

SEAL Teaching and Learning Outcomes in 12 School Districts

Summary of a Multiyear Evaluation Studying the Replication of the Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) Model



Introduction

From 2015 to 2019, Loyola Marymount University's Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL), in partnership with the Wexford Institute, conducted a rigorous multiyear evaluation of the Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) model. This replication study followed an earlier evaluation of SEAL in two Bay Area school districts. That initial research (Lindholm-Leary, 2015) found that despite starting school behind their peers, SEAL students caught up with or surpassed peers on various measures ranging from language and literacy to math and science. Based on that success, SEAL has rapidly expanded to additional schools and districts. With funding from the Sobrato Philanthropies, CEEL and the Wexford Institute studied SEAL's implementation and outcomes in 67 schools from 12 California districts.

This research brief summarizes the replication evaluation's findings. The evaluators found that SEAL improved teaching practices and that SEAL ELs demonstrated stronger engagement as well as positive language development and academic outcomes. This evidence demonstrates that SEAL can be replicated at scale (CEEL & Wexford Institute, 2020). The brief concludes with implications for continued implementation and replication of SEAL and other practices to support English Learners.

Evaluation Design

Research Questions

- 1 How has SEAL improved teaching practice?
- 2 What are the learning outcomes of students participating in SEAL?
- 3 To what extent was SEAL implemented across sites, according to school and district leaders?



Note: The actual research questions were more complex. For more details about the evaluation design, including the evaluation research questions, see the Context and Design section of the full [report](#).

Research Tools



Logic Model

Addresses: Goals, Activities, Data Collection, Outcomes



Depth of Implementation Tool

Covers: Leadership, Professional Learning, Curriculum, Instruction, Environment, Family Partnerships



Classroom Observation Tool

Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies®



Surveys

Teacher, Coach-Facilitator, District Leader, Principal

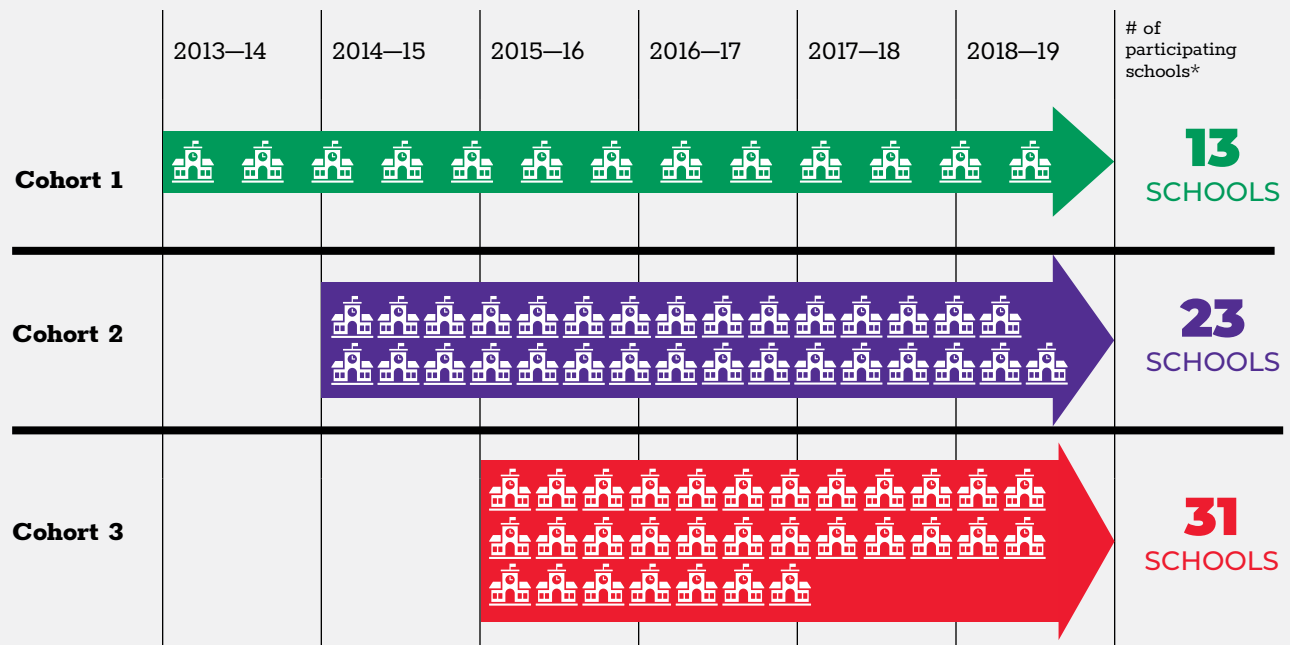


Student Assessments

- CAASPP English Language Arts and Mathematics
- CELDT and ELPAC English Language Development
- LAS Links Español
- preLAS English and Spanish

FIGURE 1

Evaluation Participants



*In total, 12 districts participated in the evaluation and were represented in one or more cohorts. These districts were: Berryessa Union School District, Evergreen School District, Fillmore Unified School District, Franklin McKinley School District, Gilroy Unified School District, Milpitas Unified School District, Mountain View School District, Oak Grove School District, Redwood City School District, San Lorenzo Unified School District, San Rafael City Schools, and Santa Clara Unified School District.



“SEAL has given me license to allow exploration, artistic expression, noise—and [to] embrace the style of teaching that came naturally to me.”

—TEACHER

SEAL Improved Teaching Practice

The SEAL model is a comprehensive approach to systems change that couples professional learning for teachers with leadership development opportunities for district and site-level administrators and instructional coaches. School and district staff engage in this professional learning for two to three years. After SEAL training, teachers in SEAL schools significantly increased their use of research-based best practices for teaching English Learners and increased their confidence and sense of efficacy as educators (see Figure 2).

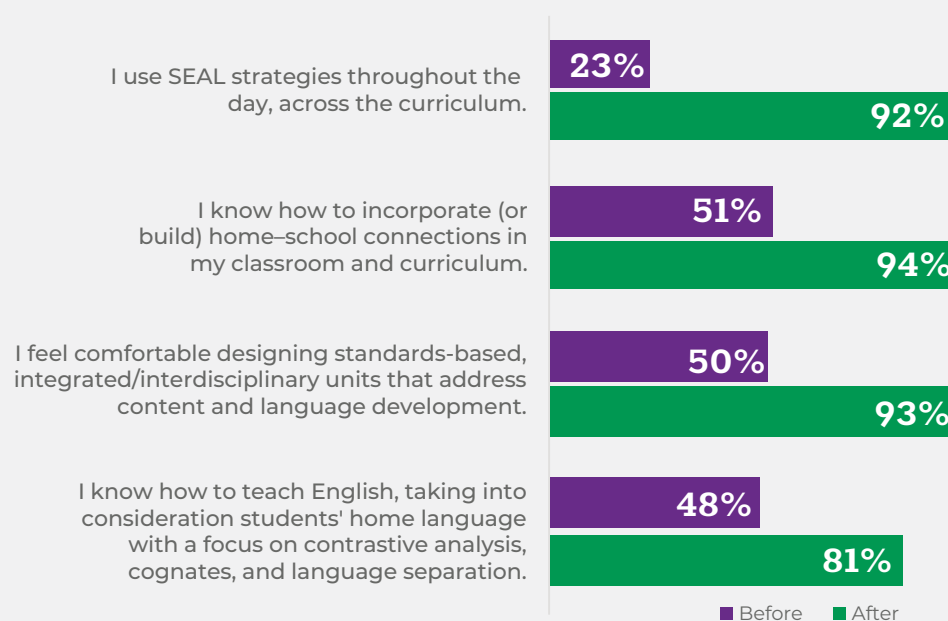
Teachers in **bilingual classrooms** were more likely than teachers in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms to implement research-based best practices, demonstrating SEAL's particular efficacy in supporting teachers and students in bilingual settings.



Source: Section 3, Brief 7 of the full [report](#).

FIGURE 2

Teachers' Perceived Knowledge and Understanding Before and After Participation in the SEAL Professional Learning Community



Source: Section 3, Appendix F of the full [report](#).

TEACHING AND LEARNING IMPROVED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

- ✓ Teaching became more **interactive**.
- ✓ Teachers and principals observed increased **student engagement**.
- ✓ Principals observed more **joyful and confident** students.
- ✓ Teachers increasingly helped students make **connections** to previous learning and felt more confident making home-to-school connections.
- ✓ Students had greater **access to materials**, technology, and other resources for learning.
- ✓ Teachers used more **scaffolding strategies** to enhance comprehension.
- ✓ Teachers used more **flexible groupings** to meet student and group learning needs.
- ✓ Teachers said they were more **enthusiastic** about teaching.

Source: This list is derived from findings from the Teacher Development and Implementation Studies (Section 3, Briefs 6 and 8) and the Leader Perspectives on System-Level Implementation Studies (Section 2, Briefs 2 and 3) of the full report.



SEAL Students Demonstrated Positive Outcomes

After SEAL was replicated across multiple school districts, teachers, principals, instructional coaches, and principals reported that student engagement increased. Moreover, students in SEAL schools demonstrated positive outcomes in English language development as well as English language arts (ELA) and mathematics achievement.

Although SEAL schools have higher concentrations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students than California schools as a whole, by fourth grade students in SEAL schools who are currently or who have ever been English Learners (Ever ELs) as well as those who have been reclassified as fluent-English proficient (known as RFEP in California) perform as well as or above their statewide peers in ELA and math. Spanish-speaking SEAL students in bilingual programs also made progress in their Spanish language development.

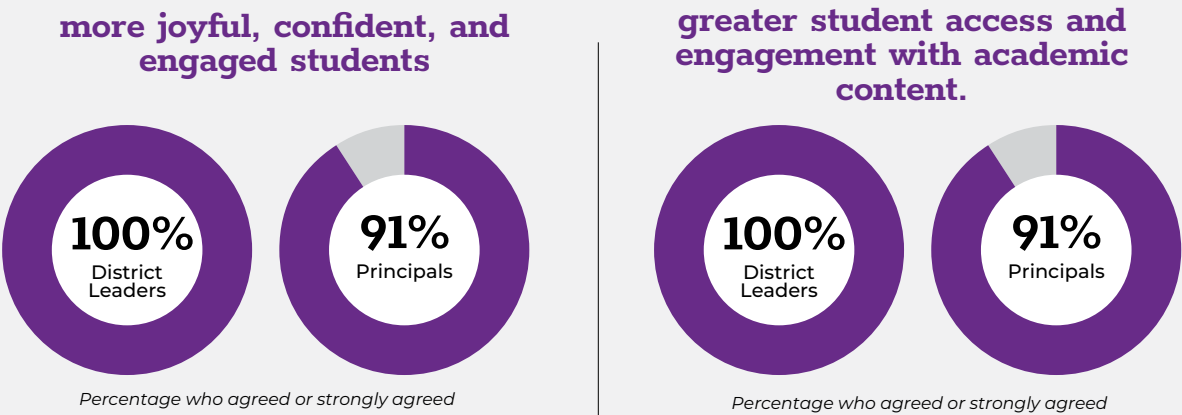
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

District and school leaders observed that **students were more joyful, confident, and engaged** following implementation of the SEAL model. Teachers said that after SEAL implementation, they more often provided opportunities for joyful learning; they more often created content-rich, print-rich, and affirming environments for their students; and their students were more consistently engaged and actively participating (see Figure 3).

Source: Teacher-reported student engagement results can be found in Section 3, Brief 8 of the full [report](#). District and site leader-reported results can be found in Section 2, Brief 3. Coach-Facilitator reported results can be found in Section 2, Brief 4.

FIGURE 3
District Leader and Principal Perspectives of SEAL’s Impact on Students

As a result of the implementation of SEAL, our school/district has:





“Students are more engaged. I notice higher level vocabulary in student conversations. Parents are connected through family projects and Gallery Walks.”

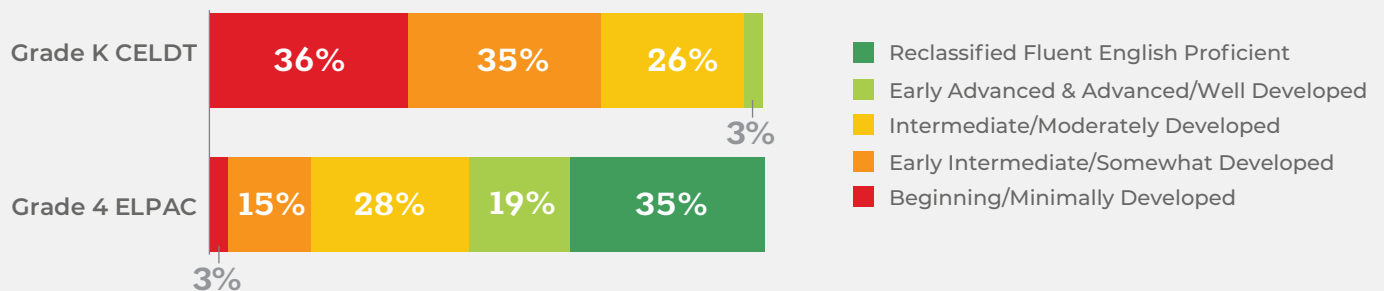
—SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

By fourth grade, most SEAL students who entered kindergarten as English Learners had well-developed English language skills or had been reclassified as English proficient, even though the majority of them started at beginning or early intermediate levels of English fluency (see Figure 4). SEAL English Learners in bilingual or dual language programs progressed at a greater rate than English Learners in SEI programs.

Source: Section 4, Brief 9 of the full [report](#).

FIGURE 4
Change in English Language Proficiency, Kindergarten Through Fourth Grade



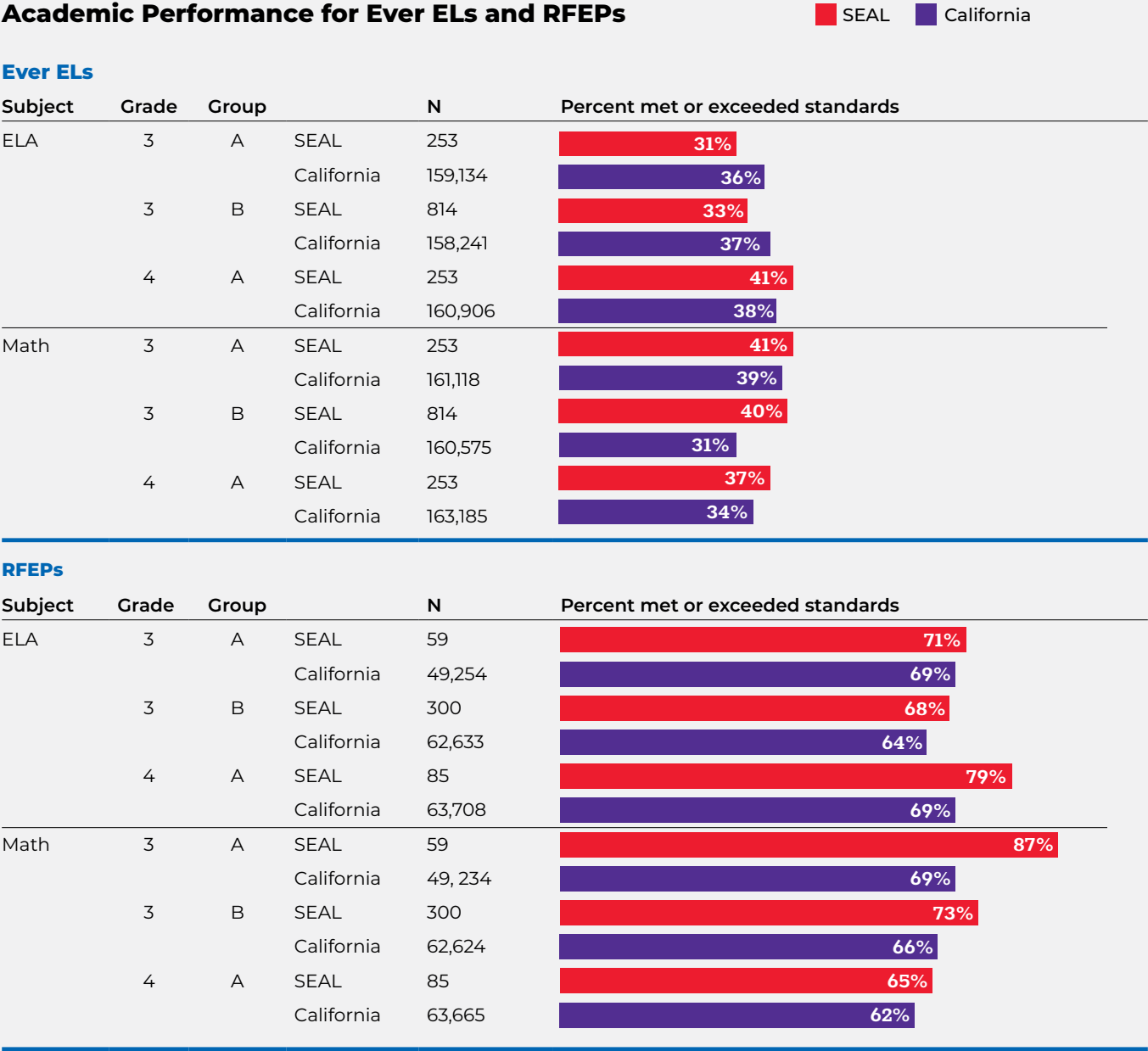
Note. Based on students who started kindergarten in 2014–15 and were continuously enrolled through fourth grade in 2018–19. The test of English language development changed over this time from the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC).

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

By fourth grade, Ever ELs and RFEP students in SEAL schools **performed as well as or better than their peers in California on statewide assessments of both ELA and math** (see Figure 5), despite the fact that SEAL schools have higher concentrations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students than California as a whole. These differences were most pronounced among RFEPs: In third grade, SEAL RFEPs outperformed California RFEPs by 18 percentage points in math; in fourth grade, SEAL RFEPs outperformed California RFEPs by 10 percentage points in ELA.

 Source: Section 4, Brief 9 of the full report.

FIGURE 5
Academic Performance for Ever ELs and RFEPs



Note. Figure 3 compares California state averages to SEAL students who started kindergarten in 2014–15 and were continuously enrolled through fourth grade in 2018–19 (group A) and SEAL students who started in 2015–16 and were continuously enrolled through third grade in 2018–19 (group B). Results are from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP).

BILITERACY

Although SEAL students in both bilingual and SEI classes performed comparably to their statewide peers on the state's ELA and math assessments (which are in English), SEAL students in bilingual classrooms also improved their home language, Spanish. In contrast, SEAL ELs in SEI classes suffered Spanish language loss. The youngest learners, those in prekindergarten and transitional kindergarten, grew in their oral language fluency in both languages and in their preliteracy in English by the end of the school year.



Source: Section 4, Briefs 10, 11, and 12 of the full [report](#).

WHAT DOES SEAL LOOK LIKE?

Example after two years of SEAL professional development



Kindergarteners learn in a classroom rich with resources, books, and visual charts related to the essential question they are exploring: “How do humans change the environment?” Charts include sentence starters such as “I observe...” and “I notice...” to help students note animal and plant parts. A story retell chart based on *The Great Kapok Tree* includes pictures from the book; some of these are labeled. Students wear lab coats and investigate different exploration centers, reviewing high-frequency words and using vocabulary in context. The teacher provides whole-group instruction as well as divides students into groups to learn more about their assigned snails. A poster displays norms for collaborative conversations, groups are named according to specific habitats, and a student leads a short activity to remind the class to focus on good choices and display good behavior. The teacher facilitates small-group work, asks questions to expand students’ thinking, and includes multiple opportunities for intentional use of academic language.



Source: Section 3, Brief 6 of the full [report](#). This example comes from the Observed Changes in SEAL Classroom Practices Study and is based on a classroom where high levels of SEAL practices were observed.

Replicating SEAL

This multiyear evaluation set out to determine whether SEAL works when replicated across multiple districts in different regions of California. The answer is yes: SEAL improved teaching practices and SEAL ELs demonstrated stronger engagement as well as positive language development and academic outcomes.

SEAL is successful because it is a whole-school strategy. It encourages district leaders, principals, and teachers to establish systems and practices that support language development, literacy, and engaging, joyful learning—not just for English Learners but for all students. SEAL also encourages these leaders and educators to use SEAL’s Depth of Implementation Tool to continuously improve by regularly reflecting upon how deeply they are implementing the model across six focus areas.

According to SEAL district and site leaders, they have made the most progress in addressing the following elements to support SEAL implementation and sustainability:

- ✓ SEAL is aligned with other district and school initiatives.
- ✓ Resources are allocated to sustain SEAL implementation.
- ✓ Intentional planning to implement and sustain SEAL happens at both the district and school levels.
- ✓ SEAL coaches have dedicated time to support SEAL sustainability.
- ✓ New teachers are provided SEAL professional development.



Source: SEAL’s Depth of Implementation Tool is discussed in Section 2, Brief 1; leader perspectives on implementation are discussed in Section 2, Briefs 2 and 3 of the full [report](#).



“Collaboration has been so valuable this school year, giving our teachers an opportunity to discuss, plan, [and] refine SEAL lesson implementation. Coaches have offered their support to grade-level teams and teachers have been very receptive to that support.”

—SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

District and school leader perceptions about SEAL impact and sustainability

100% District leaders and principals who agree or strongly agree that SEAL has led to improvements in teaching for English Learners

93% District leaders who agree or strongly agree that SEAL is aligned with other district initiatives

92% Principals who agree or strongly agree that district policies and decisions reflect SEAL values and/or goals

79% Principals who agree or strongly agree that SEAL is integrated into systems and practices within the district



Source: Section 2, Brief 3 of the [full report](#).

DEEPENING IMPLEMENTATION AND INCREASING SUSTAINABILITY

Although SEAL has taken root in many classrooms, schools, and districts, others are still working to implement SEAL consistently and in a way that is sustainable in the long term. SEAL is making a difference in fostering effective educational practices and positive student outcomes for English Learners, but there was variability in SEAL implementation and student outcomes across the study sites.

To strengthen and sustain SEAL in current schools and implement it in others, schools and districts will need to support those in the coach-facilitator role, invest in continued professional learning, create more coherence with SEAL and other initiatives across grade levels, use data to support improvement, and provide time for district and site-level planning as well as for teacher collaboration.

School and district leaders and policymakers interested in supporting English Learners and the literacy and language development of all young students should study and implement SEAL's research-based practices and assets-based, systems-change approach to create joyful, rigorous language and learning for more children.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This summary was created by SEAL, not the authors of SEAL's replication evaluation. For the full evaluation, please see the final report (CEEL & Wexford Institute, 2020).

References

Center for Equity for English Learners, Loyola Marymount University, & Wexford Institute. (2020). Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) Model: Final report of findings from a four-year study. <https://doi.org/10.15365/ceel.seal2020>

Lavadenz, M. & Armas, E. G. (2012). The Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies: Conceptual framework and validation report. Los Angeles, CA: Center for Equity for English Learners, Loyola Marymount University.

Lindholm-Leary, K. (2015). Sobrato Family Foundation early academic and literacy project after five full years of implementation. The Sobrato Family Foundation. <https://sobrato.app.box.com/s/cg20x3q26ccdfm9dsql3mdon8ep140oe>

About SEAL

The SEAL model is designed to build the capacity of preschools and elementary schools to develop the language and literacy skills of English Learners and Dual Language Learners. Its model delivers language-rich, joyful, and rigorous education for all children. SEAL provides professional development, curriculum support, and technical assistance to school systems—which bolsters learning for all children but is especially critical for English Learners.

SEAL currently serves

