Case Study of SEAL Implementation:
Mountain View School District

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Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) is a research-based, comprehensive model that provides professional development and technical assistance model to teachers and educational leaders, equipping them to deliver high-quality education to Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and English Learners (ELs)[i] in preschools and elementary schools. The model was launched in 2008, when the Sobrato Family Foundation[ii] partnered with Laurie Olsen to design and pilot test a comprehensive approach to support language and content learning in the early grades. The SEAL model is now being implemented in over 130 preschool classrooms and over 110 elementary schools across the state of California.

In 2020, SEAL engaged Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to develop a series of three in-depth case studies on district implementation of the SEAL model during its replication phase (2013-2018) in order to better understand how the districts operationalized the model to meet the needs of ELs/DLLs and adapted it to meet their specific contexts. This case study focuses on the Mountain View School District, which took a unique districtwide approach to SEAL implementation. It describes how the district—specifically, two of its elementary schools—embraced the SEAL model and adapted it to its own needs, the outcomes of SEAL implementation for the profiled schools and their students, and lessons learned for districts and policymakers seeking to more effectively engage and support ELs.

> **About SEAL**
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> The SEAL model is designed to build the capacity of preschools and elementary schools to develop the language and literacy skills of ELs and DLLs. The model delivers language-rich, joyful, and rigorous education for all children. Originally the model focused exclusively on grades PK-3, however, it now encompasses the upper-level elementary grades as well.

District Context

Situated in the San Gabriel Valley, the Mountain View School District serves approximately 5,500 Kindergarten through eighth-grade students across its 10 schools[iii] and an additional 500 children, ages 0–4, at its preschool programs.[iv] Currently, 90% of the district's students qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch (FRPL),[v] and more than half are ELs. Hispanic/Latinx students comprise approximately 94% of the student body.[vi] The vast majority of ELs in the district speak Spanish, and a small number speak Arabic, Tagalog, Mandarin, or Vietnamese.

Over the past decade, several district initiatives have been introduced to change classroom instructional approaches, with a focus on the way that district and school staff support EL students. In particular, the district had previously adopted Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), a pedagogical approach that focuses on second-language acquisition strategies to promote high-level thinking, development of academic language, and cross-cultural skills. However, during the No Child Left Behind era, school leaders and educators described an environment focused on test taking, which, according to district leaders, resulted in a deprioritization of GLAD in favor of a focus on tested subjects.

By the time the SEAL model launched, the district had already worked for several years with Ivannia Soto, a professor of education at Whittier College who specializes in second-language acquisition and systemic reform for ELs. Soto introduced concepts such as reciprocal teaching, the Frayer model for vocabulary instruction,[vii] and collaborative group work, all of which are focused on increasing ELs' oral language production in academic areas. Another districtwide initiative that helped set the stage for SEAL was the use of Thinking Maps, a set of techniques focused on improving student concept development and clarity of communication.

District Adoption of SEAL

In Mountain View, the decision to adopt SEAL in 2014 was largely driven by the district's analysis of state and district test score data. Using the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment, district leaders discovered that students had very low receptive vocabulary and reading comprehension scores. These numbers were lower for ELs, who comprised over half of the districts' students.[viii] According to state-level Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment results, only 13% and 10% of Mountain View's ELs met or exceeded English language arts (ELA) and math standards, respectively.[ix] Moreover, 16% of the district's ELs were reclassified for reaching English proficiency.[vi]

Given the low EL test scores and the district's low EL reclassification percentage for elementary students, it became clear that Mountain View needed a new strategy to support its ELs. Notably, neighboring school districts in the El Monte region had similar EL outcomes, which generated an opportunity for Mountain View—along with three other districts—to partner with external organizations to reduce the number of ELs in their schools. Mountain View received a grant from the California Community Foundation to fund a year-long project designed to analyze strategies to mitigate long-term classification of EL students. The grant funded Mountain View's work with Californians Together, which supported the district in collecting additional data—including qualitative information on the current conditions and experiences of ELs in Mountain View classrooms—to complement the existing quantitative data and get a more concrete understanding of what could be improved.

The findings from this project shocked district leaders. As Mountain View Superintendent Lillian Maldonado French explained:

> **It was eye opening for folks when we shadowed a student and realized that the time students actually spent speaking in a whole day, in six periods of classes, was two minutes... And it's heartbreaking. But that was so eye opening about why our practices had to change. And that was really what made the difference… That was an 'ah-hah moment' that we had to do things differently.**

The findings raised concerns about the district's approach to promoting vocabulary, reading comprehension, and language acquisition. In response, Californians Together presented district leaders with various programs and models that used EL-specific strategies, each of which could be incorporated into the district's instructional approach. It was through this process that the district first discovered SEAL.

District leaders watched a SEAL demonstration video together and, according to French, some staff "were left in tears." They subsequently had an opportunity to speak with Olsen, SEAL's founder, and learn that SEAL's pilot sites in Northern California were producing promising preliminary results. French and her team moved forward with the decision to pilot SEAL in a few schools in Mountain View, making it the first Southern California school district to adopt the model.

District Approach to and Support for SEAL Implementation

Mountain View took a unique approach to SEAL implementation, significantly modifying aspects of SEAL's professional development model to fit their unique context and desired timeline. Like most districts, however, they began SEAL implementation by first identifying the school sites that would participate based on their proportion of ELs and those with the lowest ELA test scores. This led to the selection of three pilot schools: Parkview Elementary, Cogswell Elementary, and Miramonte Elementary.

The district then needed to identify the school leaders and teachers who would learn about and lead the implementation of the SEAL model in their respective sites. At least one school staff member from each of the three pilot schools traveled to Northern California to visit demonstration sites in the Redwood City School District. They described this experience as invaluable, as it provided them with the opportunity to witness a typical SEAL classroom; doing so resolved many doubts and motivated them to begin using aspects of the model within their own classrooms.

The first cohort of preschool through first-grade teachers to participate in SEAL training began the first module in the spring of 2014. The spring start and use of only the first training module differed from the SEAL model's typical implementation. (See "SEAL Model Timeline for Teacher Professional Development" text box for details.) As a result, SEAL and its trainers needed to modify their work and Summer Bridge program. In the following school year, a new cohort of second- and third-grade teachers from the three pilot sites began their own SEAL training, while the first cohort continued theirs. (For details about the content of the two-year professional development series, see the text boxes "SEAL Model Teacher Professional Development Series" and "SEAL Summer Bridge Program.")

Although SEAL training had only recently begun, district leaders were already brainstorming about future SEAL expansion. By then, more staff from the pilot schools—as well as from other schools in the district—became aware that Mountain View was piloting a new initiative. This generated concern among some educators who'd had negative experiences with previous districtwide

SEAL Model Timeline for Teacher Professional Development

In Year 1, which begins in late summer or early fall, teachers participate in the SEAL Launch and the first three training modules. In Year 2, they participate in the final three modules. Teachers can also choose to participate in a Summer Bridge program between their first and second years of training. Typically, SEAL staggers the 2-year teacher training cycle over a 3-year period, with teachers in Pre-K/Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 1 training together in Years 1 and 2, and teachers in Grades 2-3 participating In the training cycle in Years 2 and 3.

SEAL Model Teacher Professional Development Series

Teachers and instructional coaches, called SEAL coaches, are the primary audience for the 2-year professional development series consisting of a "Launch," six module trainings, and a Summer Bridge program. The purpose of the Launch is to establish a shared understanding of the SEAL model. The module trainings are where teachers learn background research and learn instructional strategies to support ELs, and how to create standards-based thematic units and foster family partnerships. (See "Summer Bridge Program" for a description of this component.) SEAL coach-facilitators also receive additional training (e.g., SEAL Coach Convenings) to support their role in helping teachers implement SEAL in their classrooms. The participation of district and school leaders in module trainings is optional; however, they are strongly encouraged to participate in the Launch.

SEAL Summer Bridge Program

Summer Bridge is an optional program for teachers that provides intensive professional development as well as enriched language development for children. Teachers build a shared understanding of SEAL's approach and deepen their SEAL teaching expertise by co-teaching with a grade-adjacent peer (e.g., a Kindergarten teacher is paired with a first-grade teacher), observing and supporting each other to try out new strategies and deepen implementation.

initiatives. The teacher union voiced teachers' concerns about SEAL, particularly their hesitation about having coaches enter classrooms. These concerns ultimately resulted in Miramonte teachers opting out of the SEAL training and the school exiting from the pilot; this created an opportunity for Jerry Voorhis Elementary School (Voorhis) to join Parkview and Cogswell as a SEAL pilot site.

Grade-Level Training Roll-Out

Prior to completing the training sequence with preschool through third-grade teachers from the three pilot schools, Mountain View decided that the best way to foster systemic impact on learning and outcomes for ELs was to expand SEAL to the entire district. This meant that once the district was ready to expand the model to second grade in the pilot schools, the remaining schools would begin SEAL training and implementation with the second grade as well. This approach differed from SEAL's traditional training cycle, in which teachers in adjacent grade levels train together. (See "SEAL Model Timeline for Teacher Professional Development" text box for details.) Thus, Mountain View chose to delay third-grade teacher training at the pilot sites in order to expand SEAL training to non-pilot schools in Year 2.

Funding

The district was not initially able to fund the implementation of SEAL on its own. In fact, according to district leaders, the impact of the Great Recession left Mountain View with virtually no funds for staff professional development opportunities. Fortunately, the same California Community Foundation grant that funded the district's work with Californians Together to address EL outcomes also funded the initial SEAL implementation efforts.

When the state enacted the Local Control Funding Formula in 2013, Mountain View set aside funding from its Local Accountability Action Plan to fund ongoing SEAL implementation. According to school staff, SEAL support and funding was more complete and helpful in comparison to funding for other initiatives. Much of this was because SEAL staff partnered with districts to think through how to fund ongoing implementation efforts. Through this, the district provided coaching, materials, and trainings for SEAL. (Other initiatives had limited trainings, no site-based trainers, and few materials to implement the strategies.) The initial funding efforts for SEAL paid off, as the district was eventually able to expand the model to other grade levels at its other school sites.

Internal SEAL Trainer

SEAL trainers are experts on the model who work directly with district and school staff to prepare them for SEAL implementation. They provide training modules to teachers and to the district's own instructional coaches and, with separate coach training sessions, they support instructional coaches to become SEAL coaches. These training sessions prepare coaches to model SEAL teaching strategies and lead unit development days with teachers. (More information about the SEAL coach role can be found in the next section.) Additionally, SEAL trainers work in pairs and complete classroom walkthroughs with the district's SEAL coaches to provide school staff with support and feedback to improve their approach to implementing SEAL strategies in the classroom. While Mountain View had the support of two external SEAL trainers throughout its implementation and expansion, the district also sought to create and grow its own capacity to provide SEAL training by identifying an internal SEAL trainer. Mountain View selected a district Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) who had initially been trained as a SEAL coach to serve as the internal trainer. She was a firm believer in the SEAL model and had knowledge and hands-on experience, which supported her transition to this new role. She engaged in additional training sessions exclusively for SEAL trainers, which required frequent travel to Northern California to attend presentations and learn more deeply about the model in ways that are typically reserved for SEAL training staff. As part of her development and growth, the district's internal SEAL trainer joined the two external SEAL trainers working with Mountain View schools and co-facilitated module sessions with them. Now, Mountain View's internal SEAL trainer is tasked with the same obligations as a typical external SEAL

trainer. Additionally, she leads the trainings for all new educators who join grade levels that have already received training on the SEAL model.

The internal SEAL trainer was a pivotal and essential position that allowed the district to navigate concerns brought up by its teacher union. Given the negative experiences with previous initiatives, the teacher union and educators were wary of initiatives that brought external individuals to the classroom. As a result, SEAL's trainers were not permitted to participate in classroom walkthroughs and it often took them longer to build relationships and trust among staff. However, having an internal SEAL trainer who had worked in the district for many years and whom educators already knew alleviated this tension and helped to promote buy-in to the SEAL model.

SEAL Coaches

SEAL coaches are school or district staff who receive professional development opportunities to promote SEAL strategies and directly assist teachers with SEAL implementation in the classroom. The "SEAL Coach Role and Responsibilities" text box describes a coach's typical role and responsibilities as part of the SEAL model.

During initial SEAL implementation, Mountain View was very intentional when identifying educators to receive training to become SEAL coaches. Because they would be tasked with being champions of SEAL at their respective sites, the district specifically selected teachers who had extensive tenure at the pilot sites, knowledge of second-language acquisition strategies (from previous district initiatives), and well-developed, trusting relationships with school staff. Additionally, the district selected an educator who was actively part of the teacher union to be one of the first coaches, giving the union a voice in the rollout of the initiative.

Mountain View also took ownership of how it assigned coaches to school sites. This allowed leaders and coaches to navigate teachers' earlier concerns about being observed by an external individual during a former districtwide initiative. Mountain View's coaches were located at the district office and supported teachers at all schools across a given grade level. As such, they had to be invited by teachers to model instructional strategies or observe teachers in their classrooms—an element of the model that was negotiated in consultation with the teacher union.

By giving teachers autonomy to choose when to receive support from coaches in their classrooms, and by selecting well-respected coaches, Mountain View fostered a collaborative environment that built trust between teachers and coaches. Over time, teachers felt safe seeking support from SEAL coaches, found their assistance helpful, and gained confidence in their expertise. Teachers in Mountain View were, and continue to be, appreciative of the coaches' support. In the words of two teachers:

> **SEAL Coach Role and Responsibilities**
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> - Work with teachers to maximize consistency and coherence of instruction and to encourage collaborative and reflective practice.
> - Lead professional development modules and special topic institutes that bring together district staff, administrators, and teachers across SEAL sites, building a shared understanding of the framework and research behind the SEAL model while creating a robust community of SEAL practitioners.
> - Support the Summer Bridge program, an intensive professional development opportunity for teachers as well as enriched language development for children.
> - Lead classroom demonstrations and modeling to help individual teachers implement SEAL strategies.
> - Plan instructional and curriculum sessions to review curriculum standards, plan thematic units, and analyze the core program to determine where intensive language development strategies can be employed.

> **I think [the coaches] did an excellent job as far as providing just instruction on how to teach it, exactly what it is, what it's for. And the best part, I think for us, is the modeling. They would model [SEAL] for us, and so we could see how it works. They would provide opportunities, actually, even in a classroom, and take over and show us, even in the classroom setting with students, how to implement the strategies.**
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> **[SEAL coaches have] always been available to us through this whole process to model, to provide resources, to make things for us with anything. With anything, really. I've never had so much support with anything.**

In addition to working with teachers, coaches maintained an open and consistent level of communication with school leaders. One SEAL coach went above and beyond expectations by creating binders for the Voorhis principal to help with awareness of the lessons on which teachers were focused throughout all grade levels. Teachers and the school principal appreciated this support tremendously. As the principal explained:

> **Having district TOSAs as SEAL coaches, helping with the planning and helping the teachers at that level, is a huge bridge between the training and the actual implementation. A lot of training fails if you give it, 'Here's the training,' and then you leave it up to the teachers to do all of the planning, the implementation, without any help. Things quickly fall apart that way. So the facilitated planning that was going on is a huge bridge in that. That can't be undersold.**

Mountain View Families

Mountain View families were important advocates for SEAL implementation. Those who were involved in the district's Family Engagement Department and the District English Learner Advisory Committee learned about SEAL, supported its implementation, and informed other families about it. Pilot sites like Parkview held community sessions to enable families to learn about the SEAL model's key components, including its background, research, approach, standards, and anticipated outcomes. Through implementation, parents saw how the SEAL model sparked children's academic interest, supported their academic development, and improved their academic performance; this further motivated families to advocate for SEAL.

Parkview & Jerry Voorhis Elementary Schools: Exemplars of SEAL Implementation

In order to examine SEAL's influence on classrooms and instruction, it is useful to look at how the model was implemented in two schools. When SEAL implementation began, Parkview Elementary School was the only bilingual school in the district; Jerry Voorhis Elementary School had no existing bilingual program.

According to Parkview educators and external SEAL trainers, the Mountain View School District was previously considered a "powerhouse for bilingual education." After Proposition 227 passed, however, the district eliminated the majority of its programs. As a result, by 2015, Parkview Elementary School was the district's only bilingual school site. One reason Mountain View's superintendent selected Parkview as a SEAL pilot site was to support and rebuild the school's bilingual legacy and impact. Embracing the overall spirit and promotion of bilingual education, particularly through SEAL's Bilingual Convenings, Parkview teachers pushed to continue the transitional bilingual program to upper grade levels, eventually leading to a long-term bilingual program that now operates through the eighth grade. The dual-language program at Parkview is a key resource and support system for the school's ELs, many of whom come from working-class families. [x] [xi]

> **Parkview Elementary School Demographics**
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> - Over 90% of students qualify for FRPL.[viii]
> - Over 60% of students are ELs.[viii]
> - Over 90% of students identify as Hispanic/Latinx.[ix]

Jerry Voorhis Elementary School replaced Miramonte as a pilot site for the SEAL model about a year after the pilot began. Prior to formally joining the pilot program, the Voorhis principal and one of the school's teachers at the time (the current internal SEAL trainer) learned about SEAL and introduced it to other school staff. They both approached a second-grade teacher and encouraged her to attend the teacher module session that was already underway for the pilot sites. Intrigued, she arrived at that training alone and immediately noticed that teacher representatives from other school sites implementing SEAL had small teams present. Upon returning from the session, she asked the district staff and her principal for permission to invite her second-grade colleagues to the training, and they agreed. As such, once Voorhis was chosen as a new pilot site, its first SEAL cohort comprised its second-grade teachers; it later expanded into Kindergarten and first grade, which (as noted earlier) is the opposite of SEAL's typical implementation order. That first cohort of teachers embraced being the first staff to be trained in the SEAL approach, and they were willing to work with one another to create units, modules, and materials for SEAL's introduction to the school.

> **Jerry Voorhis Elementary School Demographics**
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> - Over 90% of students qualify for FRPL.[x]
> - Over 50% of students are ELs.[xi]
> - Over 95% of students identify as Hispanic/Latinx.[xi]

One of the biggest assets that supported both schools' adoption of the SEAL model was that teachers had received prior training from other initiatives, many of which were similar to or overlapped with the SEAL model. For example, some were trained in GLAD, Reading Recovery, and/or a balanced literacy program that focused on guided reading, shared reading, and interactive writing for ELs. Parkview's experience in bilingual instruction was an asset as they sought to blend language instruction into the curriculum across subjects as part of SEAL implementation. Though Voorhis was not a bilingual school site, many of its teachers spoke Spanish. In addition, they were already aware of language-acquisition strategies and early

literacy strategies, which provided helpful background when they began learning about SEAL. For instance, one SEAL coach reported the ease of teaching and guiding Voorhis teachers in SEAL, describing it as "something that didn't seem foreign." Their background knowledge and former experiences were assets that helped them implement the model.

SEAL adoption was also facilitated by the support the initial cohort of teachers received from school and district leaders. Mountain View principals visited a SEAL demonstration site and attended principal Convenings, which meant they shared a common understanding and language with teachers. (See "SEAL Convenings" text box for more details.) Moreover, principals were conscious of the amount of time, effort, and work that teachers put into SEAL preparation; teachers knew they could discuss any SEAL issues with their principals, who understood the demands of the model. Furthermore, the Convenings gave principals credibility with teachers because they could understand teachers' day-to-day activities. In the words of Parkview's principal:

> **SEAL Convenings**
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> A series of regional and state-wide Convenings engage district leaders, principals, SEAL coaches, and bilingual educators in building their understanding of the needs of ELs, deepening their knowledge of the SEAL model and their role in the implementation process. These gatherings provide structured opportunities for peer dialogue about the challenges inherent in supporting teachers through instructional and curriculum change, and for building a toolkit of skills related to being an instructional leader and sustaining SEAL implementation. New state policies and broader educational trends are also outlined with the aim of building coherence and cultivating a shared vision and commitment across the SEAL network.

> **When we started those trainings, and actually we were being trained as though we were teachers, that made a big difference in us having that foundational understanding of the strategies. I mean, as a leader it's important to have some of the other scaffolding and what it should look like as a system. But I think it was more important for us to have that foundation [of], 'This is what it needs to look like and now you're going to try it,' [which] was even more important to be able to support the teachers.**

Principals also had district-level support that allowed them to prioritize SEAL. As such, it was possible to allocate funding and resources to acquire materials and otherwise support SEAL implementation within specific school sites. One principal cited this as critical to ensuring that it was implemented with fidelity. Teachers witnessed and valued the principals' intentional decisions to center SEAL, and this further contributed to a sense of trust and responsiveness between leaders and educators. As one teacher explained, "The principals are always supportive and willing to invest in [SEAL]. And also, financially. We were given the materials, the books, any kind of supplies that we would need to implement."

SEAL Implementation

Both Parkview and Voorhis incorporated SEAL fully into their preschool through third-grade classrooms. At both sites, teachers implemented SEAL strategies and combined them with other approaches. While SEAL encourages schools to minimize the number of initiatives and methods they incorporate in the classroom, its trainers and coaches also work with teachers to merge different approaches to maximize classroom impact.

Interestingly, both schools' older grades gained interest in and benefited from the SEAL model. Parkview's expansion of its bilingual program through eighth grade was largely influenced by the momentum that SEAL created among teachers in the lower grades who were eager to facilitate a smoother transition for

their younger students into upper grade levels. As such, even though Parkview students are not in SEAL classrooms beyond third grade, they continue learning in bilingual settings. They are taught by teachers in the upper grades who understand the importance of multilingualism and who use similar strategies meant to bridge the learning experience for ELs from one grade to the next. Some even carry over SEAL strategies they see their colleagues using. Meanwhile, at Voorhis, SEAL's success encouraged the district to advise school leaders to train many upper-grade teachers on SEAL strategies. Though not an official expansion, one of the SEAL coaches met with fourth- through sixth-grade teachers at Voorhis to support the creation of alignment between grade levels throughout the school.

Classroom Level Implementation

> **You can walk in a classroom and know which ones are doing [SEAL] and which ones are not, just from scanning the room when you walk in the door.**
> **— District Administrator**

As indicated by the district administrator quoted above, staff at both Parkview and Voorhis spoke of the ways that SEAL classrooms are distinct from other classrooms, both visually and aurally. SEAL classrooms rely heavily on physical spaces and visual displays, which are used to depict students' current knowledge, learnings, and growth. Teaching strategies, such as "Draw and Label" and "Narrative Input," create scaffolded learning opportunities that keep students engaged in the classroom. Notably, while the materials and lessons are prepared by the teacher and SEAL coach, the displayed visuals are teacher- and student-created, serving as a powerful reminder of students' ownership of the work and the collaborative space they are helping to build. As described by one of Parkview's teachers:

> **There's not enough walls or ceiling space to put up all the strategies, chants, and student work, [and] we're always adding pieces. You'll see a lot of vocabulary. There's centers where kids can manipulate some of the pictures or words.**

Furthermore, students in SEAL classrooms consistently talk to one another, using their language and voices in ways that differ from more traditional classrooms. A SEAL coach described it this way:

> **You're going to see kids talking. You're going to see them interacting. You're going to see them in groups. But most of all, you're going to hear language. You're going to hear vocabulary. You're going to hear the rigor.**

Underneath these visual and aural differences lie the rigor, student collaboration, and family partnerships that are all key components of an ideal SEAL classroom. Below we highlight the ways in which staff and partners from both schools described the presence of these elements within their classrooms.

Rigor

SEAL classrooms maintain a level of rigor that supports students in their early years of education and helps them transition into future grade levels. One of the ways in which SEAL sustains this level of rigor is through its focus on increasing student vocabulary and its connection to language development overall.

Teachers are taught to closely consider the graphic organizers, sentence stems, and discussion questions (among many other factors) that students need to support such development. As such, Parkview and Voorhis teachers are intentional about the vocabulary words they introduce to students and about the strategies they use to focus on those words, including reading comprehension and compare-and-contrast strategies. Students are also exposed to rigorous vocabulary during "Dialogical Read-Alouds," another SEAL strategy that teachers learn through their training.

One Voorhis teacher said that, prior to SEAL adoption, language acquisition was an area that the school was having difficulty addressing well, and SEAL provided the necessary resources to dive deeper into this area. Through scaffolding and other pedagogical practices, teachers learned to introduce new vocabulary words, knowing that some might be advanced for certain students but that other SEAL strategies would help them understand and use the words. For example, teachers model and create spaces for collaboration and individual thinking to process ways in which a word can be used. One Voorhis teacher explained:

> **Their language just grows. It really is amazing. You hear [the students] talking to themselves when they're at centers or groups, and you hear these words…They start explaining things, and you're like, 'Wow. Okay, I've done my job…' They are acquiring language that's at a higher level. Just because they're English language learners, we can't sit there and say they can't. We need to provide everyone the opportunity. And they can do it with modeling, with support, with collaboration. They can do it. And it's so evident with this [model], so evident.**

SEAL's use of rigorous vocabulary is part of the reason essential planning is needed, so that teachers are equipped with information and skills to explain and help students understand content. Parkview staff commented on their intentional focus around lesson planning. During unit development days, teachers collaborate with SEAL coaches to determine the strategies and curriculum they will teach during the school year to support students' language development and meet state standards. A Parkview teacher explained:

> **Well, I think definitely when you plan [SEAL lessons], I think that's where you're looking for the rigor, and that's where I was grateful to be able to plan them with my team. We had time to look at the state standards, and we matched what we wanted to teach during each different unit or each different strategy. And when we were putting our binders together, we had that embedded in there.**

Furthermore, rigor is sustained through hands-on activities that give students an opportunity to incorporate vocabulary words with other aspects of the content. For example, as part of SEAL's "Narrative Retell" strategy, Kindergarten students create a puppet and story to reinforce vocabulary words from their community unit. This gives teachers and classmates a chance to ask each other questions about the puppets and gives each presenting student an opportunity to use sentences and incorporate words from the unit. It helps teachers gauge which students have a good grasp of the material and which students may need additional support to process the curriculum. Other SEAL activities that teachers have learned and used include chants and songs, "Draw and Labels," guided reading, writing time, and poems. These activities allow teachers to use vocabulary in context and give students a chance to practice word

grouping, reading comprehension, literacy, and speaking all at once. All of these activities are done at least once a week in SEAL classrooms.

Student Collaboration

Another important aspect of SEAL classrooms is the opportunity for student collaboration. These types of activities, which are frequently very hands-on, create learning environments that prompt students to talk and interact with one another. There are opportunities for large- and small-group activities that are centered on speaking and using language and new vocabulary and that allow students to help one another through the tasks.

Students engage with one another, with teachers, and with the material. For example, when teachers are showing students how to use sentence frames, they create opportunities for students to engage and talk with peers and to share their thinking with and learn from one another. Teachers also give students collaborative writing tasks in which they are able to discuss how to use key vocabulary words as well as how to form sentences, write paragraphs, and undertake longer writing tasks.

Another helpful approach that is common in SEAL classrooms is the "Think-Pair-Share" approach. Teachers develop discussion prompts and questions to engage children practicing new academic language, first by thinking and writing on their own and then through opportunities to talk and share about their ideas—first with a peer and then with the entire class. Additionally, they explore and use songs and chants to learn words, which creates interactive and collaborative classrooms that improve students' confidence when speaking and sharing with others. One SEAL teacher described it as "one of my favorite times of the day":

> **…because it's so hands-on. Definitely…there's a lot of engagement with each other, because you want to give them that opportunity just to use the language as much as possible. So, it's a back-and-forth where I'll teach a little piece and then they have to teach each other or discuss what they've learned, whether it's with a partner or not. There's a lot of chants and movement…It's really an active time when we're doing the SEAL strategies.**

Teachers use strategies and materials that are revisited throughout the day, week, and entire unit, which reinforces learning and growth. A Voorhis teacher explained, "From the beginning to the end, you're going to see the students talking and working together, and you're going to see them collaborating."

Family Partnership

SEAL creates opportunities for school staff and parents to connect in new ways, creating partnerships between schools and families. Through culturally relevant lessons, parents are seen and valued by school leaders, which helps establish more trusting relationships. For example, teachers attempt to find literature and stories that will resonate with the culture and experiences of their students. Additionally, SEAL has home–school connection projects that attempt to involve parents and guardians in the work that students are doing in the classroom and through homework. A Parkview teacher explained how they try to engage Spanish-speaking families in this work and support home language development:

> **We always send home an introduction to the unit and a list of vocabulary in both languages, and just explain what we're going to be learning and that they can go over those words with their kids. And then throughout the unit, there are projects, and of course the parents help.**

These small tasks or assignments are meant to get the parent and child talking and sharing information related to the unit. Because activities are not limited by language, students are able to speak with their families in their home language. It also creates an opportunity for them to share what they are learning in their classroom with their parent or guardian.

There are many other ways that SEAL has helped both pilot schools integrate cultural relevance into strategies and classrooms to strengthen family partnerships. For example, teachers add variety in their chants and songs to follow rhythms that mimic the songs that students are likely to have heard in their native language and within their communities. There are also designated lessons in which the class focuses on ancestry and family origins, providing space for each student to speak with their family to learn about their unique upbringing and culture. At both Parkview and Voorhis, children have opportunities to proudly represent and speak about their families' countries of origin. This approach includes students' families in their learning, which signals to parents and guardians that they are an important part of their children's education and that their knowledge and experience are valued.

As a core example of family partnership practices, SEAL teachers offer family members Gallery Walks at the end of each unit. During these Gallery Walks—described as small-scale open house events—students demonstrate the new language and knowledge they have acquired by walking their parent or guardian through the classroom and explaining their individual and class projects. At the same time, these events create a space for families to be more involved and informed about their children's education.

Though there is often high parent attendance, it can sometimes be difficult for all parents to attend the Gallery Walks because they take place during or at the end of the school day, when many parents are working. Interestingly, a Parkview teacher observed higher participation among Spanish-speaking parents, which may be a direct influence of the cultural components of SEAL and the intentional invitation to enter classrooms. Importantly, Gallery Walks give teachers an opportunity to establish and strengthen communication and relationships with families. As one teacher explained:

> **I think the parents definitely appreciate when we have our end-of-unit Gallery Walks. Instead of just coming in once a year for open house, I think they appreciate that time to just to be able to see. And it's nice, honestly. As a teacher, I feel like, 'Hey, I want them to see all of our hard work that we're doing.' So, I appreciate it too. I think that keeps them connected.**

These events create open opportunities for parents to enter the classroom to celebrate their children. A Parkview teacher described the value in this approach:

> **Well, the great thing about our kids is that they're always willing to learn. They work so hard…And that partnership with the parents and the kids, it just makes it easy. So even if they don't have a lot of background in English, the parents are still on the sideline cheering them on. And so, the kids try. And whatever progress they're making, that's celebrated. A lot of times it's hard because maybe the parent can't help them with certain things, but there's always an effort being made.**

The Voorhis principal is a big proponent of Gallery Walks because they create opportunities to welcome parents onto school grounds and into classrooms. Meanwhile, Parkview's principal noted a distinct shift in the school's approach to family partnership, which he previously described as "business-based." Through SEAL's model, the school has offered more (and new) opportunities to welcome parents and families into school settings, creating space for teachers and parents to engage in celebratory and welcoming school environments in an ongoing way.

Challenges

Teachers at both Parkview and Voorhis identified a lack of planning time as their primary implementation challenge. Teachers were appreciative of the unit development days and of the fact that the district hired substitute teachers to cover classrooms during such days. Nevertheless, they expressed the desire to have additional time to plan for SEAL strategies inside the classroom and during instruction. One teacher explained the challenge this creates:

> **SEAL is challenging in the aspect that it takes a lot of time. That's one of the most challenging parts to it, is finding time. Teachers need to find time to make the resources. It takes a lot of outside time.**

Another teacher who was part of the first SEAL cohort at Voorhis recalled having additional time during her first year to build and create the materials she would need for her lesson. Once she was in her second year of SEAL, however, she and others in the first cohort no longer had that much time, as SEAL training was only being offered to the newest cohort:

> **If you truly believe in us as teachers and in implementing this [model], then allow us the time…I appreciate the fact that I could reach out to my SEAL coaches. They're wonderful, wonderful coaches, all of them…But the Draw and Labels and everything else we need to create, or sometimes we need to move things around…give us that time, because it takes a while.**

As noted, Parkview had a bilingual program that predated the adoption of SEAL. This program already required a substantial amount of planning and preparation time for teachers as they prepared all materials in both English and Spanish. Although the implementation of SEAL benefited from having teachers who had previously implemented similar instructional practices—not to mention the added advantage of bilingual teachers' understanding of the richness of language—reconciling the bilingual curriculum with the SEAL curriculum required yet more planning time. Teachers did their best to incorporate aspects and strategies of multiple models into their lessons, especially the first cohort of

teachers implementing SEAL at Parkview. These teachers simultaneously created many of the SEAL materials while working to link the different initiatives. One teacher explained:

> **It was challenging to just try and tie them in, try and find the right core standards to teach, because there's just so many, and trying to pull in the reading strategies, the writing standards, the language conventions. So, it's just a lot to try and go through to try and tie it in with what we're teaching in SEAL.**

To address challenges like these, SEAL encourages districts to avoid overlapping or simultaneous initiatives. In recognition that this is often difficult to do, SEAL trainers are prepared to support district leaders, SEAL coaches, and teachers with connecting existing initiatives or efforts together.

SEAL Outcomes

SEAL has had widespread impact, both on students and on the school culture at Parkview and Voorhis.

Student Level

Given SEAL's interactive and engaging learning environment, one of the most common impacts of the model described by school staff at both sites is that it has activated students' desire and willingness to learn. Moreover, staff described that, given the level of rigor SEAL sustains, it truly creates a learning environment where students are able to grow their vocabulary and reading comprehension. In the words of a Voorhis teacher, "It's created a culture of learning, a joyful sense of learning." District leaders explained that they have observed dramatic changes in students' abilities. For example:

> **I was an elementary teacher, I was a middle school teacher. I had never heard students, especially not in my own class, talk about things like the Environmental Protection Agency in second grade. And not just use the word, they could walk you over to a strategy that was on the wall, like the language function wall, and they could walk you through what it was. It used to be that every kid in the class could repeat photosynthesis, and [only] two could tell you what it was.**

In addition to building students' academic skills, SEAL classrooms have helped to grow students' confidence and self-esteem. They are able to sustain conversations and write about specific unit topics using their acquired learning. One of the district leaders recalled the story of a student's growth:

> **I had a student in my final year in the classroom in 2015, he was a third grader and…he really thrived. I would say he's one of our top students. And he came back in eighth grade and he told me, during an open house, he said, 'I always thought I was dumb. I sat in my first-grade and second-grade class, and I didn't know what the teacher was saying, and I stayed quiet.' And he then went on to say, 'I didn't know how smart I was until I was in your class.'**

As captured by this anecdote, SEAL classrooms create learning environments that allow students to engage in new ways, many of which have the promise of activating students' academic potential and confidence. In addition, these environments can make students aware that they can use more than one language to communicate with their friends, family, teachers, or others; as such, they are able to push away from English-only environments and instead embrace the various ways to communicate.

Children are not only speaking more in class and with their peers, but also with their parents and guardians through at-home activities and classroom Gallery Walks that give them the opportunity to speak about what they are learning in the classroom. Students are able to explain items, pieces, and projects that they have completed, giving them a sense of ownership and joy that they can share with their families.

When it comes to data and results, the district has been seeing students' test scores increase, especially in language development. After its first year of SEAL implementation, district leaders recalled that word recognition significantly increased, as did scores in the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment.

School Level

At the school level, staff from both school sites agreed that SEAL has helped to develop richer curriculum and instruction that is better connected with other standards and efforts. Furthermore, SEAL has created a more collaborative teacher environment, where educators can support one another with implementation and planning. It has invited teachers to speak with and work with one another to collectively prepare to serve students, as opposed to working in isolation. In essence, it has given school staff a common language to use with one another around implementation. This type of collaboration calls for more productive and insightful lesson planning that draws on individual teachers' strengths; it also provides opportunities to reduce the amount of work that is needed to prepare for lessons. For one Voorhis teacher, SEAL has been more than just a model:

> It's given me direction…Every time I go in, I [have] a purpose. It's meaningful. It's purposeful. It's rich…It really is precise…You know everything is integrated…I want kids to walk into the room and feel joyful. I feel like if they're happy, they're going to learn. And when they come in and they see their work on the wall, and they see the drawings, and they see their sentences or paragraphs hanging on the wall, and they can be successful and read it. It's not just a bunch of words up on a wall because a teacher wrote it. They created it. They wrote it. They could go up there with a pointer and they could read. That's so powerful.

This increased collaboration also promoted a stronger alignment between educators, school leaders, and district administrators across grade levels and schools. As stated by a district staff member, "I would say that we're now aligned. [N]ot just classroom-to-classroom within a grade level, but we know that teachers in Kindergarten are covering their standards, so that first grade can be built on those standards, so that second grade can build on those standards."

At both school sites, school leaders and teachers have worked with teachers in the upper grade levels to incorporate aspects and strategies of the SEAL model into their lessons; the goal is to sustain and reinforce students' growth and proficiency as they progress through their academic journeys. Parkview's principal talked about the value of these shared strategies:

> "I think one of the biggest value-adds, other than the fact that the strategies are great for kids, is that having a cohesive bank of strategies that all of our teachers are implementing and really developing gives our kids a consistent peg on which to hang their hats…By having something like SEAL, you have this rich bank of strategies, this rich way of learning content. And then it's consistent, really makes it a whole lot easier for the kids to be able to access the content faster because they don't have to continue to relearn strategies. It's already been taught from the beginning."

SEAL has also reignited teachers' passion for working with students. SEAL staff have found that district and school leaders as well as teachers are supportive of the model's foundational research and practical approach. They recognize its assets and strengths, which can not only support implementation but also have an impact on a students' education. A Voorhis teacher explained: "Anything I do in teaching, I always ask myself, 'What's the purpose?' And once I knew it [SEAL] was geared to them, our ELs at our district, and it was going to help me become a stronger teacher, it was an easy buy-in." The superintendent elaborated on this idea:

> "It brought joy back into teaching for a lot of teachers. I had teachers tell me, 'Oh, I'm happy to teach again.' And every time I went [to visit schools], they [the teachers] would pull me in to show me something they were doing, and had me crawling through a little cave with the kids. And one teacher was so excited, and she said, 'You know, I hadn't been this excited in years to teach.'"

The Parkview principal recalled that, prior to SEAL implementation, school staff were using an approach to English-language development instruction in which EL students were put in groups based on grade level. This "pull-out" approach entailed removing EL students from the classroom and shifting students back and forth between different teachers at the school. After adopting the SEAL model, school staff grew more confident in their skills to differentiate instruction, and they eventually shifted to a "push-in" approach, grouping students within their own classrooms. This is a more efficient process that gives teachers the opportunity to work on differentiation and to focus on actual language development strategies without losing precious time as they physically move students between classrooms.

Facilitators and Lessons Learned

District and school staff identified a number of conditions that supported their ability to successfully adopt and implement SEAL. As discussed below, these include strong support from district leaders, a designated internal SEAL trainer at the district level, access to externally funded and district-supported trainings, ongoing professional development and support for teachers, and strong family buy-in and support for the model.

- **District leaders served as champions for SEAL.** When asked about the conditions that supported the success of SEAL implementation across the district, interviewees shared that the district's leadership—particularly the superintendent and assistant superintendent—were strongly

dedicated to embracing the SEAL model, regardless of the risks associated with being the first Southern California district to do so. The district developed an EL master plan with policies, structures, and implementation components that specifically referenced the SEAL model as a way to better center EL students' needs. As put by the district's internal SEAL trainer, "I think it's the sense of, 'What do you need? We'll get it for you.' We've really bent over backwards trying to support. And by we, I mean [the assistant superintendent] and his team." Coaches similarly affirmed that the district emphasized the SEAL training and support for implementing SEAL best practices, sending a clear message that SEAL should be prioritized.

- **A district-level SEAL internal trainer played a key role in supporting teacher implementation.** One of the most tangible ways in which district leaders demonstrated their commitment to SEAL was by intentionally advocating for and positioning an internal SEAL trainer in the district. In this role, the trainer, who was first an experienced teacher and SEAL coach, worked alongside external SEAL trainers to assist in planning for SEAL sustainability, creating and updating units of instruction, and offering trainings for new teachers or those changing grade levels. By receiving substantial additional support from SEAL, Mountain View uniquely positioned itself to strengthen SEAL implementation and sustainability throughout the district.

- **SEAL Convenings and site visits provided teachers as well as district and school leaders with exposure to models of how SEAL could be applied within classrooms.** The SEAL demonstration site visits, supports, and leadership Convenings created spaces for leaders from various districts to gather and share their learnings about SEAL. These sessions gave district leaders a clear visual of the hands-on experiences and learning environments that were being created in classrooms. An additional benefit of these experiences was that district and school leaders could better empathize and respond to concerns about the model and support its implementation.

- **Districtwide trainings supported a culture of ongoing learning and peer support.** Contrary to previous initiatives, which were often prescriptive and fell short of supporting school staff with implementation, Mountain View's leadership was very intentional about offering SEAL's professional development trainings and sessions for staff across all levels. This created an opportunity for staff to train with role-alike peers and exchange ideas. Momentum for SEAL adoption was sustained through the district's internal SEAL trainer and SEAL coaches, who helped teachers bridge the gap from training to classroom application/implementation.

- **Teachers were provided the flexibility to work with SEAL coaches after school and on Saturdays, when they received hands-on support.** Another condition supporting successful implementation was that teachers were given more flexibility than in prior initiatives to work on SEAL-related professional learning with coaches after school and on Saturdays. Though this support was offered every year, it was primarily concentrated and more heavily emphasized during the first year of implementation. During these trainings, coaches supported teachers with whatever they needed—demonstrating lesson plans, helping with unit development, and troubleshooting specific issues. According to one principal, the Saturday sessions made it easier for teachers to participate. District leaders accommodated staff preferences for how to best implement SEAL, rather than enforcing a particular approach.

- **The district made a conscious effort to ensure that teachers had enough time to embrace SEAL-related professional learning.** After receiving feedback from teachers that they needed more time to prepare SEAL lessons, the district sought to expand the unit development days for teachers to collaborate around SEAL planning and material preparation. To ensure teachers had

sufficient time to focus on SEAL, the district hired additional substitute teachers who covered teachers' classrooms during SEAL development days. The internal SEAL trainer described the district's responsiveness in the following way:

> We have been fortunate to have a superintendent, and an assistant superintendent of educational services, and a director of curriculum and instruction that really do listen, and they respond to the needs of the teacher. When teachers had expressed the concern that SEAL took too much time to plan, because it really does take a whole lot of time to plan, they…provided our SEAL teachers an hour and a half a week of additional planning time to work on their SEAL thematic units of instruction.

- **District efforts strengthened once school leaders were more deeply engaged.** In Mountain View, the initial focus for implementation was on training district leaders and teachers on the SEAL model. The district wanted to focus its efforts on ensuring that teachers developed a strong understanding of the model given their role in implementing it in front of students. School leaders were not involved in those first SEAL trainings, limiting their knowledge of the model and what it looked like in the classroom. As SEAL was expanded to other school sites, the program began offering principal Convenings in Southern California, giving Mountain View principals the opportunity to gather and speak with principals from other school districts. Interviewees felt that their knowledge and support of SEAL increased from attending these Convenings.

- **Family partnership and advocacy for SEAL helped to deepen its implementation.** Family and parent advocacy for SEAL also strengthened implementation. The district has a Family Engagement Department and family members participate in a District English Learner Advisory Committee. These family members learned about and strongly advocated for SEAL, spreading information to other parents and guardians. They were also given opportunities to attend workshops and trainings focused on different school initiatives, which is where many parents and family members learned about SEAL.

- **The district collaborated productively with the teacher union leaders on how to launch and expand SEAL in the district**. To overcome the district's challenging past with previous initiatives, district leaders closely worked with the union to build a sustainable and supportive learning and working environment. District leaders wisely crafted solutions to alleviate some of the union's concerns, particularly around having external individuals visit classrooms. They also actively listened to teachers' needs for more time and funding to more effectively carry the SEAL model forth in their classrooms.

Conclusion

Through its adoption of SEAL, the Mountain View School District was able to meaningfully improve the quality of instruction for its English Learners and promote a positive professional learning environment for its teachers. In its roll-out of the model, Mountain View drew on established SEAL structures, trainings, and supports while asking for modifications to the approach in order to fit the district's unique

context and needs. For instance, Mountain View drew on external SEAL trainers in its early phases of implementation and also created a permanent internal SEAL trainer position at the district level, which has helped to institutionalize and sustain capacity to support the model. Furthermore, the district navigated initial resistance from its teachers to having coaches observe their classrooms by proactively partnering with the teacher union and letting teachers opt in to coaching visits rather than making them required. Mountain View ultimately invested fully in the adoption of SEAL in a way that has facilitated SEAL integration into instruction and institutional policies and practices throughout the district.

End Notes

[i] Because the SEAL model includes preschools, SEAL uses both terms (Dual Language Learners [DLLs] and English Learners [ELs]) as well as the combined acronym (DLLs/ELs) to refer to the primary population the model was designed to serve. The EL term is statutorily defined and refers to K–12 students who meet state and federal criteria and are learning English while simultaneously learning academic content in school. The DLL term is less consistently defined. In this case, it refers to preschool-aged children who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken.

[ii] The Sobrato Family Foundation is now called Sobrato Philanthropies.

[iii] During SEAL implementation, Mountain View had 10 schools. Due to school closures, however, it currently has only eight schools.

[iv] Mountain View School District. (n.d.). *About MVSD!* Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://www.mtviewschools.com/about_mvsd/about_mvsd

[v] California Department of Education. (n.d.). *District profile: Mountain View elementary.* Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://www.cde.ca.gov/sdprofile/details.aspx?cds=19648160000000

[vi] California Department of Education. (n.d.). *2019–20 enrollment by ethnicity: Mountain View elementary* (Report No. 19-64816). Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/enrethlevels.aspx?agglevel=District&year=2019-20&cds=1964816

[vii] The Frayer Model is a type of graphic organizer that uses a four-square model to determine, clarify, and analyze word meaning and structure.

[viii] California Department of Education. (n.d.). 2014–15 enrollment by English language acquisition status (ELAS) and grade: Mountain View elementary district (Report no. 19-64816). Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/longtermel/ELAS.aspx?cds=1964816&agglevel=District&year=2014-15

[ix] California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. (n.d.). *English language arts/literacy and mathematics Smarter Balanced summative assessments: Mountain View Elementary*. Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/DashViewReport?ps=true&lstTestYear=2015&lstTestType=B&lstGroup=4&lstSubGroup=160&lstGrade=13&lstSchoolType=A&lstCounty=19&lstDistrict=64816&lstSchool=0000000&lstFocus=a

[x] California Department of Education. (n.d.). *School profile: Parkview Elementary.* Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://www.cde.ca.gov/sdprofile/details.aspx?cds=19648166020770

[xi] California Department of Education. (n.d.). *2019–20 Enrollment by Ethnicity: Parkview Elementary (Report no. 19-64816-6020770).* Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/enrethlevels.aspx?agglevel=School&year=2019-20&cds=19648166020770

[xii] National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *2020–21 school year: Jerry Voorhis Elementary.* Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_detail.asp?Search=1&ID=062619003915

[xiii] *2019-20 School Accountability Report Card*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 12, 2021, from https://voorhis.mtviewschools.com/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=8477731