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## **New Report Shows That “Filling the Curriculum Void” Is the Next Challenge in K–12 School Reform**

***Research Proves That a Content-Based Curriculum like Core Knowledge  
Raises Student Achievement, Teacher and Parental Satisfaction***

**Hawaii, New Mexico Explore Statewide Adoption of Core Knowledge Curriculum**

Washington, September 13<sup>th</sup> — A new report issued today shows that a strong, content-based curriculum is the missing piece in raising academic standards in America’s pre-K-12 schools and that research on the effects of the Core Knowledge curricula shows that it helps increase students’ academic achievement and narrow achievement gaps between groups of students.

The Core Knowledge Foundation, a Charlottesville, VA-based research and curriculum development organization, conducted a thorough review of all existing national, state, and local-level research on the effects of their content-rich, carefully sequenced pre-K–8 curriculum. This research shows that schools that successfully implemented the Core Knowledge curriculum were more likely to show increased levels of academic achievement as well as higher levels of teacher and parental satisfaction.

Cumulatively, several studies by different researchers in different school districts have come to the same conclusion: filling the curriculum void with a common, coherent, rich, and challenging set of content guidelines sequenced carefully across grade levels and taught in every classroom has a positive effect on student achievement. The study also includes in-depth profiles and interviews with principals and teachers at eight schools from across the country implementing the Core Knowledge curriculum.

“With the increased focus on raising achievement in America’s schools, teachers and parents are clamoring for programs that are based on content, sequenced from year-to-year to guarantee consistency and continuity, and provide children with what they really want—rich and engaging content knowledge, built upon a strong and ever-growing foundation,” said Barbara Garvin-Kester, president and CEO of the Core Knowledge Foundation. “No Child Left Behind expects students to learn specific things at designated points in their academic lives. Unfortunately, few curricula adequately do that. We believe we are in the vanguard of a movement in that direction, and we are seeing strong interest from all over the country in our program, and others, that are based on specific, sequenced, and rich content.”

Highlights of the report include:

## **Raising Student Achievement**

Several studies demonstrate the advantages of a specific, sequenced, content-rich curriculum.

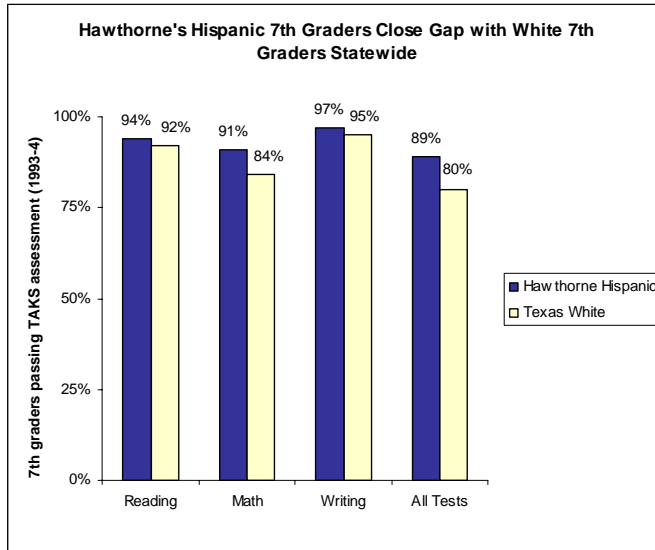
- Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that adopting the Core Knowledge curriculum can help solve the problem of “a general lack of organizational consistency and coordination within schools.” They found that the Core Knowledge curriculum produced “more clarity of goals, clearly defining ‘what school means’ for the educators implementing the program.” The finding confirmed the “significant positive relationships between clear and consensual schoolwide goals and student learning.”
- The Johns Hopkins researchers also found that implementing Core Knowledge leads to “increased teacher collaboration,” helping them “understand what will be taught in the grades below and above theirs,” and ensuring that “there are no unnecessary repetitions and harmful gaps in instruction.”

There is also a compelling body of research that shows that a curriculum such as Core Knowledge can help schools raise student achievement and narrow achievement gaps.

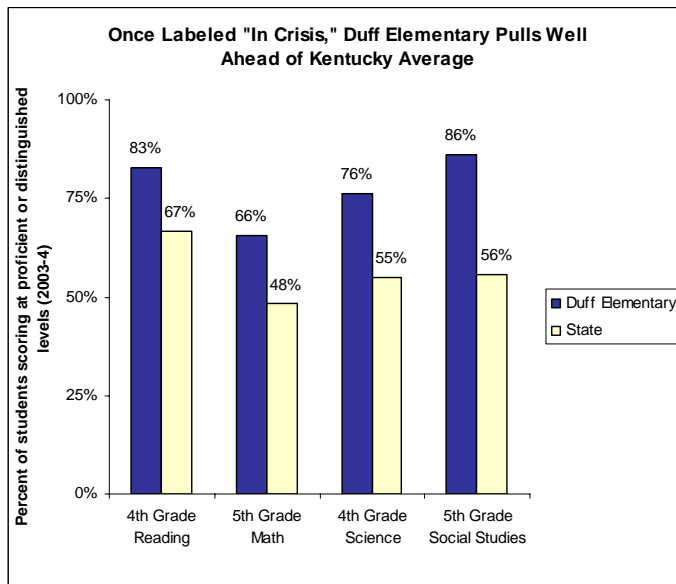
- A study by administrators in Oklahoma City, OK, which paired students in Core Knowledge schools randomly with similar students in non-Core Knowledge schools, found that students who had spent the year in Core Knowledge classrooms gained more than their matched peers by statistically significant margins in seven of the eight categories on the standardized Iowa Test of Basic Skills. They also looked at performance on Oklahoma’s own state tests in reading and social studies and found the same results – students in Core Knowledge classrooms gained more than their otherwise evenly matched peers by statistically significant margins.
- University of Virginia researcher Dr. Fred Smith studied the academic progress of students in two demographically similar schools – one a Core Knowledge school, the other not – over a six-year period, from kindergarten through sixth grade. He found that students in the Core Knowledge school outperformed their peers at the comparison school on the Stanford 9TA both in reading and math, again by statistically significant margins.
- The previously-mentioned Johns Hopkins study also found that when Core Knowledge was implemented in more than 50 percent of a school’s classrooms, “Core Knowledge students learned more advanced language arts, science, and social studies topics and skills than did their non-participating peers.”
- Recently, two researchers compared the value-added gains on North Carolina’s state assessments for six Core Knowledge schools that took those tests against gains for students across the state as a whole. After controlling for various student characteristics, including previous achievement, poverty, and race, they found that

students in Core Knowledge schools outperformed those in other North Carolina schools in both language arts and mathematics across five grade levels.

- A study of San Antonio, TX’s Hawthorne Academy—the third school in the nation to adopt Core Knowledge—noted that the school had improved its student achievement results substantially since it adopted the Core Knowledge curriculum in the early 1990s, considerably outpacing the district and state.



- Eastern Kentucky’s Duff Elementary School was well below the state’s cut-off on assessments, and was considered a “school-in-crisis” prior to the implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum. Now, the school’s test scores are the best in its district and are well ahead when compared with other elementary school across Kentucky.



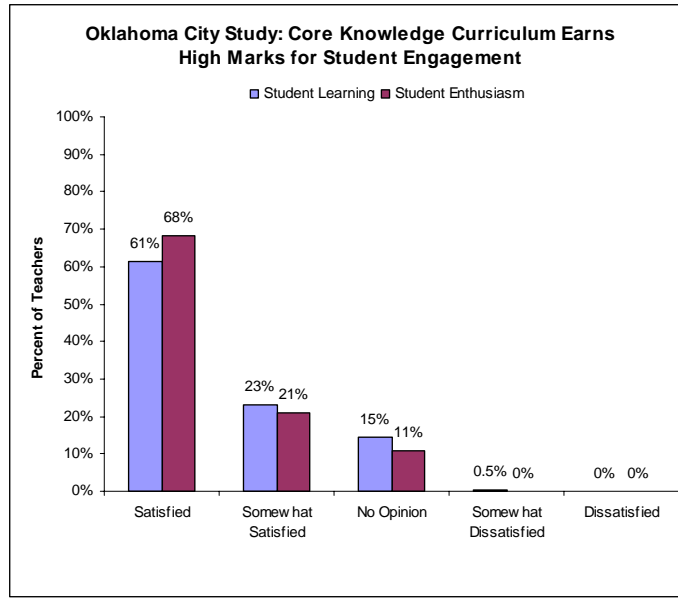
- Evidence is emerging that Core Knowledge’s pre-K program can dramatically improve the chances of low-income students to be fully ready for kindergarten – a growing national concern. A study of the implementation of the curriculum in Baltimore County Head Start (BCHS) programs – where it is being implemented across all Head Start centers in the county – found that students who participated in both Core Knowledge Head Start and pre-kindergarten showed greater academic readiness, in both language/literacy and math, than children who attended only pre-kindergarten. As the table below shows, kindergarten readiness has skyrocketed among BCHS participants since the County Head Start program began implementing Core Knowledge during the 2001-2002 school year:

<b>Percentage of Maryland Head Start Students with “Full” Readiness by Academic Domains</b>									
	Language/Literacy			Mathematical Thinking			Scientific Thinking		
	2002	2005	Change	2002	2005	Change	2002	2005	Change
<b>Baltimore County</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>+ 33</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>+ 39</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>+ 29</b>
Baltimore City	17	26	+ 9	17	24	+ 7	8	14	+ 6
Howard County	24	38	+ 14	37	47	+ 10	12	16	+ 4
Anne Arundel County	20	35	+ 15	23	44	+ 21	13	25	+ 12
Prince George’s County	26	42	+ 16	27	40	+ 13	14	27	+ 13
Montgomery County	36	39	+ 3	42	49	+ 7	25	29	+ 4

### **Increasing Student, Parent, and Teacher Engagement**

Additional research shows that student, parent, and teacher engagement increases with the implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum.

- As part of the Oklahoma City study described earlier, school district researchers surveyed teachers about whether they were satisfied with Core Knowledge’s impact on student learning. They reported that, overwhelmingly, the Core Knowledge curriculum increased students’ enthusiasm for learning (a finding confirmed by the Johns Hopkins study of schools across the nation):



- Both the formal studies on Core Knowledge schools and interviews with principals strongly suggest that teachers are likely to be energized and engaged when the right kind of common curriculum is introduced. For example, the Johns Hopkins researchers who conducted the national study of Core Knowledge found that “implementing Core Knowledge improves the professional lives of teachers. . . . Core Knowledge was viewed favorably by teachers and was seen as an enhancement to their professional lives. Overwhelmingly, teachers enthusiastically encouraged their teacher friends to implement Core Knowledge.”
- The Johns Hopkins researchers noted that a positive outcome that was “observed across all moderate-to-high implementing Core Knowledge schools was the satisfaction of parents. Echoing the comments of many, a teacher at one school stated: ‘the parents are thrilled, thrilled, thrilled.’”

## Calling Educators to Action

Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind, districts and states around the country have discovered that too many school curricula do not present a structured, content-rich program that helps raise the achievement levels of their students to the levels required by the legislation.

Two states—New Mexico and Hawaii—are exploring the heretofore radical step of implementing components of the Core Knowledge curriculum—or one that is similar to it—as a statewide curriculum. The state of New Mexico introduced legislation that would provide funding to its schools that adopt a common, core curriculum like Core Knowledge. In Hawaii, the state legislature is considering legislation to develop a core reading curriculum for grades PreK-8 statewide that is “a rigorous, research-based curriculum like the Core Knowledge program.”

“We’ve seen a considerable increase of interest in our program since states, districts and schools have discovered that a collection of textbooks is not the same thing as a rich, challenging, and specific curriculum designed to accumulate student knowledge in a coordinated way across subjects and grades,” Garvin-Kester said. “Finally, there seems to be recognition that rigorous, engaging and specific content matters—and we encourage all schools, everywhere, to adopt curricula that instill in students the love of knowledge, and the understanding that a foundation in content is the real road to a lifetime love of learning.”

The report demonstrates that the curriculum void is a national problem of significant scope and consequence. It creates huge repetitions and gaps in learning, spawns overwhelming knowledge deficits that make reading and learning harder as children advance through school, and increases the achievement gap.

The report concludes with the following call to action:

***“Policymakers and education leaders must take explicit action to ensure that every student in America has the opportunity to attend a public school with a common, coherent, and challenging core curriculum that prevents repetition and gaps in learning and provides adequate ‘world knowledge’ for reading comprehension.”***

## **About the Core Knowledge Foundation**

Dedicated to excellence and fairness in early education, the Core Knowledge Foundation is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1986 by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., professor emeritus at the University of Virginia and author of many acclaimed books including *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* and *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*. The Foundation conducts research on curricula, develops books and other materials for parents and teachers, offers workshops for teachers, and serves as the hub of a growing network of Core Knowledge schools. For more information, visit the foundation’s website at [www.coreknowledge.org](http://www.coreknowledge.org).

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