

## Supporting Oral Language

### *How Teachers and Parents Can Work Together to Support Oral Language*

**At school**, a SEAL classroom is alive with language! Children are talking and actively producing language to give expression to their thoughts, emotions, needs and knowledge. In SEAL classrooms, teachers thoughtfully and strategically select vocabulary to teach, model and infuse into the curriculum. This vocabulary encompasses depth of meaning, precision, and is central to the concepts being taught. Teachers draw pictures and label the visuals while describing what is in the picture, as a means to build vocabulary and comprehension. Vocabulary development is supported with real things that give meaning to the vocabulary. Students have many opportunities throughout the day to use the vocabulary and deepen their understanding of the meaning of the words. Additionally, teachers are intentional about teaching the words children need in the socio-emotional and interpersonal realms to express their needs, experiences and feelings.

To develop a language, children need many opportunities to practice using the language. Parents can play a powerful role in creating these opportunities outside of the classroom. Just as teachers structure oral language supports and opportunities, parents can do so as well. Parents as well as teachers can serve as a Language Coach, guiding students to use oral language by encouraging, modeling, probing, and providing physical and verbal cues to help student elaborate their language. Just as teachers ask high-quality questions that require students to put complex thoughts into language, and encourage students to elaborate, using more enriched language, so too their parents can do so at home.

Other powerful oral language activities that can be extended into the home include songs, chants, children's rhymes and choral reading. Through these types of activities, children are given the opportunity to hear the language and practice producing the language in non-threatening ways – utilizing rhythm and repetition to bolster fluency.

Teachers play important roles in helping families understand why oral language development is so important, and what parents can do to support their child's oral language. This means that teachers need to regularly communicate and reinforce the message with parents that it is important that families talk to their children and engage them in conversation. **At home**, families can:

- 1. Expand the child's vocabulary by modeling and teaching them new words.**  
*Parents should be encouraged NOT to use "baby talk" with their child all the time, but rather to use more precise and complex vocabulary when they can so children will learn more vocabulary.*
- 2. Expose children to rich, complex language through reading books aloud**
- 3. Talk to children, using rich, expressive language**

- 4. Engage children in conversations - ask questions - keep the conversation going through multiple exchanges**
- 5. Encourage children to tell stories**
- 6. Teach children songs, and sing them often with children**
- 7. Ask children questions about what they are learning, thinking and wondering - and ask them to explain what they are doing.** *If a parent asks a question that only requires a “yes” or “no” response, the child won’t have to produce much language. Instead, they should ask open-ended questions that have no single right answer, and that require a child to use more language.*
- 8. Describe out loud to children what they are doing.**
- 9. Play games with sounds and words.**
- 10. Ask children questions and encourage them to tell about what they are thinking, learning, and wondering.**
- 11. Encourage children to say when he or she doesn’t understand something.**  
**The skill of asking questions is an important one for children to learn, and it opens up opportunities for more talking together.**
- 12. Listen!** *Listen carefully to what children are saying without rushing them along or speaking for him. Let the child do the “brain work” of figuring how to say what he wants to say. Parents can ask for clarification when they don’t understand.*

It is best if parents do all of the above in the language that is the strongest for the parents - because that is the language in which the most expressive and developed language can be modeled. By definition, English Learners are children living in dual language worlds. In the SEAL model, the development of oral language is encouraged in both their home language and in English. While children naturally code-switch across their two languages, it is important for children to *hear* each language system with authenticity and integrity. One of the great gifts parents can give to their children is to develop and maintain the family heritage language.