



**Advancing the Educational Outcomes of
California's Dual Language and English Learners
Through **Rigorous**, **Joyful** Learning**



“I’m a reborn teacher. In three decades of teaching, this past year with SEAL has been the best experience I’ve ever had. With what they teach us, the hands-on experience, and our awesome coaches, we return to the classroom with the knowledge, books and supplies to implement immediately. I feel like a brand new teacher, and I absolutely love it.”

TEACHER,
LOS ANGELES UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT



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About SEAL

ENGLISH LEARNERS IN CALIFORNIA

Today, **60% of California children birth to age five speak a language other than English at home.** That number will continue to grow, leaving our current educational system woefully unprepared to teach such a diversity of students and help them reach their fullest potential.

When we disregard the educational needs of English Learners, they struggle academically and do not become proficient in English, leading to higher dropout rates. Additionally, they often lose their home language skills, which diminishes their opportunities to become bilingual and biliterate. This loss creates barriers to maintaining community and cultural connections as well as hindering economic and career opportunities in an increasingly global economy.

But with the right investments, focus, and support, we can put English Learners at the heart of our educational system. Research shows that when we treat English Learners' home language as an asset, and design learning to meet their needs, they succeed academically. And in today's global economy, a next generation, multilingual workforce is a tremendous benefit to California. If we want to ensure that California realizes its true potential as a socially just and prosperous state, we must make English Learners a priority.

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WHAT IS SEAL?

SEAL (Sobrato Early Academic Language) is nonprofit with a powerful research- and evidence-based approach to education rooted at the intersection of research and educational equity. The bedrock values are a commitment to further developing the intellectual and linguistic genius of young children's brains, honoring the value and role of a family's culture and language in students' lives, and helping teachers cultivate the skills and mindset they need to become powerfully effective educators. SEAL is inclusive of all students, creating an environment where children engage together in rigorous, joyful, content and language-rich learning.

WHY SEAL?

The Sobrato Family Foundation invested in the design and pilot of the SEAL model, which was led by Dr. Laurie Olsen. A 5-year evaluation of SEAL found that despite starting school with language and academic skills behind their peers, SEAL students catch up or surpass peers on all measures, from language and literacy to math and science.¹ Findings show statistically significant gains in language, literacy and cognition, and significant impact on family literacy.

SEAL ACROSS CALIFORNIA

SEAL partners with educational leaders across California to transform their systems by providing professional development, curriculum support, and technical assistance for educators. SEAL is helping English Learners turn their home language into an asset.



EXPERIENCE A SEAL CLASSROOM!

Click to watch or visit our
YouTube Channel @SEALedEquity.

SEAL TRANSFORMS EDUCATION FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS AND ALL STUDENTS

SEAL provides a clear pathway for California to meet the vision of the English Learner Roadmap state policy. With over a decade of practice and research as an effective model, SEAL fosters systems change in two ways: by continuing to transform more classrooms, schools, and districts, and by advocating for state level changes that focus on English Learners' needs.

SEAL addresses English Learner needs at all levels — practice, research, policy and advocacy — to create long-term systemic changes.

PRACTICE

We partner with schools over multiple years to train teachers in research-based pedagogy, spark cross-school collaboration, and build internal coaching and leadership capacity to support English Learners.

RESEARCH

We conduct research in classrooms, pilot new approaches, and publish insights to advance the field's understanding of what works for English Learners.

POLICY & ADVOCACY

We engage with district leaders and organize stakeholders to design and advocate for policies that centralize the needs of English Learners.





Reach and Impact

SEAL partners with educators across the state, and helps transform classrooms into language-rich, rigorous, joyful learning environments.

2,400+
Teachers
trained

50,000+
Students
reached

67

Preschool LEA's,
School Districts and
County Offices

367

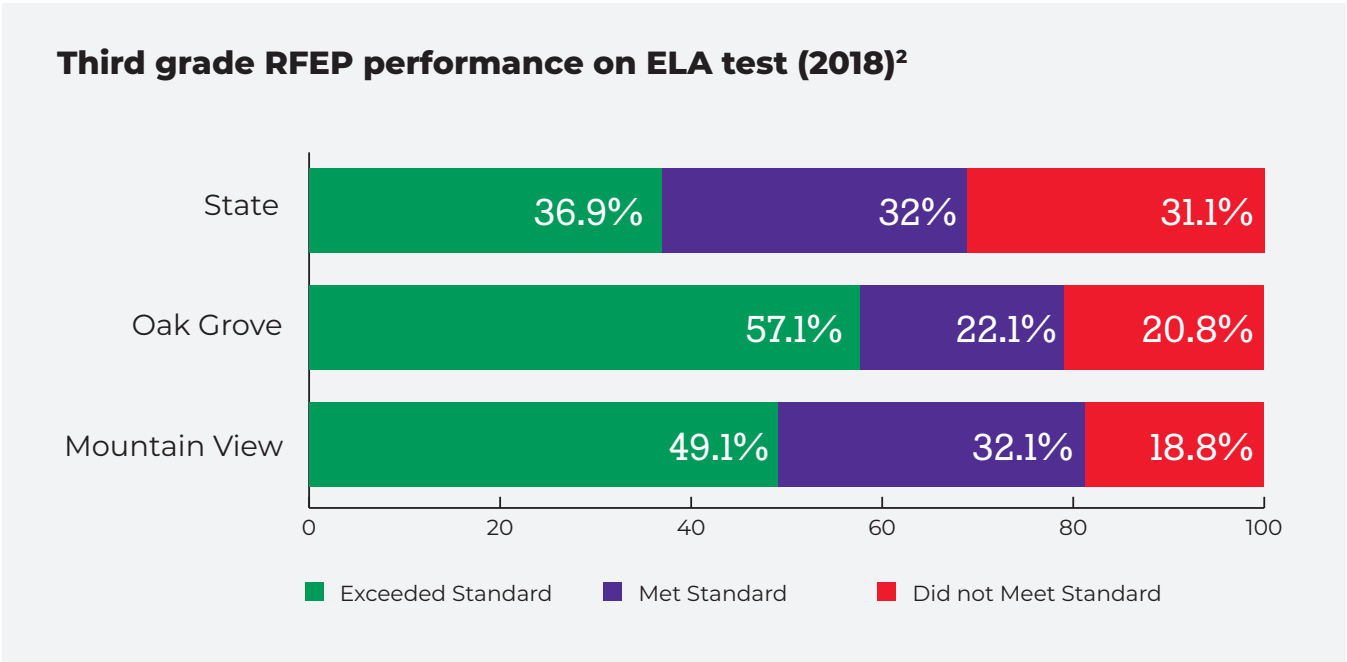
Preschool Sites and
Elementary Schools

86%

Title I Schools

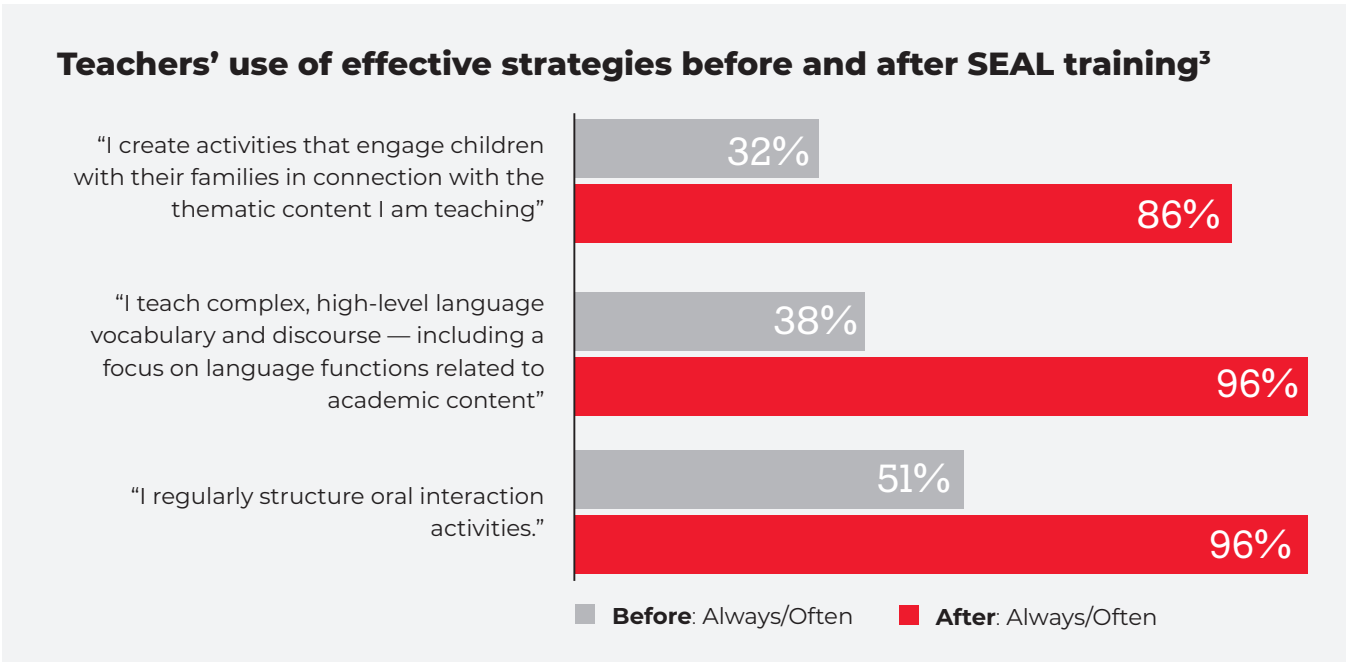
STUDENT OUTCOMES

SEAL’s research-based model and results prove that when we design powerful learning opportunities that put English Learners at the heart of our education system, they succeed.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

After receiving SEAL professional development, teachers report frequently implementing effective strategies for teaching English Learners.





“SEAL’s complex language and constant oral language practice has done worlds to improve the quality and amount of student discourse. Student confidence is higher with the use of science and social studies content. They are intrigued, engaged and motivated.”

TEACHER, FRANKLIN
MCKINLEY SCHOOL
DISTRICT

SEAL Pedagogy: Centralizing English Learners

SEAL’s research-based model and results provide clear proof that when we design with English Learners at the heart of our education system, they succeed, because educators are equipped to teach their diverse students.⁴ To provide an instructional framework, SEAL articulates 11 High-Leverage Pedagogical Practices used in all SEAL classrooms that ensure English Learners, and ALL students, thrive together in rigorous, joyful, language-rich learning.

The SEAL practices are delivered with a deep understanding of the dual language brain and that English Learners are children living in and across multiple languages and cultures. All SEAL classrooms welcome, affirm and support children’s home languages, and (where possible) provide home language development. Teachers create classrooms that encourage respect for home language where the linguistic and cultural assets students bring are recognized, appreciated and integrated as a contribution to the class community and a resource for learning.

PRACTICE #1: COMPLEX, ACADEMIC VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

A person's vocabulary shapes not only what they are able to express, but also the degree to which they comprehend content. In SEAL classrooms, deliberate and precise academic vocabulary exposure, instruction and language use begin in preschool and continue throughout the years of schooling across all subjects to develop students' sophisticated language and literacy skills. Learning language goes beyond vocabulary and includes higher-order language functions (e.g., compare and contrast, cause and effect) and their associated structures and patterns. SEAL teachers identify key vocabulary and language as they plan units to immerse children in ways of putting language together to discuss ideas. They use photographs, visuals, drawings, demonstrations and experiential activities to give meaning to the vocabulary, and to create authentic opportunities throughout the day, fostering a fascination with and love of language.

PRACTICE #2: STRUCTURED ORAL INTERACTION AND ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Mastering language begins with talk and interaction. SEAL classrooms are designed to engage students in talking about what they are learning, what they are thinking, and what they are feeling. Classrooms are alive with language, and typically, students talk more than teachers. Teachers craft discussion prompts, ask high-level questions, and engage children in discussion protocols so students generate and use language, and practice new words and concepts with peers to deepen their language sophistication. Songs and chants incorporate vocabulary and content allowing students to practice new words and learn concepts in a risk-free environment, increasing their ease and confidence with academic vocabulary while building fluency.

PRACTICE #3: EXPOSURE TO RICH LITERATURE AND HIGH-LEVEL INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Children become readers and learn to love reading when they are immersed in books that interest them. Students in SEAL classrooms engage with texts across multiple genres. Classroom libraries include fiction and non-fiction literature with rich vocabulary and engaging graphics, multilingual books in students' home languages, and student-written books. Teachers use storytelling strategies and engage students in dramatization to teach story structure and develop comprehension. Young children engage with their peers in well-stocked centers that include puppets and props to support story retell and paraphrasing. As students mature, literature circles provide time to connect with peers in book discussions. Teachers select literature for the expressiveness of the language, and the relevance of the content.



“Students are more joyful and engaged because they are excited about what they’re learning.”

**TEACHER, GOLDEN PLAINS UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

PRACTICE #4:

PURPOSEFUL, INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUDS AND MEANINGFUL TEXT ENGAGEMENT

SEAL teachers read aloud a variety of theme-based texts to model rich and expressive language and build students' vocabulary. Read-alouds are prefaced with activities that allow students to make predictions, draw connections between their own background experience and the text, and deepen comprehension skills. Teachers and students discuss books and engage in summarizing, predicting, and synthesizing. Multiple readings of the same book provide opportunities to examine various aspects of the text, promote awareness of the author's use of language, and develop vocabulary, which leads to writing.

PRACTICE #5:

WRITING FOR PURPOSE

Reading and writing are interrelated. From the beginning of their school experiences, children in SEAL classrooms are engaged in actively producing text. Children view themselves as authors when they see the connection between their own words and text through dictation — what they say can be written down, and what they write can be read. SEAL classrooms have writing centers to encourage children to write. They learn the power of the written word and the power of their voice when they use notebooks, daily journals, and collaborative writing to express themselves.

PRACTICE #6:

DRAMATIC PLAY AND HANDS-ON, INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

Young children learn best through play and exploration. SEAL preschool through 1st grade classrooms include dramatic play areas where props, realia, equipment, visuals, and puppets related to thematic units provide developmentally appropriate opportunities to explore content, practice vocabulary and cement new learning through dramatization, dialogue, and play. As children advance through the grades, carefully designed research and inquiry centers stocked with tools, experiments, and equipment promote curiosity, encourage peer collaboration, and support inquiry-based learning.





“I have stronger direction to teach the standards now and am more in control. I can respond more easily to the needs of my students.”

TEACHER, FILLMORE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRACTICE #7: GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS AND VISUALS

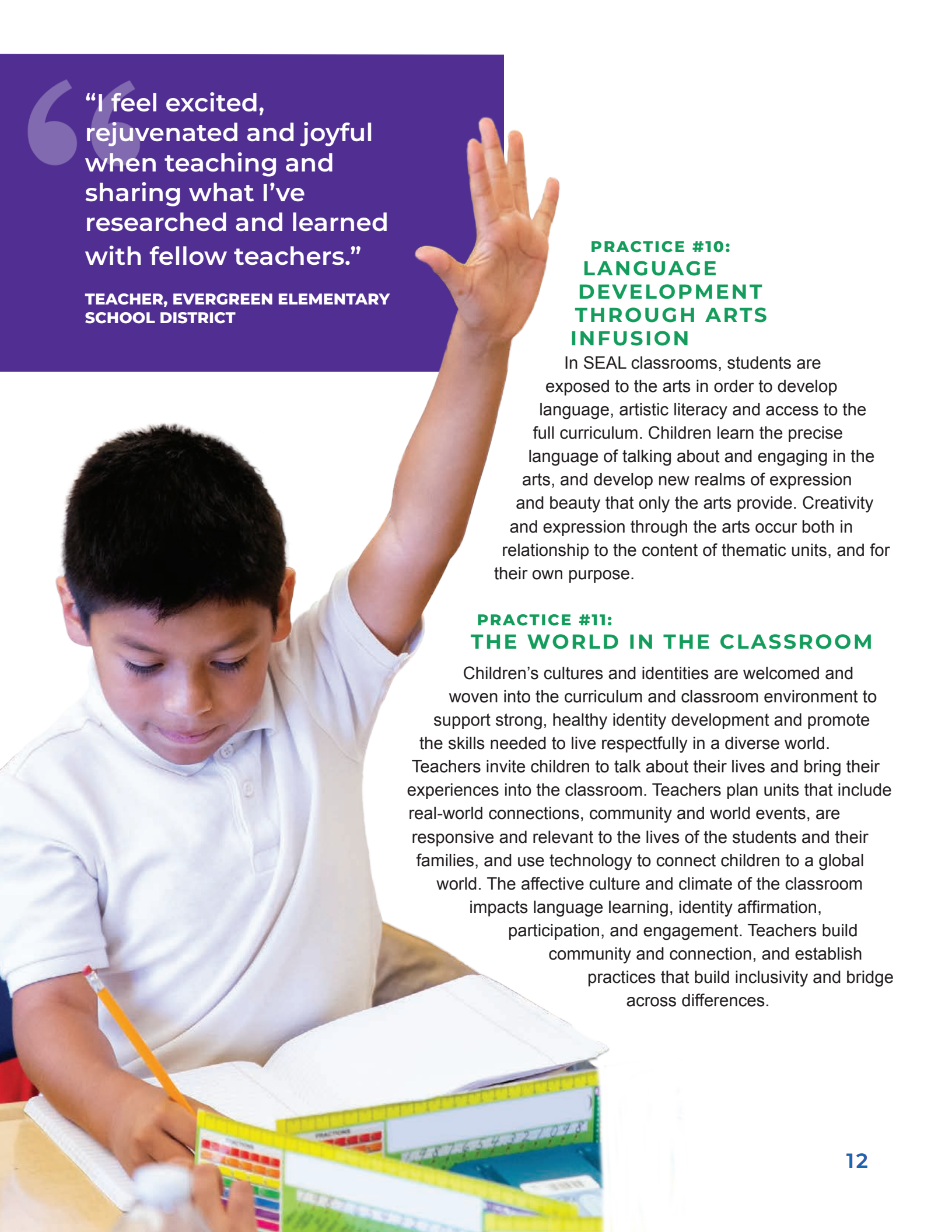
Graphics and images make academic content concrete, comprehensible and relevant. Teachers use graphic organizers, color-coding, and visuals throughout the day. Photographs and pictures help make learning and concepts concrete. Visual constructs, such as tables, timelines, webs, flow charts, and Venn diagrams teach children to organize information, clarify concepts, compare and contrast characteristics, sequence events, and categorize and classify. These comprehensible inputs provide context and support making meaning of the new language. Visual tools display the relationships between concepts and sophisticated language structures, and bridge across languages. Graphic organizers are used as tools to organize oral presentations, writing, and to synthesize learning.

PRACTICE #8: CONTINUOUS CHECKS FOR COMPREHENSION AND DEMONSTRATING LEARNING

Through the use of questioning, observation, discussion, and student work teachers in SEAL classrooms continually monitor students' understanding and skill development. These continuous checks occur minute-by-minute throughout each lesson and across the unit to adjust instruction and clarify concepts. Students also demonstrate content knowledge, skills acquisition, and language mastery more formally through performance-based tasks and culminating activities at the end of each unit.

PRACTICE #9: TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

Small group activities are important contexts that promote language practice and use, while also increasing engagement and cooperative learning. SEAL enables teachers to work with small groups to target instruction while allowing students opportunities to take ownership of their learning process with peers. Students engage with peers in inquiry, cooperative learning, research, and discussions where they learn to build on each other's ideas, share and integrate information, and develop the skills necessary for working together to achieve academic as well as social purposes.



“I feel excited,
rejuvenated and joyful
when teaching and
sharing what I’ve
researched and learned
with fellow teachers.”

TEACHER, EVERGREEN ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRACTICE #10: LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ARTS INFUSION

In SEAL classrooms, students are exposed to the arts in order to develop language, artistic literacy and access to the full curriculum. Children learn the precise language of talking about and engaging in the arts, and develop new realms of expression and beauty that only the arts provide. Creativity and expression through the arts occur both in relationship to the content of thematic units, and for their own purpose.

PRACTICE #11: THE WORLD IN THE CLASSROOM

Children’s cultures and identities are welcomed and woven into the curriculum and classroom environment to support strong, healthy identity development and promote the skills needed to live respectfully in a diverse world. Teachers invite children to talk about their lives and bring their experiences into the classroom. Teachers plan units that include real-world connections, community and world events, are responsive and relevant to the lives of the students and their families, and use technology to connect children to a global world. The affective culture and climate of the classroom impacts language learning, identity affirmation, participation, and engagement. Teachers build community and connection, and establish practices that build inclusivity and bridge across differences.



Lessons Learned

In 2008, with support from The Sobrato Family Foundation, SEAL was created as a model program to prepare and support teachers to better meet the needs of their English Learners. With a focus on effective instruction, meaningful and rigorous curriculum, and powerful language learning, the program (now a stand alone organization) has contributed to higher student outcomes, and more engaging and inclusive classroom and school culture. After more than a decade implementing, expanding, evaluating and refining the SEAL model, we have learned several overriding lessons about what it takes to create schools and classrooms in which English language learners thrive, learn, and achieve.

“SEAL has brought new creativity into the classroom and into my planning and developing units. I feel much more joy in the classroom as my students and I dive into well-thought-out planned thematic units.”

TEACHER, TWIN RIVERS
UNIFIED SCHOOL
DISTRICT

1 Children’s language, culture and identity matter

California’s school children are diverse in languages, cultures, national backgrounds and experiences. When they arrive at school, affirming environments that welcome and invite them to bring the wealth of cultural and language assets into the classroom result in richer learning for all students, stronger engagement, and healthier identities. Furthermore, programs that enable students to develop biliteracy skills accrue benefits to the students and produce stronger academic outcomes. All classrooms must affirm and support students’ languages and cultures; and, where possible, provide programs leading to dual language proficiency.

2 Knowledge matters — provide access to the full curriculum

It is essential to provide all students with access to the full curriculum — science, social studies, the arts, math and language arts. Literacy develops in the context of learning about the world, providing a purpose for reading and writing. School is for learning about the world, not just learning skills. The result is that English Learners are able to develop a deeper understanding of language because it has meaning, academic gaps do not occur, all students develop academic language and skills across all curriculum areas, and students are engaged and inspired at higher levels.

3 Teachers are key, and must be honored and positioned as professionals and partners

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to teaching that works for all children. Teachers are key to building relationships with and between students, determining needed supports, and crafting learning experiences that meet the needs of the students in the classroom. Recognizing and supporting them as professionals capable and responsible for knowing who their students are, understanding the academic standards children have a right to learn, and creating student responsive learning environments and experiences is critical to student learning.

4 Teachers cannot do it alone — they need a system designed to support their professional learning and student responsive practices

Teaching is complex. To respond to the diverse needs of their students, and to deliver instruction covering a full curriculum, teachers need professional learning and support that deepens their understanding of the academic standards, builds skills as creative shapers of curriculum, and helps them craft learning experiences that are engaging, powerful, and address the language needs of students. They need time built into their schedule to plan and collaborate with colleagues, as well as coaches who provide ongoing support. To ensure teachers can deliver engaging, inquiry-focused, language-rich teaching, leadership throughout the system has to share in the vision and take responsibility for ensuring the conditions and resources needed. For this, leaders need education and direction about how to implement new approaches. And, they are hungry for their own professional development.

5 Joy and rigor create better results for students and teachers

Classrooms should be joyful places where students are engaged in discovery, inquiry, stretching their minds as they grapple with interesting and important intellectual tasks, and developing the language to express what they are learning and what they care about. Teachers should be able to bring their own passions and creative strengths to the task of inspiring students. By coupling notions of joy and rigor, teachers are reinvigorated in their teaching and students engage in more powerful ways.



“I love SEAL — it reignites my passion for teaching. I feel motivated to grow.”

TEACHER, FRANKLIN MCKINLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

6 Families are essential partners

For all children, families are their first teachers. Once children enroll in school, however, it takes invitation and intentional strategies to knit partnership between families and schools needed to support student learning and healthy identity development. Bringing families in as partners in their children's learning, and emphasizing the key role families play in supporting home language development are essential elements of effective schooling for young English Learners, bridging across language and culture.

7 Classrooms, schools and districts transform

Schools transform when educators have the support to create meaningful, relevant and rigorous curriculum, and use instructional strategies that foster collaboration and inquiry, and commitment to affirming the languages and cultures students bring. The commitment by district and school leadership is critical so change can be systemic. Educators become more student centered and responsive to students' needs. Principals report a visible difference. Superintendents see culture changes throughout their districts. Students learn better: English Learners catch up or surpass their peers on all measures, from language and literacy to math and science, with significant gains in language, literacy and cognition, as well as having a notable impact on family literacy.

8 Go big, be bold, build it, and they will come

A comprehensive approach that touches curriculum, instruction, family-school relationships, and belief systems about language and diversity may be big, but it is what is needed. Small changes, and short-term efforts do not work. It takes the consistent collaboration of teachers, leaders, and schools over years to implement meaningful change and hold the course. Working across grade levels to create alignment, and bridging preschool with elementary school is needed for systemic change. When others see the excitement and high-level intellectual work students are engaged in, that English Learners can attain English proficiency and also be literate in their home languages, that teachers are inspired, they want it for their schools and communities. This requires investments in mechanisms to implement educational change at a large scale.

“SEAL has been an amazing journey. It continues to offer me professional growth. I look forward to the challenge next year with deeper understanding of the model.”

TEACHER, LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



EXPERIENCE SEAL IN ACTION!

Visit [SEAL.org](https://seal.org) or contact us at

hello@seal.org for more information.

ENDNOTES

- 1 SEAL's research base is consistent with the research synthesized in "Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising Futures," by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), 2017, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. The SEAL model was also featured in the report (see pp. 256-257). A pdf of the report can be found at <http://nap.edu/24677>
- 2 Data source for graph: 2018 English Language Arts assessment results for RFEP students found at <https://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/sb2018/Search> Note: This comparison doesn't control for demographic differences between the student groups or their previous performance.
- 3 These are unpublished findings from year 3 of a 4-year evaluation of SEAL replication in 12 districts. Survey years: 2016-2018 (n = 403).
- 4 See "Sobrato Family Foundation Early Academic and Literacy Project After Five Full Years of Implementation: Final research report," by K. J. Lindholm-Leary, 2015, Cupertino: Sobrato Family Foundation.
- 5 See first endnote regarding the NASEM report.



“SEAL strategies connect everything together to help build students’ long-term language acquisition.”

TEACHER, FILLMORE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



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