

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
SEAL Evaluation Report: Year One

INTRODUCTION

SEAL (The Sobrato Early Academic Language Program) is a Preschool – 3rd grade pilot program of the *Sobrato Family Foundation*, designed to build the capacity of Silicon Valley preschools and elementary schools to powerfully develop the language and literacy skills of young Spanish-speaking children who are English Learners. SEAL seeks to develop students who love reading and writing, are able to express themselves articulately in two languages, and are curious and active learners – off to a powerful early start towards academic success. The goals of the SEAL pilot are:

- To enable students to attain age-appropriate literacy in English and Spanish, grade-level mastery of the academic curriculum, and high levels of motivation and confidence as learners
- To significantly narrow the academic achievement gap between Latino English Learners and others by the end of 3rd grade

The SEAL Model:

SEAL was designed as a comprehensive and developmentally appropriate model of *intensive*, enriched language and literacy education designed for English Learners. The SEAL model draws upon the research on first and second language development, dual language brain development, and developmentally appropriate early language and literacy approaches. The model is built around seven foundational components:

- *Alignment of preschool and the K-3 systems* around a shared vision of powerful language development as the foundation for academic success – with support for transitions across systems and levels (including Summer Bridge programs).
- Simultaneous *academic language and literacy in both English and Spanish* (The bilingual classrooms are taught a minimum of 50% in Spanish; a minimum of 25% in English; SEAL also operates, however, in Sheltered English Immersion classrooms)
- Language-rich environments and instruction with an emphasis on expressive and complex *oral language development* and enriched vocabulary

- *Text-rich curriculum and environments* that engage children with books and the printed word, and lead to the appreciation and love of reading and writing
- Language development in the context of *enriched curriculum* including science, social studies and the arts.
- *An affirming learning environment*
- *Parents and teachers working together* to support strong families and build a strong foundation for academic success

English Learners start their schooling experiences in the SEAL model with a coherent preschool program that prepares them in a developmentally appropriate manner for the kindergarten curriculum they will enter. It is a thematic, play-centered, language intensive preschool approach. The kinder program is designed to build seamlessly from this preschool experience to develop the skills and language foundation needed for academic success in grades 1 – 3 and beyond.

SEAL Pilot Implementation: Year One 2009-2010

The SEAL model is being piloted in three elementary schools and thirteen (13) feeder preschools in two California school districts (Redwood City School District and San Jose Unified School District). The preschool sites include both state-funded preschools and community-based preschools. The SEAL sites are 95% “minority” enrollment, 90% Hispanic, and 70% English Learner. The schools serve higher rates of Hispanic children, economically disadvantaged children, and many more English Learners than other schools in the same district and the statewide average.

While the SEAL Model was designed as a biliteracy model, all classrooms in each SEAL site (including the SEI/English instructed classrooms) participate in implementing the basic SEAL instructional strategies and approach. However, the evaluation analysis examines these two program settings separately.

The first cohort of 320 students began preschool in Fall 2009, and is now in Kindergarten. The pilot is building into the subsequent grade level each year, following Cohort 1.

In this first implementation year, SEAL provided intensive professional development to preschool teachers through workshop sessions, coaching, and collaborative reflection and planning. This professional development included: Preschool GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design), Anti-Bias Curriculum (emphasizing the development of oral language related to the socio-emotional and interaction domains), text engagement strategies, and a focus on language assessment and support for Dual Language development. Utilizing these approaches, preschool teachers developed and implemented five thematic curriculum units. SEAL also provided hands-on science workshops related to the curriculum themes (two per month per classroom), sponsored field trips to build background knowledge related to the themes, and purchased high quality bilingual books

and materials for the classrooms. Parent engagement activities included multiple-session parent education, monthly mini-workshops, family literacy series with bilingual authors, and a program of parent participation in the classroom.

THE SEAL EVALUATION: YEAR ONE

Dr. Kathryn Lindholm-Leary, a national expert in dual-language education, is conducting the SEAL Evaluation. The Year One Evaluation report examines the outcomes of SEAL preschool and kindergarten students after one year of SEAL implementation. Key findings and conclusions of the report as written by Dr. Lindholm-Leary are below.

Key Findings and Conclusions

This study examines the progress of preschool children who received one year of a SEAL preschool and then moved into a SEAL kindergarten. The data represent only a year of progress for the first cohort of SEAL preschoolers. Outcome data are available for 142 preschoolers and 142 children who attended the SEAL program in both preschool and kindergarten. SEAL students come from homes with very low incomes (\$27,384 per family of 4) and very low parent education levels (83% with high school or less, 46% with less than high school diploma); the parent education level of students is lower than comparison students. This low level of parent education can put the child at risk for lowered language and literacy development in the home environment, which can further place the child at risk for underachievement in school.

Data include the DRDP-R given to all state-funded preschoolers, the Pre-LAS measure of language development, and the CELDT measure designed by the State of California to assess progress in the development of English language proficiency. (Descriptions of these assessments can be found on page 11 of the full report). Outcome analysis focused on measures of language, literacy, cognition and learning, because those are the focus of the SEAL model. The three major questions of the study were:

- 1) To what extent did the performance of SEAL preschool students improve during the 09/10 year?
- 2) How do the SEAL Cohort 1 students compare to other students who are demographically similar to them?
- 3) Is there a difference between students receiving English/SEI vs. Bilingual instruction?

Question 1) To what extent did the performance of SEAL preschool students improve during the 09/10 year?

This question was addressed with five different subtests of the DRDP-R: Language, Literacy, Cognition, Learning, Social, Self, and Self Regulation. In each of these measures, the preschoolers began their preschool experience with low or very

low levels of development, usually at Exploring (Level 1) or Developing (Level 2). Over the year (or 7 months from the pre-test to the post-test), children showed significant gains, usually moving up 1-2 levels. By the spring, usually a third to a half of the children were at the highest level.

On the Pre-LAS in Spanish, we again see that the children entered preschool with very low levels of proficiency, even in their native language. Only 17% were considered Fluent in Spanish, and 38% were Not Fluent. Over the course of the year, students showed highly significant gains in all the subtests and on the measure as a whole. By the end of the year, 50% of students were Fluent in Spanish and only 10% were Not Fluent.

When students were given the pre-LAS in English at preschool entry, 73% were Not Fluent and only 7% were Fluent. Though only eleven students were given the pre-LAS at kindergarten entry, close to half were Fluent. However, we have another measure of English proficiency, which is the CELDT. According to the CELDT, though only 2% were Proficient in English, and 56% were at the Beginning level. Since 73% of preschoolers had been at the Not Fluent level, it would appear that students had made gains in English over the course of the year, even though the measures were different.

In addition, in examining CELDT scores according to parent education level, it was clear that CELDT scores were highly correlated with parent education. Thus, children with more highly educated parents scored the highest, followed by children whose parents had a high school diploma, and lastly by children whose parents had less than a high school diploma, which can sometimes mean a few years of primary school.

We also found in each of the assessments that there was considerable variation across the three school sites. However, regardless of their starting point, children made highly significant gains at each school in all areas of development.

However, it is difficult to determine whether students were making expected progress on all the measures without some type of comparison group. So, we turn to the next question.

Question 2) How do the SEAL Cohort 1 students compare to other students who are demographically similar to them?

SEAL children were compared to various non-SEAL groups to determine whether the SEAL children were making lower, similar, or higher growth on the assessments. In looking at the DRDP-R measures, first we noted that all groups (SEAL and comparison) started at fairly low levels in all subareas (Language, Literacy, Cognition, Learning) and that all groups made progress from the fall to the spring. SEAL preschools showed similar distributions across the category levels as their peers in Cohort 0 and the district. In addition, they demonstrated greater growth than Head Start children, and they were far outscoring the Head Start children in the spring post-test.

On the Pre-LAS measures in Spanish, SEAL children scored significantly higher than a non-SEAL comparison group and higher than a first-grade dual language comparison group, and SEAL children outscored the non-SEAL children in every measure in Spanish. They were about as likely to be proficient in Spanish as the other two groups (49% vs. 45% Fluent in Spanish), but SEAL students had the highest overall score and subscale scores.

Though only a small number of students were given the Pre-LAS measure in English in kindergarten, there was a comparable percentage of these students who were Fluent in English (46%) compared to the non-SEAL and Cohort 0 groups. In addition, their total score was similar to that of the other groups as well.

On the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), SEAL students' distributions across the various proficiency levels was fairly similar to that of the other comparison groups, especially in terms of the percentage of students who were considered Proficient. In examining the scale scores, the SEAL students were slightly lower in their oral language (listening and speaking) scores than the non-SEAL and Cohort 0 students, but stronger in their literacy (reading and writing) scores than the non-SEAL comparison group.

Collectively, these data show that the SEAL students were at least as strong, and in many cases, much stronger, in the areas of language and literacy compared to their peers. They were making excellent progress in Spanish while continuing to make gains in English. Their progress appeared to be greater in the areas of focus in SEAL – that is, in language and literacy.

Question 3) Is there a difference between students receiving English/SEI vs. Bilingual instruction?

Children's development was also examined according to whether they were receiving instruction through an English or a Bilingual program. Overall, children instructed in both programs began at low levels on each measure and made significant growth. Children in Bilingual programs scored as high or higher than their peers instructed through English in most measures.

- In the DRDP-R measures of Language and Literacy, both groups began at low levels, but by spring, SEAL children in the Bilingual program were more highly represented in the Integrating level or at least the top two levels compared to their SEAL peers instructed only through English (75% vs. 62% in Language and 67% vs. 53% in Literacy at top two levels) and the total scores and/or gain scores were higher for children in the Bilingual program compared to children in the English/SEI program.
- Similar results were obtained in the DRDP-R measures of Cognitive and Learning; that is, both groups scored fairly low in the fall, but children in the

Bilingual program were more likely to be in the top level (11% vs. 0% in Cognitive and 29% vs. 5% in Learning), and the total and gain scores of children in the Bilingual program were fairly similar to those of the children in the English program.

- Compared to children in English programs, children in Bilingual programs were more Fluent in Spanish (17% for English vs. 49% for Bilingual), though both groups made similar gains across the year on the Pre-LAS (gains of 17 points). Thus, children in Bilingual programs have the added advantage that they are bilingual whereas the children in the English program are not scoring as high in the development of their native language of Spanish.
- While children in English programs were slightly more likely to be Fluent in English than children in Bilingual programs (6% vs. 1%), children in Bilingual programs scored higher than children in English programs in Listening, Reading, and Writing.

These results are consistent with the research studies on English Learners in elementary and secondary school programs, which we discussed in the first part of this report. That is, research shows that children in Bilingual/dual language programs make gains in the content areas and in English proficiency at levels that are similar to or higher than their peers in English programs, but greater gains in proficiency in Spanish (August & Shanahan, 2006; Francis et al, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2010).

The only advantage that the children instructed through English had was in higher English oral language proficiency scores, but these advantages were overshadowed by the higher scores of Bilingually instructed children on the literacy measures in English (i.e., CELDT reading and writing). Research shows that higher levels of oral proficiency in English do not translate into higher literacy in English. There are many children who sound proficient in English, but who lack the academic language and literacy skills in English to achieve at grade level. Thus, the results here are consistent with the research showing that literacy instruction through a child's primary language is associated with higher literacy and academic language in English and in Spanish (Francis et al, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2010).

Summary

In summary, the results presented here demonstrate that the SEAL children entered preschool with very low levels of Spanish and English oral language and literacy development and fairly low levels of other cognitive, learning, and social skills. Over the course of the year in the SEAL preschool, children made great gains in all areas and their developmental progress was fairly similar to or higher than that of other comparison groups. In addition, the children's language proficiency in Spanish was very strong by kindergarten and they continued to make gains in English as well. They

also showed stronger pre-literacy skills in English than non-SEAL children. Finally, the results were consistent with the research literature showing that children in Bilingual programs make gains that are as strong or stronger than their peers in English programs.

It is important to remember that this study represents only one year of growth for children in the SEAL program. Research shows that the positive impacts of bilingualism and transfer of skills for children instructed through two languages do not demonstrate their full potential for several years. Yet, we still see the beginning signs of the advantages of primary language instruction and of a focus of language and literacy training in preschool on these children's greater preparation for kindergarten in the areas of language and literacy.

Finally, there are currently no published reports of children's development on the DRDP-R with any children, much less with English Learners. The study reported here will make a significant contribution to the research literature on the early development of academic language in young EL children. Further research with this SEAL cohort and with additional SEAL cohorts will provide a much needed understanding of the language and literacy skill levels of children who enter school as English Learners, and especially in the interventions that can be successful with these children.

From the findings reported here after only one year of SEAL implementation, it would appear that the SEAL model is effective in promoting stronger language and literacy skills in Spanish, stronger literacy skills in English, in addition to enhancing the development of cognitive, learning, and social skills.