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The Newsletter of the Core Knowledge® Foundation
Volume 17, Number 1, December 2003/January 2004

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Colorado Teacher Creates Website to Help Middle School Core Knowledge Teachers



How Can Core Knowledge Help You Meet the NCLB Requirements?



At first glance, many educators are tempted to say, "There is no way we can meet the [No Child Left Behind](#) (NCLB) requirements and effectively implement Core Knowledge-that would be too much work!" But don't despair: it can be done.

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Teaching Core Knowledge in a Special Education Setting

Core Knowledge offers many advantages to schools eager to promote student learning. Students are motivated by the scope and sequencing of topics. They have the opportunity to learn content that might otherwise not be presented until the secondary level and are able to connect skills to contextual situations. Special education students are no different in their quest for knowledge.



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How Can Core Knowledge Help You Meet the NCLB Requirements?

by Cyndi Wells, Director, Teacher Development

At first glance, many educators are tempted to say, "There is no way we can meet the [No Child Left Behind](http://www.NoChildLeftBehind.gov) (NCLB) requirements and effectively implement Core Knowledge—that would be too much work!" But don't despair it can be done.



In this article I hope to correctly show that the NCLB requirements are entirely consistent with the philosophy of Core Knowledge and can be met through the effective implementation of Core Knowledge. The goal of the two-year-old NCLB act is to narrow the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students through school accountability, which leads to high-quality education and improved performance for all children. This has been the goal of the Core Knowledge Foundation for the past 16 years.

In this article, I will address how Core Knowledge can be the *vehicle* used to meet the key principles of the NCLB act. These include "stronger accountability for results; greater flexibility in the use of federal funds; more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been demonstrated to work" (*The No Child Left Behind Act: A Desktop Reference*, p. ix). In the paragraphs that follow I will say a few words about how Core Knowledge can help schools address each of these principles.

NCLB places an increased emphasis on *school accountability*. The bill requires that students make adequate yearly progress, and requires states to define what this progress should "look like." In order to ensure that all children meet high academic standards, states are required to create (or use existing) annual assessments that measure academic performance in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8. These tests are to be based on state standards. A key component of the Core Knowledge Foundation's [Professional development](#) at individual school sites is helping the faculty develop a plan for meeting (and exceeding) their state standards through implementation of the [Core Knowledge Sequence](#). While this is not an easy task initially, we have found that teachers who work closely with one another to design this plan acquire a deeper knowledge of their own state standards, and begin to see how Core Knowledge can help their students meet and exceed these standards. Often the Core Knowledge Sequence provides specific learning goals that can be used to flesh out vague state standards. In recent years, some states have even

decided to use the Core Knowledge Sequence as the basis for revising their state standards!

By allowing increased *flexibility in the use of federal funds*, NCLB allows districts to shift all federal funds to the Title I program. While Title I funds can be used only for effective educational practices, Core Knowledge is recognized as a research-based school reform model and has a proven track record of success in those schools that implement the program wholeheartedly and participate in our *full* professional development program. [Sierra Grande School District](#) in Blanca, Colorado, is an example of a successful Title I Core Knowledge School. Title I funds may be used for school-wide implementation of Core Knowledge. (For complete details about our professional development program, click [here](#).)

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from Core Knowledge through equal access to a high-quality education. Upon reviewing the topics included in the *Sequence*, teachers and parents often remark, "Wow, I learned about this in high school," or "This looks like a private school's curriculum." But Core Knowledge is not intended only for those who can afford a private school. It is *not* a elitist program. The Foundation's mission is to deliver a rich curriculum to *all* students, and research has shown that Core Knowledge can help boost achievement among disadvantaged students and narrow the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. However, this does not mean that only disadvantaged children benefit from Core Knowledge. [Research](#) has shown that the curriculum boosts performance among advantaged children as well as disadvantaged children. The topics outlined in the *Sequence* are the result of years of research, consensus-building, and review from teachers, administrators, multicultural advisors, and subject matter advisors. These topics are challenging, interesting, and empowering for *all* children, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, or ability.

This leads to the final key principle that can be met through implementation of Core Knowledge: *teaching methods that have been demonstrated to work*. Now, some may be tempted to say, "Core Knowledge is only about content—the teaching strategies don't matter." In fact, Core Knowledge can and should go hand in hand with a structured, well-designed teaching program. Core Knowledge doesn't mandate "how" teachers must teach, but that does not mean that instructional methods are irrelevant. On the contrary, student learning is crucially dependent on good teaching. The beauty of Core Knowledge is that it can be effectively combined with several proven styles of teaching. It gives you focus in the content areas while providing a measure of flexibility as far as pedagogy is concerned. Also, by encouraging grade-level teamwork and collaboration, Core Knowledge encourages all teachers on a grade level to share strategies and lessons and become better, more effective teachers.

NCLB and Core Knowledge have other common goals, as well. "The NCLB Act puts a special emphasis on determining what educational programs and practices have been clearly demonstrated to be effective through rigorous scientific research" (p. xiii). Core Knowledge is a program that has been demonstrated to be effective, when implemented in earnest. In Oklahoma City, a quasi-experimental study matched Core Knowledge students with students in non Core Knowledge schools. The students were randomly matched according to sex, race, free-lunch status, pre-test score, and other key characteristics. The study found that Core Knowledge students

outperformed the matched non-Core Knowledge students. Click [here](#) for more information. A recent longitudinal study in Virginia has found that the benefits of Core Knowledge can increase over time. The study tracked students from grade K to grade 6 and found Core Knowledge students outperforming non-Core Knowledge students in every subject tested on the sixth grade Stanford 9TA tests. For more information on this study, click [here](#).

NCLB also seeks to improve the quality of our nation's teachers. The bill requires schools to have a "*highly qualified teacher*" in every classroom. It also states very clearly that one of the characteristics of a "highly qualified teacher" is knowledge of subject matter. Because subject area competency is also necessary to be a Core Knowledge teacher, being a successful Core Knowledge teacher helps you meet the government's standards. Additionally, we are working here at the Foundation to develop materials and improve our [professional development training](#) to include training teachers in content—the very content of which can be found now (thanks to our influence) in many state standards. We have already designed teacher education materials intended primarily for pre-service teachers. (To examine these education materials, click [here](#).) We are doing what we can to encourage universities to develop content-rich teacher education programs based on these materials. Finally, we are developing teacher handbooks that provide background knowledge on the topics from the *Core Knowledge Sequence* for Kindergarten through grade 5. While first conceptualized for teachers in Core Knowledge schools, the handbooks provide background information that will be helpful for teachers in states with content-rich standards.

Yet another key component of NCLB is the [Reading First funding](#) that places increased emphasis on reading. While Core Knowledge is not a "decoding" program, we have always, and continue to, advocate the use of a reading program that includes explicit, systematic approach to decoding that teaches children the letter-sound associations (phonics). But the foundation also recognizes that decoding skills alone are not sufficient to become a skilled reader. Children need to be able to decode words, but they also need to have enough background knowledge and vocabulary to understand the words and sentences they are decoding. The *Core Knowledge Sequence* provides teachers with a way to build this all-important background knowledge. The *Sequence* is a list of key topics of study that, over time, provide students with the essential background knowledge—the cultural literacy—that they need to become successful readers and full participants in American society. By listening to well-known stories and poems, as well as age-appropriate nonfiction, and by learning about topics in history, science, art, and music, Core Knowledge students are constantly building vocabulary and laying the foundation for successful reading comprehension.

The foundation is currently working on developing a reading program. In the meantime, our professional development workshops can help a school build its own customized year-long plan, which will include a scientifically-validated reading program as well as a knowledge and vocabulary building program based on the topics in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. A program of this sort—one which combines research-based skills instruction with systematic knowledge-building—represents the most effective way to achieve long-term reading and academic success.

It is important that schools understand that Core Knowledge is not a quick-fix. While

schools implementing Core Knowledge can see gains early on, student achievement really begins to pick up after three to four years, as students begin to benefit from the knowledge they have acquired and the long-term commitment begins to yield cumulative effects. That's why it's important that a school be genuinely committed to the Core Knowledge before deciding to implement—and also dedicated to sustaining the effort for the long haul. We are in the process of collecting more test data that documents just this fact.

We would like to hear your reactions and comments to this article. Do you agree that Core Knowledge can help you meet the NCLB requirements? Do you have concerns that are not addressed in this article? Would you like to talk about how we can help improve your students' achievement? Send your thoughts directly to Cyndi Wells at cyndi@coreknowledge.org

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Jim Morgan, a former history and geography teacher at [Liberty Common School](#) in Fort Collins, Colorado has developed a website called [eSchoolPal](#) to help middle school Core Knowledge teachers. We spoke with Morgan about his work.

Q: Tell me a little about your background in education and how you became a Core Knowledge teacher.

I have been a classroom social studies teacher for the past 15 years. During the last three years, I taught the CK history and geography sequence to 5th and 6th graders at Liberty Common School in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Q: What sparked the idea for eSchoolPal?

My wife recently earned her Master's and much of her classroom work took place in an online interactive forum. [eSchoolPal.com](#) offers interactive discussion forums, similar to those offered by online college courses, to middle grades Core Knowledge teachers. I chose this specific group of teachers because there is so much to manage in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, particularly in the areas of CK history, science, and literature. Students are studying units that offer the opportunity to explore the rich ideas within the content, not just the itemized bullets of the [Core Knowledge Sequence](#).

Q: How does it work exactly?

When middle grades Core Knowledge teachers register at [www.eSchoolPal.com](#), they are designated as the moderator of their own interactive discussion forum. Their students may then register as users. Teachers may post topics of their choice to the discussion forum and, along with their students, participate in an on-line discussion.

Teachers may, for instance:

- Post topics which introduce students to new units.
- Post topics which serve as a review of daily classroom content.
- Post topics for students who need an extra challenge or extra help.
- Establish individual topics for students working on group projects.
- Allow students to design and manage topics of their own.
- Create an interactive communication forum for students and parents.
- Post any other topics which support their communication needs.

Teachers can also connect their classes to the "Middle Grades Core Knowledge World" by engaging their students with other same-grade Core Knowledge students from across the country. All teachers and students will be able to view, and sometimes participate, in the interactive discussion forums of other teachers who join eSchoolPal. It is my belief that the service I am offering greatly enhances the "shared" quality of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*.

As the site grows, my job is to manage the demand for specific topics which teachers may request, advertise discussions which might be of interest to certain groups involved in specific CK content, and post topics of my own which may be used by individual classes or by groups of teachers presenting similar content to their classrooms.

Teachers may join eSchoolPal.com without charge or obligation for a free trial period.

Q: What are your hopes for the site and the approach?

Hopefully, eSchoolPal.com will become an extra communication feature of the regular classroom and a "virtual conference site" for teachers pursuing similar goals. In both of these areas, the success or failure is dependent upon what participants bring to the discussion. Motivated students energize a classroom and, as the Core Knowledge conferences have demonstrated, they are best when the participants are well-prepared, creative and enthusiastic. eSchoolPal.com hopes to tap into all that energy and provide a useful tool for those with common interests and goals, as well as being the glue that holds it all together for the content covered in the final three years of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*.

Q: Let's say another Core Knowledge teacher in another part of the country is interested in doing something similar. What should he or she do?

I first contacted a local website developer, [Squarei Technologies, Inc.](#) in Fort Collins, Colorado, and shared my ideas. We have worked together to create a site that is easy to manage for teachers and students. Squarei has trained me and my staff to administer eSchoolPal.com on our own. I also upgraded my personal computer hardware and internet access in order to manage the site, which was designed with future growth in mind. I would like to think that middle grades Core Knowledge

teachers will find eSchoolPal.com has all the online features that they need. I believe, though, that there are opportunities for growth here. At some point I hope to offer a similar service to specific high school academic areas and bring those teachers and their students together in a similar fashion. An obstacle is the wide variety of high school content offered (even in similarly named courses). This is why dedicating eSchoolPal to specific Core Knowledge content makes it a more rewarding and relevant place to visit.

Visit www.eschoolpal.com to find out more information.

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Teaching Core Knowledge in a Special Education Setting

by Eida E. Martinez, Core Knowledge Consultant



Core Knowledge offers many advantages to schools eager to promote student learning. Students are motivated by the scope and sequencing of topics. They have the opportunity to learn content that might otherwise not be presented until the secondary level and are able to connect skills to contextual situations. Special education students are no different in their quest for knowledge. The difference lies in their ability to process information or to express their knowledge in traditional forms of writing, reading, and oral communication. The label that is often imposed upon these students—"learning disabled"—is really a misnomer. Such students are not *unable* to learn, but rather, have a learning *difference*. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), as amended in 1997, identifies a learning disability as a *significant discrepancy between potential and current performance*. The "learning disability" label should not be used to indicate an inability to learn, but rather to illustrate the importance of finding alternative teaching methods that will assist a child who learns differently. Traditional teaching methods often frustrate students with special learning needs, thereby reducing their motivation and desire to learn new topics and skills. While Core Knowledge cannot eliminate learning differences, it can provoke student interest and provide a focus for learning.

The majority of students with learning differences spend most of their day in a general education classroom and receive either "inclusion" or "resource" support from special education support staff. Inclusion settings typically provide modifications for grade-level instructional standards. When the student's needs are more severe and require alternative instruction, a resource setting may be chosen. It is in this setting that teachers often struggle to find ways of implementing Core Knowledge. Instruction is often fragmented due to subject-block scheduling, and since special education teachers generally work with all grade levels, there is rarely enough time to collaborate with all classroom teachers. Nevertheless, it is possible to integrate Core Knowledge and skill-based instruction so as to facilitate the learning process.

General education teachers correlate their state standards with Core Knowledge content when they are [developing the year-long plan](#). This model works for special education teachers as well; however the plan must be reviewed annually to address the specific Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals for each group. In

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developing a special education version of the year-long plan, the special education teacher should examine each group's collective IEP objectives and categorize them by grading period. This identifies focus skills and creates a pacing guide for the year. The year-long plan for the grade level should then be developed with reference to the Core Knowledge topics to be taught in the same grading period. Figure 1 shows an example of how this might be done for the Texas state standards, the TEKs.

Figure 1: Sample Special Education Year-Long Plan

RESOURCE LANGUAGE, 4th & 5th Grade 1ST GRADING PERIOD		
IEP Skill Objectives	CK Content	Activities / Assessments
Write with more proficient spelling of inflectional endings, including plurals and past tense and words that drop the final <i>e</i> when such endings as <i>-ing</i> , <i>-ed</i> , or <i>-able</i> are added (TX TEK 3.16-3)	4 th Grade: Middle Ages	Options include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating an illustrated timeline with written descriptions of historical events ● Identifying important events as a group, then allowing each student to choose a different event to research and write about ● Identifying significant historical figures and assigning students a person to research and write a biography of
Use resources to find correct spellings, synonyms, or replacement words (TX TEK 3.16-8)	5 th Grade: Civil War	
Edit for appropriate grammar, spelling, punctuation, and features of polished writing (TX TEK 3.18-4)		

Within a special education setting, explicit skill-based instruction must be provided and supported by giving children an opportunity to use new skills in context-based activities. For example, students working on written language skills should be presented with grammar rules explicitly, given opportunities to practice and assess understanding, and then have the opportunity to apply the skills to writing. Students working on spelling inflectional endings (including plurals and past tense) can practice this skill in isolation or can apply what they have learned in a writing assignment; the topic is flexible. This provides an excellent opportunity to integrate the Core Knowledge topics students are studying in their general education setting. Even when students in a resource group are from different grade levels, the same activities can be implemented. For example, a teacher might ask students to create timelines, as specified in Figure 1. Fourth-graders could be asked to create a time line on the Middle Ages; fifth graders could work on the Civil War. In this way the content taught in the classrooms can be combined with the teaching and practicing of skills in the

special education setting.

Activities should be chosen that motivate students and allow for assessment. Every activity should have a purpose, made clear at the outset. For example, a group of fourth- and fifth- grade students in a language group might be preparing for their grammar lesson on quotation marks. The teacher can inform the students that the next writing piece will be a historical fiction based on a historical period they are studying in their classrooms (e.g. Middle Ages for grade 4, or Civil War for grade 5). One component of this project will be to incorporate dialogue, so it will be necessary to understand the use of quotation marks. In this way instruction focusing on the skill is followed by and reinforced by work on the writing assignment.

Rather than simply grading assignments and returning them to the author, there should be many opportunities to share student work. Knowing that writing is valued and shared encourages the writer to make a greater investment in the process. Sharing also aids in dispelling the notion that special education students are *unable* to learn. Even more importantly, it attracts positive attention for students who have typically received negative attention for their academic efforts, and thereby helps build self-confidence. It is important to remember that some students may be hesitant to share their academic efforts publicly. For instance, students who struggle with reading may not be willing to read their work in a public forum. While sharing is important, it should never be forced; this would discourage students rather than motivate them. Accommodations can be made that allow the student to share without the pressure. The above-mentioned historical fiction writing assignment could be shared by "publishing" a book that could be included in the classroom resources on the Civil War. The student could read the book to individuals rather than to a large group, or an electronic version could be prepared on PowerPoint with the student's voice recorded. As the students become more comfortable sharing their work, they will be more likely to attempt different methods.

The [Core Knowledge Sequence](#) provides the content to teach, but does not dictate how to teach. Special education objectives provide the skills to teach, but do not dictate the curriculum to be used. Integrating content into a skill-based setting is a way to combine these two elements. Such integration not only motivates students but also adds depth to the learning process. *We may learn what we are taught, but we remember what we put into practice.*

To learn more about Special Education, visit some of the sites listed in our ["Links We Recommend"](#) section.

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Still Time to Register for the 13th Core Knowledge National Conference

by Charles J. Shields

Native American history, the physics of everyday life, the art of storytelling, building math skills, and Islamic and Asian culture are a few of the over 150 topics that will be discussed at the [13th Core Knowledge National Conference](#), March 4-6 at the Marriot Marquis Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia.

And there's still time to register! Telephone registrations will be processed through February 13th. Interested persons who miss that deadline are encouraged to register on-site in Atlanta.

According to Core Knowledge Foundation president, Barbara Garvin-Kester, the National Conference is designed to meet the needs of teachers or administrators in a wide variety of school settings: "Core Knowledge may appeal to a school or school system that needs assistance with meeting [NCLB requirements](#); has over 70 percent of its students on free or reduced lunch; needs a curriculum that can be easily aligned with state standards; wants to offer all students a content-rich, knowledge-based curriculum; or is looking for an approved model for Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) funding."

Currently, close to 2000 participants are registered for this year's conference.

Conference week begins on Monday, March 1 with a series of one- and two-day [Preschool Institutes](#). "Getting Started," a one-day institute, will be presented on Monday from 8:30 A.M.-3:30 P.M. This institute explains the basics of integrating the [Core Knowledge Preschool Sequence](#) into participants' current classroom schedule. A question and answer session with Core Knowledge preschool experts will be held that evening from 6:30 P.M.-8:30 P.M.

Two-day Preschool Institutes will be offered on Tuesday and Wednesday, March 2-3, 8:30 A.M.-3:30 P.M. Sessions will include "Autonomy, Social Skills, and Work Habits"; "Using Children's Literature and Print to Develop Literacy Skills"; "Phonemic Awareness, ABCs, and More"; "Assessment and Planning at Each Child's Level"; and "Scientific Reasoning and Knowledge."

Preschool strands are woven in throughout the sessions of the National Conference on March 4-6, as well.



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The three main days of the National Conference begin on Thursday, March 4 with several sessions on the topic "Beginning and Sustaining Core Knowledge in Your School." Attendees can hear teachers, administrators, and officials talk about K-8 and preschool successes in their schools. Roundtable discussions will be facilitated by Core Knowledge consultants and staff from 3:00 P.M.-4:15 P.M. , followed by the Opening Session address delivered by E. D. Hirsch, Jr. from 4:30 P.M.-6:00 P.M. An Exhibit Hall reception will be hosted that evening from 6:00 P.M.-7:30 P.M. with more than 50 booths open to attendees.

Friday sessions will run from 9:00 A.M.-4:00 P.M. These sessions are intended to help bridge the knowledge gap with content-rich, hour-long presentations by authors, scholars, and subject-area experts on history, language arts, mathematics, science, and early childhood. Returning will be many popular speakers such as Vicki Cobb, Jim Weiss, Dennis Dennenberg, Louis Bloomfield, Kim Siegelson, Sam Stringfield, and James Cross Giblin as well as dozens of new speakers.

Keynoter Jack Prelutsky will speak during the Friday luncheon, 11:30 A.M.-1:30 P.M. Prelutsky, author of more than 30 books of verse for children and known for blending Marx Brothers' humor with the suspense of Poe, was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1940, grew up in a working class neighborhood of Italian, Jewish, and Irish families. He published his first book of nonsense verse for children in 1967: *A Gopher in the Garden*.

Core Knowledge teachers in the early grades will already be familiar with some of Prelutsky's work. His "I Do Not Mind You, Winter Wind" is part of the Core Knowledge curriculum for kindergarten, and his hilarious "I Know All the Sounds the Animals Make" is included in the poetry listings for first grade. In this last poem a young know-it-all boasts of his great knowledge of animal sounds:

*I know all the sounds the animals make,
and make them all day from the moment I wake,
I roar like a mouse and purr like a moose,
I hoot like a duck and I moo like a goose.*

*I squeak like a cat and I quack like a frog,
I oink like a bear and I honk like a hog,
I croak like a cow and I bark like a bee,
no wonder the animals marvel at me.*

On the third day of the conference, Saturday, over 100 grade-specific units on topics in the [Core Knowledge Sequence](#) will be presented by Core Knowledge teachers. In addition, every attendee will receive a "Share the Knowledge" CD containing units presented during the Thursday and Saturday sessions.

Teachers who attend the National Conference are eligible to earn college credit through an arrangement with California State University Fullerton. (For more information, [click here](#) to view the CSUF brochure in Adobe® PDF format). In fact, teachers who attend

Core Knowledge workshops or writing institutes throughout the year offered by the Core Knowledge Foundation are eligible to receive college credit, as well.

Through February 13, registration fees for the three-day National Conference are \$350. One-day only fees are \$200. The one-day Preschool Institute on March 1, "Getting Started," is \$165; each of the two-day Preschool Institutes, March 2-3, costs \$275. Fees for on-site registration are slightly higher. Contact the foundation for additional details.

To register for the Core Knowledge National Conference, click [here](#). To view the Conference Program in PDF format, click [here](#).

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**Volume 17,
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COMMON KNOWLEDGE™

The Newsletter of the Core Knowledge® Foundation
Volume 17, Number 1, January/February 2004

New Longitudinal Study Shows Core Knowledge Boosting Scores, Closing Achievement Gap

by **Matthew Davis, Director, Reading Project**

A new study indicates that a Core Knowledge education can improve students' scores on standardized tests and also narrow the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students.



Researcher Fred Smith tracked the effect of Core Knowledge on the achievement of elementary students in a Virginia school using a quasi-experimental, longitudinal, matched-comparison design. Smith, then a Ph.D. candidate at the [University of Virginia's Curry School of Education](#), compared students in a Core Knowledge school with students in another school in the same district with a similar demographic make-up.

Smith examined test results on Virginia's state tests, the [Standards of Learning \(SOL\)](#), and on the national Stanford 9TA test. He also tracked gain scores, the achievement of disadvantaged and advantaged students, and the achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students at the two schools. Smith found that Core Knowledge had the following positive effects:

- Core Knowledge increased student academic achievement as measured on the Stanford 9TA tests.
- Core Knowledge promoted fairness in schooling by providing equal educational opportunity to disadvantaged as well as advantaged students.
- Core Knowledge helped narrow the achievement gap on the Stanford 9TA test between advantaged and disadvantaged students
- Core Knowledge helped students achieve larger gains on the Stanford 9TA over two-year periods.

Smith tracked two cohorts of students at a Core Knowledge school and two similar cohorts at a comparison school. All of the students in the study remained in the same school from kindergarten to sixth grade.

Results for the Virginia state tests, the Standards of Learning, were mostly inconclusive, with the Core Knowledge cohorts sometimes posting higher mean

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scores and sometimes failing to do so. In most cases the differences did not qualify as statistically significant. However, results on the well-validated Stanford 9TA tests revealed a large number of statistically significant advantages in favor of the Core Knowledge students.

The cohort of students who began their studies in a Core Knowledge kindergarten in 1994 and remained in the same school continuously through grade 6 posted higher mean scaled scores than the control group in all three subject areas of the 6th grade Stanford 9TA tests: Reading (706.93 vs. 675.85), Math (713.70 vs. 662.25), and Language (659.87 vs. 635.80). The margins of superiority for Reading and Math were deemed statistically significant: Reading $p \leq .029$ and Math $p \leq .002$. (A p factor, or probability value, is a statistical indicator of the reliability of a finding. The smaller the number, the smaller the likelihood of the results being just a fluke. A p value of .05 means there is a 5% chance that the outcome was only a chance occurrence; a p value of .01 indicates a one percent chance. Scientists generally consider any p value smaller than .05 statistically significant.)

The cohort of students who began their studies in a Core Knowledge school in 1995 and remained in the same school through grade 6 also posted higher mean scaled scores in all subjects tested on 6th grade the Stanford 9TA: Reading (709.91 vs. 670.95), Math (718.67 vs. 680.61), Language (662.13 vs. 645.76). Again, the Reading and Math results were statistically significant (

Reading $p \leq .002$ and Math $p \leq .014$).

Additional analysis showed that the superior performance of Core Knowledge students on the 6th grade Stanford 9TA tests held true for both advantaged students and disadvantaged (free and reduced lunch) students. Advantaged students in the Core Knowledge school outscored advantaged students in the control school in all three areas tested on the 6th grade Stanford 9TA, and for both cohorts examined. Likewise, disadvantaged students in Core Knowledge schools outscored disadvantaged students in the control school in all three areas tested on the 6th grade Stanford 9TA, and for both cohorts examined. The disadvantaged students showed statistically significant advantages in reading ($p \leq .017$ for one cohort and $p \leq .030$ for the other).

Smith also found statistically significant evidence that the Core Knowledge school was doing a better job than the control school at narrowing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Smith computed the differences between advantaged and disadvantaged students' Stanford 9TA scores for sixth grade in Reading, Math, and Language. In the Core Knowledge cohort that began kindergarten in 1994 and was tested several years later in grade 6, advantaged students outperformed disadvantaged students by 7 points in Reading and 3 points in Language. Remarkably enough, however, the disadvantaged students outperformed the advantaged students by 18 points in Math. In the aggregate, *disadvantaged students outperformed advantaged students by 8 points*. Although the number of students Smith was able to track longitudinally was small—just 31 students in the Core Knowledge school for this cohort—this is nevertheless a tantalizing indication that Core Knowledge can help narrow the gap between the haves and have-nots in society. The results stand out even more sharply when one notes that the combined

achievement gap in the control school for the same cohort was a whopping 156 points.

Results for the 1995 cohort were less spectacular but still showed Core Knowledge narrowing the achievement gap more successfully than the control school. For this group of students, the control school showed a smaller achievement gap in 6th grade: only 40 points in the aggregate. But the Core Knowledge school did even better, almost completely erasing the achievement gap among the students it educated for six years. The 12 disadvantaged students in the Core Knowledge school actually outperformed the 25 advantaged students in Reading (707.64 advantaged vs. 714.66 disadvantaged) and Language (661.36 advantaged vs. 663.75 disadvantaged), though they were outperformed in Math (722.04 advantaged vs. 711.66 disadvantaged). Taken as an aggregate, the disadvantaged Core Knowledge students in this cohort lagged behind the advantaged students by only 1 point. Essentially, there was no achievement gap.

Smith also tracked gains from grade to grade. For example he tracked the gains students made from the fourth grade Stanford 9TA to the sixth grade Stanford 9TA. Students in the Core Knowledge school made larger gains on the Stanford 9TA in all 6 cases Smith examined. Many of the gains detected were statistically significant. For example, on the Stanford 9TA, gains in reading and math from grade 4 to grade 6 were deemed highly significant ($p \leq .001$).

Smith separated students into advantaged and disadvantaged groups and analyzed the gain scores again. He found that advantaged Core Knowledge students made larger gains than advantaged students in the control group in all six of the Stanford 9TA cases he examined. The advantaged Core Knowledge students exhibited gain-score superiority that was deemed highly significant ($p \leq .001$) in all three subjects (Reading, Language, and Math) and for both cohorts tested.

Among disadvantaged students, the Core Knowledge students displayed an equally impressive advantage, posting larger gains than their control group peers in all 6 of the Stanford 9TA cases examined (as well as 10 of 12 Standards of Learning cases). In some cases the differences in gain scores on the Stanford 9TA were staggering. For example, disadvantaged students in the 1994 cohort in the Core Knowledge school posted healthy gains in all three Stanford 9TA subject tested (Reading +61, Math +83, Language +40), while their peers in the control school posted sharp losses in all subjects (Reading -37, Math -33, Language -46). The edge to Core Knowledge was deemed highly significant in all three subjects ($p \leq .001$ for Reading, Math, and Language). Such large results in a small sample might seem to suggest a fluke, but the gain-score advantages for a completely different group of students in the 1995 cohort were almost as statistically robust. Once again the Core Knowledge students posted healthy gains in every subject (Reading +97, Math +112, Language +76). Once again students in the control school slipped in all areas (Reading -4, Math -31, and Language -11). And once again the differences in gain scores were deemed highly significant for each subject (Reading $p \leq .001$, Math $p \leq .001$, Language, $p \leq .002$).

Smith's research provides compelling longitudinal evidence that Core Knowledge can improve academic performance for both advantaged and disadvantaged students, and can help to narrow the achievement gap between these two groups. His findings

also suggest that Core Knowledge may have certain latent effects-effects that may not be visible immediately, and may not show up in a one-year study, but begin to appear after several years of exposure to the curriculum and can grow quite large when exposure persists throughout the elementary years.

Smith's dissertation is available on microfilm and in digital form through Proquest/UMI, 1-800-521-0600.

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CK Schools in the News

We have located stories on Core Knowledge schools in several states. However, there are many more stories that can be shared. If you are a Core Knowledge school and your school has been mentioned in the press, please email the story to [Nina Hammie](mailto:Nina.Hammie@ckf.org) for possible inclusion in the Foundation's e-newsletter.

Click on the state you wish to view.

[Arizona](#)

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Core Knowledge® = No Child Left Behind at The PEAK School

The PEAK School in Flagstaff, Arizona uses several systems of learning management technology to guide instruction by managing assessment information. These systems identify student academic progress on a daily basis in the areas of Reading, Language Arts and Math. Student assessment results support the conclusion that academic achievement is dramatically increasing in students that are now receiving comprehensive Core Knowledge content instruction. In particular, dramatic improvement is seen in students who have moved to the PEAK School from schools in neighborhoods that primarily serve families of low socio-economic status, ethnic minorities, English language learners, and students in Special Education. Students previously enrolled in middle class neighborhood schools are also demonstrating greater skill attainment than during their previous school experiences. These students and their parents frequently self-report significantly greater exposure to content instruction since attending a Core Knowledge school. Additionally, they report a significant increase in content knowledge and acquisition of academic skills.

[Colorado](#)

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The Rocky Mountain News Colorado Springs, CO (12/10/03)

This article discusses the success of Colorado schools, mentioning Cheyenne Mountain Charter School, an Official Core Knowledge School.

To read the full article, click [here](#).

The Daily Camera Flagstaff, CO (01/08/2004)

Organizers in Flagstaff Colorado urge for the opening of a new Charter school in Erie. Flagstaff Academy is currently a Core Knowledge School.

To read the full article, click [here](#).

One School That's Making Public School Better for Gifted Students

(A parent's comments on Excel Academy, a Core Knowledge School, excerpted from *JAGC News "Back to School" 2003 Issue*)

In her wonderful book, [The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids](#), Dr. Sally Walker suggests four important points for parents to recognize in order to make school better for gifted students. First, Sally suggests "an education that fits their education level and talents." Many schools these days do not allow students to work at their level. Often teachers present material that may be new to most of a class but is old hat to the gifted individual. All three of my children have made comments like, "Why do I have to learn this again?" Parents need to be sure that the curriculum meets their child's needs. At Excel Academy, a charter school in Jefferson County, a rigorous college preparatory curriculum is used at all levels. Students are treated as individuals and have many opportunities to "go in-depth" on curricular topics. Many students produce high school and college level projects to demonstrate mastery of the material presented. Last evening a parent of a student new to Excel Academy reported that their child was excited about art for the first time. The father too was excited that his primary age son was discussing Andy Warhol's works with him at dinner. That is, indeed, what Dr. Walker meant by a fit between the needs of a student and their educational level.

"Learning with true peers," is Dr. Walker's second strategy. Gifted children have two sets of peers. One set includes children that are chronologically the same age. The other involves children who may not be of the same age chronologically, but share an "intellectual age." That is one reason gifted children often gravitate to adults or older individuals to seek that intellectual understanding and stimulation. Excel Academy and other schools with high numbers of gifted children offer the best possible scenario. With large numbers of gifted children, individual students can often find true peers that are both chronologically and intellectually similar. Dr. Walker reports "many gifted children say they feel greater peer acceptance, social comfort, and self-acceptance when they are in programs that include other gifted students."

"A supportive, responsive learning environment" where "services should be matched to the needs of gifted students by a continuum of options" is Dr. Walker's third point. Excel Academy is committed to provide this environment to the students at the school. As a community of learners where integrity of character, value for education,

and respect for one another is paramount, student needs are met. The integrated environment delivers Core Knowledge curriculum through a variety of strategies and learning experiences. Many activities are project based, and extended learning adventures with community resources allow learning to extend beyond the walls of the classroom. Attention is focused on students "learning how to learn", which develops successful strategies the learner can use throughout a lifetime. Smaller class sizes, coupled with differentiated instruction create that ideal environment for the gifted, talented, and advanced learner to soar.

As a charter school, the Excel Academy staff is empowered to pursue innovative, research-based methods of instruction. Dr. Walker's final position relates to a staff of "professionals who respond to their (students) needs." Teachers are carefully selected as individuals who engage children in the thinking-learning process and are eager to work with intellectually advanced learning activities. The staff members of Excel Academy themselves must be committed to learning: constantly learning new strategies, refining old ideas, and reflecting on the future. The Excel staff strives to take our learners on an engaging journey where the destination far surpasses the boundaries of standards-based education. Staff members are trained in the proven and successful tactics that make learning come alive for gifted and talented students.

As a school that was designed from the ground up as an institution for gifted programming, Excel Academy continues its mission to enrich student learning through classroom differentiation and acceleration. Although the school is not a match for all students, you are encouraged to visit Excel Academy and check out the continuum of programming options designed to meet the needs of a child who is searching for that supportive learning environment.

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As part of the Teacher Handbooks project, the Foundation has developed several sets of loose-leaf supplemental materials. These materials have been designed to be used in Core Knowledge classrooms, in tandem with the Teacher Handbooks, but they will appear before the handbooks and will be available for purchase separately. We expect Text Resource Packets and Art Resource Packets for grades K-5 to be available for purchase at the [National Conference](#), in early March.



The Text Resource Packet for each grade (K-5) includes reproducible versions of all of the stories and poems for the grade, plus selected non-fiction texts, song lyrics, and sheet music. The text resources are printed on loose-leaf, three-hole-punched sheets of acid-free paper. They can be placed in a large, tabbed notebook for convenience, or filed with the relevant lesson plan. Each grade-level packet will cost \$32.00.

Each Art Resource Packet features a set of full-color art prints, including all of the artworks listed in the Visual Arts section of the *Sequence* for the grade in question (K-5). The art prints are printed on heavy 8 1/2 x 11" card stock. Suggested "looking questions" appear on the back of each art print. Each grade-level packet will cost \$38.00.

New CD Sets



The Foundation has also produced new CD sets which include classical selections from the [Core Knowledge Sequence](#). In the past teachers have had to buy 8-10 CDs to acquire the necessary selections: Mozart might be on one CD and Beethoven on another. Now, in partnership with NAXOS, the Foundation has developed new customized CDs which collect key Core Knowledge musical selections on fewer CDs, making it easier and less expensive to acquire the selections teachers need to teach Core Knowledge. There will be a two-CD set for Pre-K and K (\$24.95), a two-CD set for grades 1 and 2 (\$29.95), and a three-CD set for grades 3-5 (\$44.95). (For grades 6-8 we will continue to sell individual CDs in bundles.) The new CD sets will be on sale at the conference or shortly thereafter.

Education Resources

New Parent Brochure

Finally, the Foundation has produced a new "Parent Brochure." This brochure is designed to help schools tell parents about Core Knowledge. It is available on the website in a ready-to-print version and in a version that can be customized by the individual school. Click [here](#) to view the parent brochure.

There are many other new additions for the upcoming months. Continue reading *Common Knowledge* for more information.

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Professional Development:

Coordinator & Leadership Institutes Head to Atlanta

Come to the [13th Core Knowledge National Conference](#) and attend the Coordinator and Leadership Institute while you're there. The Core Knowledge Coordinator and Leadership Institute will be held in Atlanta, GA on March 3, 2004 preceding the 13th Core Knowledge National Conference. The institute, typically held in Charlottesville, VA, is an opportunity for Core Knowledge coordinators, teachers, and principals to receive guidance and assistance in implementing Core Knowledge on their campuses.

To view other professional development opportunities, click [here](#). To view our calendar of events, click [here](#).

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Preschool:

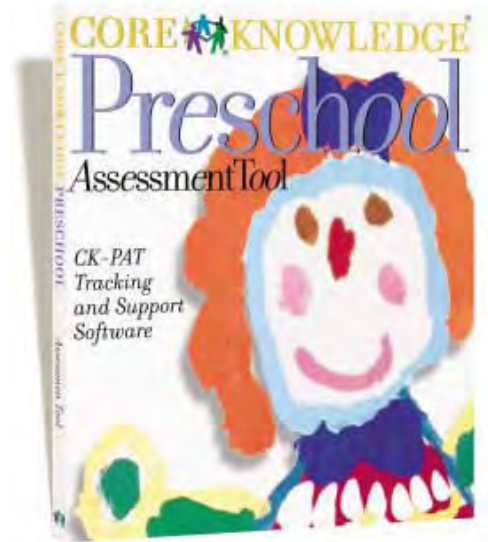
Core Knowledge Preschool Assessment Tool

Core Knowledge Preschool Department is developing an assessment tool. The CK-PAT, the Core Knowledge Preschool Assessment Tool, will be used to monitor individual and classroom progress. A year of field testing has gone into the creation of CK-Pat and it will be released at the [13th Core Knowledge National Conference](#) in Atlanta, GA.

CK-PAT will run on Windows and has the following components:

- Comprehensive Curriculum-based Assessment
- Specific and Explicit Evaluation Tools
- Software-Based Management System
- Facilitates Communication

For questions about CK-PAT, please contact Mary Miller at mmiller@coreknowledge.org.





Links We Recommend:

Special Education

[Awesome Library](#)

This website consists of links to dozens of other Special Education websites.

[Berkeley Unified School District](#)

A list of special education resources provided by the Berkeley Unified School District.

[Curry School of Education Special Education Resources](#)

The University of Virginia's Curry School of Education offers an informative website to help teachers learn more about learning disabilities and ways to teach students with those disabilities.

[Discovery Channel School](#)

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators provides links to Special Education resources.

[National Center for Learning Disabilities](#)

This website provides links to resources for special needs children and information on NCLB.

[Parent Pals](#)

Parent Pals provides a list of website links to resources for the parents of Special Needs children.

[Special Education Resources on the Net \(SERI\)](#)

SERI is a comprehensive website for special education resources.

[Special Education](#)

Provides links to special education websites and support networks.

[Teachers Helping Teachers](#)

This website provides lesson plans for teachers of special needs children.

[United Federation of Teachers](#)

Provides links to websites to support teachers of special needs children.

[The Welcome Map](#)

This website provides special education resources for the parents and teachers of special needs children. Designed to give additional support.