



Core Knowledge®

# 2014

ANNUAL REPORT

## SEIZING THE DAY:

Inspiring Demand for Coherent,  
Cumulative, Well-Rounded Curriculum

"The future  
belongs to those  
who believe in  
the beauty of  
their dreams."



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**On the Cover:** This illustration is from the Grade 2, Domain 12: Fighting for a Cause Flip Book in Core Knowledge Language Arts. As the teacher reads aloud and engages students in discussions, students focus on images to enhance their comprehension.

## President's Report: Core Knowledge Seizes the Day

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The past year has been historic for the Core Knowledge Foundation. After eight years of development, Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) is complete! Spanning preschool through fifth grade, CKLA builds reading and writing skills as well as comprehension abilities.

Nearly a decade ago, Core Knowledge heard a request from its 1,000+ schools, and saw a need across the country, for an elementary language arts program that would ensure students master foundational skills while also building broad knowledge and vocabulary in literature, science, and history. CKLA is our answer. We began development in 2006; as 2014 drew to a close we rolled out grades four and five, making CKLA a complete preschool through fifth grade program for reading, writing, listening, speaking, and comprehending.

We aimed to create a fundamentally different, higher-quality program—and we succeeded. After a rigorous review of numerous programs by the Louisiana Department of Education, CKLA was *the only program* to achieve Tier 1 status for systematic phonics. CKLA for K–3, including Listening & Learning, achieved Tier 2 status (grades four and five were not yet available when the review was conducted).

CKLA is already helping children throughout the United States. Over **2.5 million CKLA files have been downloaded**—for free—in all 50 states, and over 10,000 classroom kits have been purchased. We expect to reach millions more children in 2015.

In 2014, we directly and remotely supported thousands of teachers, too. Through our ongoing work with the New York State Department of Education, we provided eight days of face-to-face professional development to hundreds of educators from school districts throughout New York, as well as countless hours of consultations and webinars. Even better, our turnkey professional development sessions and webinars are available for free download on both EngageNY's [website](#) and Core Knowledge's [website](#).



Linda Bevilaqua, President,  
Core Knowledge Foundation



While CKLA took center stage, the Foundation continued to work with schools throughout the Core Knowledge community. In 2014, there were 1,274 schools—ranging from early childhood centers to P–8 schools, with current profiles stating they use the *Core Knowledge Sequence* and/or CKLA. During 2014, the Foundation:

- ★ Conducted sixty-three sessions of our cornerstone professional development modules for preschool through eighth grade.
- ★ Visited nine Core Knowledge schools to support their implementation of the *Sequence*.
- ★ Awarded School of Distinction honors to two schools.
- ★ Added eighteen new schools to the community of schools using the *Core Knowledge Sequence* and participating in our professional development.
- ★ Presented a very well-received regional conference in New York State (in Niagara Falls) for 225 educators.
- ★ Completed and published, with Random House, updated editions of *What Your First Grader Needs to Know* and *What Your Second Grader Needs to Know*.



Energized by our growing influence, we are setting our sights on Core Knowledge’s next great challenge: helping educators across the United States understand that abilities such as comprehension, critical thinking, and problem solving depend on prior knowledge. In simple terms: the broader the knowledge, the faster and better the thinking. Even as we began enhancing CKLA based on teacher feedback, we devoted a significant amount of time in 2014 to strategic planning. We know all children need a content-rich, cumulative curriculum that builds knowledge and skills together, but how can we ensure all schools deliver such a curriculum?

Fortunately, the educational environment has changed significantly over the past five years. Educators and parents are dissatisfied with the narrowing of the curriculum that been well documented in the elementary years. Even more promising, more and more educators are realizing that, as psychology professor (and Core Knowledge trustee) Daniel T. Willingham says, “Teaching content is teaching reading.” Capitalizing on these two trends is at the heart of our strategic plan for the next several years.

As explained in the pages that follow, Core Knowledge is seizing the day—and we hope you will join us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linda Bevilacqua". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Linda Bevilacqua  
President, Core Knowledge Foundation



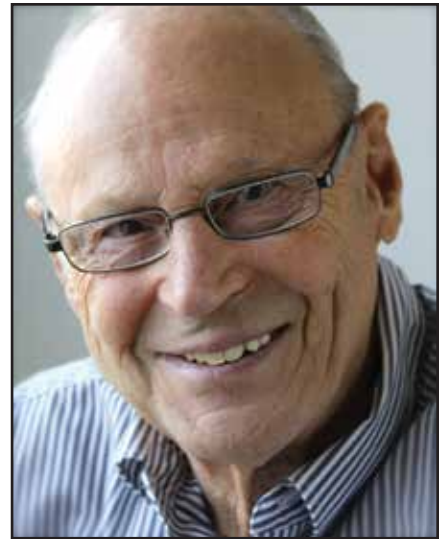
## Carpe Diem

Three decades ago, E. D. Hirsch published an essay entitled “Cultural Literacy” in *The American Scholar*. While some scholars found it brilliant—spurring Hirsch on to a bestselling book and founding the Core Knowledge Foundation—many educators could not see the wisdom in his words. Lacking Hirsch’s understanding of how knowledge facilitates comprehension and critical thinking, some educators questioned the very idea of a core of content that is essential to communication—and thus essential to our democracy. Thankfully, Hirsch persevered.

By the early 2000s, catalyzed by the Comprehensive School Reform movement of the late 1990s, the Core Knowledge community had grown to nearly 1,000 schools. Interest had been increasing rapidly, but then was replaced with a fixation on test preparation. That was not the intent of the No Child Left Behind Act, but it was a consequence of the annual testing and accountability requirements. Especially in schools serving high-needs populations—the students who would most benefit from Core Knowledge—educators understandably, but mistakenly, took time away from history, science, art, and music to devote more of the school day to preparing for reading and math tests. Over the ensuing decade, the Core Knowledge community grew very slowly to 1,200 schools.

Today, however, we see a major opportunity to reach educators and policy leaders across the United States:

- ★ Since the mid-2000s, more and more educators and parents have publicly lamented the **narrowing of the curriculum**.
- ★ In 2010, most states coalesced around the **Common Core State Standards**, which explicitly call for a content-rich curriculum and explain that comprehension depends on knowledge.
- ★ In 2012, E. D. Hirsch won the **James Bryant Conant Award** from the Education Commission of the States for publishing works that “profoundly influenced thinking on public education.”



**E. D. Hirsch, Jr.**  
**Founder**  
**Core Knowledge Foundation**

- ★ Also in 2012, Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) was selected by the New York State Education Department as the best preschool through second grade language arts curriculum for **meeting the demands of the Common Core**.
- ★ In 2013 and 2014, between our **CKLA Free Download Manager** and **EngageNY.org**, there have been over 2.5 million downloads of CKLA materials.
- ★ Between 2010 and 2014, there have been over 180,000 visitors to our **Sequene** download webpage.
- ★ In 2013 and 2014, education leaders such as **Joel Klein** and **Dacia Toll** publicly discussed how they had finally come to see that literacy requires a knowledge- and vocabulary-building curriculum, especially in the early grades.
- ★ In 2014, E. D. Hirsch was named to the **Politico 50** for “showing the fundamental connection between knowledge and literacy.”



Momentum is clearly building for schools across the country to radically improve their curricula by focusing on building knowledge.

The Common Core standards have created a unique moment in our national education reform movement. Now more than ever, educators are searching for more effective ways to cultivate essential skills like comprehension and critical thinking. The Common Core’s call for content-rich curriculum helps point them in the right direction, but educators need a deeper understanding of cognitive science and more explicit guidance to truly understand how dramatically the curriculum that is now typical in US schools needs to change. We are excited to seize the day by providing a research-based explanation of the need for a content-rich, coherent, cumulative curriculum, as well as models for such a curriculum.



## Politico 50: Leading the Common Core

In recognition of E. D. Hirsch's influence on the ideas behind the Common Core State Standards, *Politico Magazine* named Hirsch one of the most significant thinkers of 2014. Peg Tyre wrote a companion piece for *Politico Magazine* explaining why shared knowledge is essential to building the equality of opportunity we all seek. The Common Core standards in language arts and literacy are a major improvement over previous reading standards. Crucially, the standards state:

By reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas. Students can only gain this foundation when the curriculum is intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades. . . .

Texts—within and across grade levels—need to be selected around topics or themes that systematically develop the knowledge base of students. Within a grade level, there should be an adequate number of titles on a single topic that would allow children to study that topic for a sustained period.

With this recognition that literacy depends on knowledge, Core Knowledge is poised to become a national leader in education improvement.



## Schools of Distinction: Leading the Core Knowledge Community

The Core Knowledge Foundation is fortunate to have tens of thousands of dedicated educators across the country doing terrific work. Thanks to them, the Core Knowledge name signals an excellent and equitable education. While most schools using Core Knowledge materials are happy to be active members of our knowledge-building community, a handful aspire to lead. These schools have embraced all aspects of Core Knowledge’s research base, philosophy, and instructional model—and they’ve applied to the Foundation to have their extraordinary accomplishments recognized. These are our Schools of Distinction.

This designation does not come easily; it must be earned. To apply, schools must commit to a more rigorous implementation, including meeting specific milestones established by the Foundation. The criteria for success must be clearly demonstrated through a series of curriculum planning documents and a capstone visit by a team of Core Knowledge staff members. As in any rigorous educational endeavor, the journey is sure to be rewarding, but there is no guarantee of successful completion at the beginning. Relatively few schools will earn School of Distinction status.

Just a few years after creating this designation, we are proud to report that we now have five Schools of Distinction:

**Grayhawk Elementary School** in Scottsdale, AZ, earned special recognition for outstanding student engagement with Core Knowledge content.

Grayhawk, which serves 650 students in K–6, has been dedicated to the ideals of Core Knowledge since it opened in 1998. According to the principal, Norm Pratt, “Prior to the school’s opening, parent meetings were held to provide input on what they would like Grayhawk to be for their children. Common threads emerged, such as wanting . . . a challenging, engaging curriculum with high expectations for all.” The leadership at Grayhawk created that environment with the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. The school’s Core Knowledge coordinator, Kimberley Marchisotto—who also leads professional development for schools across the country using Core Knowledge materials—works with leadership and teachers to assess school needs and ensure the fidelity of





*Sequence* implementation. Marchisotto, Pratt, and the grade-level teacher teams participate in ongoing training and collaborate with other Core Knowledge schools. As a host and attendee of the Arizona Core Knowledge Network Quarterly Showcase, they have shared methods for engaging students in rich content with their colleagues at other area schools.

**Liberty Common Elementary School** in Fort Collins, CO, earned special recognition for outstanding professional learning communities and planning with Core Knowledge content.



Liberty Common—the first school to achieve School of Distinction status—is a model for how a coherent curriculum can foster meaningful collaboration. The school shined throughout a full week of classroom observations as well as interviews and surveys with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The school’s dedication to continuous, collaborative improvement was evident even in its reaction to the Foundation’s 44-page certification report. Casey Churchill, the principal, stated: “It is nice to have an outside entity such as the Foundation observe our school and point out areas that we are excelling in and areas that need improvement. The IFR [Implementation Feedback Rubric] report was thorough and spot-on in regards to feedback. We are excited to dig deep into the report, and celebrate our successes and make necessary improvements for our next steps.” In addition to serving as principal, Churchill provides professional development to schools across the country on behalf of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

**Peach Hill Academy** in Moorpark, CA, earned special recognition for outstanding content integration and intervention programs.

Peach Hill was first introduced to Core Knowledge in 2001. While the initiating principal, Donna Welch, has since moved on to the district office, she continues to be a strong advocate for Core Knowledge. The current principal, Vicky Yasenchok, has been with Peach Hill for several years. With little staff turnover, she has the advantage of a seasoned staff experienced in teaching Core Knowledge. In addition to being the principal, Yasenchok is the Core Knowledge coordinator. To ensure that expectations for students are high, Yasenchok collaborates with teachers to develop measurable goals and monitor student progress. She says, “As an elementary principal, it is my job to ensure that all students are learning and not merely being taught . . . . I work very hard to continue our well-established collaborative environment with my staff in the service of closing the achievement gap . . . . I work closely with my staff to be sure they do not work in isolation, but as a team for all students.” Yasenchok frequently asks students what they are learning, since what the child is able to articulate is very telling of whether or not the instruction is effective. Being both the principal and the Core Knowledge coordinator is a lot to take on. By merging the roles, Yasenchok exemplifies what it means to be an instructional leader.



**Snowy Range Academy** in Laramie, WY, earned special recognition for outstanding use and collaborative management of human and material resources.

Snowy Range Academy’s small size—roughly 170 students in grades K–9—and unique approach to classroom structure—one teacher per grade level—invigorate in-depth collaboration among teachers of different grades and subjects. Special area teachers, the librarian, the resource room teacher, and the special education teacher make seamless connections to the content learned in the core grade-level classrooms. In the art classroom, for example, all grade-level curriculum plans connect art concepts to history and/or science concepts. In both art and music classrooms, students are held accountable not just for their artistic performance but for the history and background of the style and artist or composer, as related to classroom study. One teacher explained the importance of this: “Songs we sing in music connect to what is taught in social studies. Students make huge connections [within] and between content areas.” This level of integration is possible through the consistent collaboration among staff regarding planning and pacing. And it’s very rewarding. During a 2013 pilot study for the Wyoming School Report Card, Snowy Range was noted as one of the few schools in the state that was decidedly “exceeding expectations.”

**Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy-CFA** in Forest City, NC, earned special recognition for outstanding implementation of Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) and curriculum support.

Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy serves a mostly lower-middle class and working-class population, yet it maintains the high expectations and excellent results of an elite private school. Thomas Jefferson’s Grammar School has been using CKLA since the Foundation first began piloting it in 2007. Teachers are “completely convinced that this is the best program for ALL of our students” because it “enables students to strengthen all of their ELA skills and their reading comprehension at the same time.” During CKLA skills instruction, teachers use assessment-based small groups to differentiate instruction. Teachers report that their “children have a strong phonics background that is nurtured and strengthened through the decodable readers from the program.” During CKLA read-alouds, teachers employ highly interactive strategies for engagement, language development, and building knowledge. They also tap prior knowledge, set a purpose for listening, focus on expression and fluency, break the read-aloud into coherent chunks, pause briefly to touch on vocabulary or ask comprehension questions, and provide visual aids to support comprehension. Thomas Jefferson’s implementation of CKLA exemplifies best practices and is a terrific model for schools across the country.



To see this expert instruction, watch this video of a second grade teacher at Thomas Jefferson doing a CKLA read-aloud lesson.

## CKLA: “The Future Depends on What You Do Today”

As this eloquent quote from Mahatma Gandhi reminds us—and all teachers know—our children’s futures depend on the education we give them today. CKLA is all about building a strong foundation for the future. By introducing children to broad knowledge, it boosts comprehension and prepares them for later studies. As educators Bridgit McCarthy, Debbie Jenkins, and Heather Awbery explain below, CKLA children are headed for bright futures.

### Et Tu, Mrs. McCarthy?

Today in social studies, we assassinated Julius Caesar!

My students’ faces registered shock, sadness, and a sprinkling of outrage, all nicely mixed with understanding.

“How mean! Why would anyone kill their ally? I bet his wife feels sad.”

“JC helped get France for them—except it was, you know, Gaul back then. Plus, his rules helped the plebeians get more stuff from the laws.”

These comments show comprehension and recall—a good start. Here’s one of the most telling comments from our class discussion; notice how it combines historical knowledge and understanding with a bit of empathy.

“Well, it did kinda seem like he wanted to be a king—and the Romans said no way to kings waaaay back—like in last week’s . . . lesson.”

These quotes demonstrate comprehension of rigorous content and use of sophisticated vocabulary. They came from third graders . . .

The assassination and subsequent discussion came about two-thirds of the way through our CKLA unit on ancient Rome. That unit takes about three weeks, starting with the basic question “What Is Rome?” and then introducing students to legends and mythology, daily life in Rome, and major wars and leaders. It ends with Rome’s lasting contributions . . .

## CKLA By The Numbers

**7,197**

**unique users  
from**

**all 50 States,  
Washington, D.C.,  
and more than**

**60 other countries  
have downloaded**

**1,054,173**

**individual files**

**CKLA materials  
downloaded**

**1,475,554**

**times**

**from New York’s  
CCSS site**

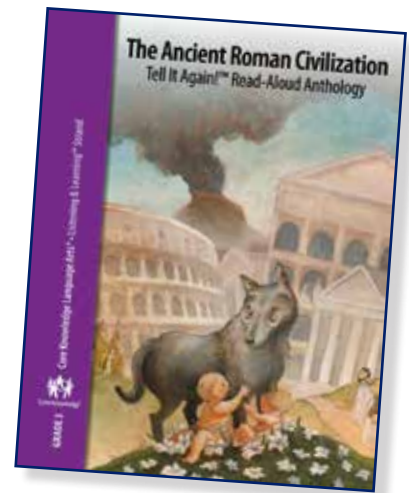
**OVER 10,000  
CKLA CLASSROOM KITS  
PURCHASED BY  
SCHOOLS IN  
37 STATES**



I have a good friend who teaches third grade in another school—one that does not use Core Knowledge. In a recent conversation, she shared her “word a day” way to tackle tiered vocabulary words and complained about highly scripted practice-test items that she *must* teach to prepare for the end-of-grade tests. I shared that my Rome unit is going well, but she worried for me: Are we covering the state standards? She meant this as a genuine professional concern, and she wondered what my students’ real “take-away” would be from our unit on Rome. I shared a little anecdote from my class, showing that my students are developing sophisticated language and useful knowledge: A student was playing a dune-buggy race car computer game in my room during indoor recess. I scoffed at its total lack of educational value. He pouted at me a bit and said, “Dang, that’s what my mom said last night! Et tu, Mrs. McCarthy?”

—Bridgit McCarthy

Bridgit McCarthy teaches third grade at New Dimensions, a public charter school in Morganton, North Carolina. To read more from McCarthy, go to the [Core Knowledge Blog](#).



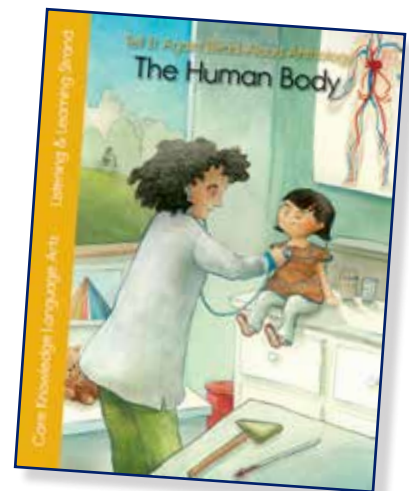
### The Right Leap of Faith

The gains our students have made in just one year with CKLA are just beyond belief. It gives me goosebumps thinking about it. At our two rural elementary schools, 93 percent of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Many of our kids don’t have much of a chance to leave our city of Bogalusa. Their parents would love to give them the opportunity to see more of the world, but it’s just not possible.

As a result, our students have had issues with comprehension because they don’t have a lot of background knowledge or world knowledge to help them. So as they get to the upper grades, they know how to read the words but they don’t understand their meaning.

I’ve been following the work of Hirsch for many, many years, and as he says, a comprehension problem is a knowledge problem. We needed a program to help build knowledge around topics, and so I took a leap of faith by bringing in CKLA. Other than a few charter schools, we were the only public school district in the state of Louisiana to use CKLA, so it was a risk. But it totally paid off.

With CKLA, our students are learning to decode words through the curriculum’s Skills strand, but they’re also learning about topics



like the human digestive system and ancient civilizations, as early as kindergarten, through the Listening and Learning strand. Each year, the curriculum builds on what they learned the previous year . . . .

The progress our students have made in language arts is unbelievable. The year before we had CKLA, 88 to 89 percent of our students hit the reading benchmark. After CKLA, that number jumped to 95 percent . . . .

Now the state of Louisiana has put CKLA on its “**Tier 1**” list of curricular resources for ELA and literacy. So we know we took the right leap of faith, and now other schools in our state will benefit from CKLA, too.

—**Debbie Jenkins**

Debbie Jenkins is the elementary curriculum and instruction supervisor of Bogalusa City Schools in Louisiana. To read more from Jenkins, go to the **Core Knowledge Blog**; learn more about Bogalusa City Schools’ use of Core Knowledge in this **video**.



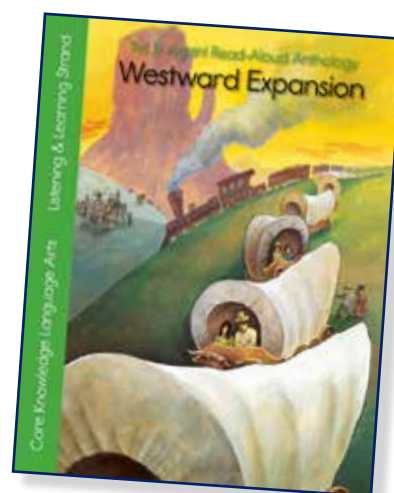
## Leveling the Playing Field


September was [when] . . . we began piloting CKLA in our kindergarten, first- and second-grade classrooms. It took a little while for our teachers to feel comfortable and confident using it, but they quickly got the hang of it, and by October, they were coming in and showing me some of the earliest assessments . . . . They were seeing immediate results and were just starting to fall in love with CKLA. They were talking about it in their lunchtime conversations.

Parents were calling us and saying, “What’s going on over there? All my kid asked for for Christmas was books on the War of 1812,” or “my first-grader is talking about Westward expansion at the dinner table.”

We’re all blown away by what these kids know and are retaining as far as deep rich content. Our librarian has figured out what she needs to order for next year that she didn’t have this year; she can’t keep certain books on the shelves, and that’s all stemming from CKLA . . . .

No matter what a student’s background or socioeconomic status, CKLA really levels the playing field. It lets kids grow independently and also enables a classroom to grow collectively . . . . We’re seeing





significant improvement for all of our kids. In March, one of our classrooms had 90 percent of the kids meeting the district standards for the May cutoff—so they were meeting May expectations in March. This is what our teachers are finding super exciting.

—**Heather Awbery**

Heather Awbery is the principal of Balboa Elementary School in Spokane, Washington. To read more from Awbery, go to the [Core Knowledge Blog](#).

## Financial Summary

Net Foundation Assets totaled \$7.9 million at the end of 2014, up from \$6.9 million a year earlier. The unrestricted asset balance (operating funds) totaled \$5.8 million, up from \$4.8 million a year earlier. In addition, the Foundation's unrestricted endowment stood at \$2 million at the close of 2014 as compared with \$1.9 million at the close of 2013. There were no expenditures against this fund during the year. The restricted asset balance totaled \$87,321 at the end of 2014.

In 2014, total income equaled \$5.6 million and total expenses \$4.6 million. Of the total expense for 2014, Program and Supporting Service expenses comprised 80%, administration expenses 19%, and fundraising expenses less than 1%. Although cash flows decreased \$1.5 million due to the purchase of investments during 2014, the cash flow remained sufficient to meet the day-to-day needs of the Foundation.

For more information on the Foundation's financial history and current status, see [GuideStar](#) and the Foundation's 2013 [audited financials](#).

### Special Thanks to Those Helping Us Seize the Day

The Core Knowledge Foundation gratefully acknowledges the support of our many friends and benefactors. The information contained in this report covers the period January 1, 2014, through December 31, 2014. We extend heartfelt thanks to all donors for their support and generosity.

#### *Unrestricted*

Baltimore Curriculum Project  
Catherine Scherer  
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J. F. Maddox Foundation  
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