that can be replicated in diverse settings. The researchers acknowledge that there is still work to be done across the SEAL network and contend that the commitment to continuous improvement and refinement of the SEAL Model design, the Logic Model, and implementation processes as informed by the SEAL Depth of Implementation Tool, the identification of additional methods to capture student outcomes, and continued research holds promise for exploring the implementation and expansion of the SEAL Model in existing and future sites.

This Conclusion 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.



<http://www.wexford.org>



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<http://www.sobrato.com/SEAL>

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