What Is Core Knowledge?

Core Knowledge is based on a simple and powerful idea: the more you know, the more you are able to learn. This insight, that knowledge builds on knowledge, is well-established by cognitive science and has profound implications for teaching and learning. Nearly all of our important goals for education—greater reading comprehension, critical thinking and problem solving, even higher test scores—are a function of the depth and breadth of our knowledge.

What is the Core Knowledge Sequence?

If all of our children are to be fully educated and to participate equally in civic life, then we must provide each of them with the shared body of knowledge that makes literacy and communication possible. This concept, central to the Core Knowledge Foundation’s goal of excellence and equity in education, takes shape in the **Core Knowledge Sequence**—a framework that provides a detailed outline of recommended curricular content to be taught in language arts, history and geography, mathematics, science, music, and the visual arts from preschool to grade eight.

What is Core Knowledge Language Arts?

The **Core Knowledge Language Arts** program is a comprehensive, preschool through grade 5, curriculum for teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking while also building students’ vocabulary and knowledge of the world. The program, also referred to as **CKLA**, follows the coherent, rich content that is outlined in the Sequence for literature, global and American history, and the sciences. In the early grades, CKLA focuses on oral language development through carefully sequenced read-alouds as well as on systematic instruction in reading and writing skills. In later grades, CKLA continues to advance students’ knowledge and vocabulary through read-alouds and in-depth discussions, while also immersing students in complex texts and advanced writing assignments that draw on the academic content they’ve been engaged in since preschool.

What is the difference between the Sequence and CKLA?

The Sequence outlines the content and skills to be taught in preschool through grade 8, but it does not include lesson plans or activities for instruction. Resources such as the **Core Knowledge Teacher Handbooks** are used by teachers to develop their own units aligned to the Sequence. To see examples of such units, visit our **Domain-Based Unit Samples** created by educators from around the country.

CKLA is a comprehensive ELA curriculum that includes detailed lessons and assessments which put the Core Knowledge approach to building literacy into action. CKLA was pilot-tested in diverse school settings and is designed to help students meet or exceed the Common Core State Standards for ELA. CKLA addresses much of the Sequence, but not all of it. For schools interested in building their own curriculum around the Core Knowledge content, CKLA is a great way to jump-start implementation using a comprehensive model.
Where will you begin?

Thousands of educators have used the Sequence framework to support and enhance their own instructional designs for more than twenty-five years. Within the last three years, almost two million files have been downloaded from the CKLA program online. Where to begin is an important choice that is left to teachers, schools, and districts to determine their best entry points into Core Knowledge. This implementation guide can help you to learn about and explore the Sequence. If you are interested in CKLA, we highly recommend reviewing the resources embedded within the CKLA Implementation Guide as well.

Additional curriculum materials are underway NOW!

The Core Knowledge Foundation is excited to continue our work as we develop more comprehensive materials and programs for the future. Please read about our vision for and ongoing work to create a comprehensive Core Knowledge Curriculum Series. We are proud to announce that Core Knowledge History and Geography (CKHG) is rolling out now! Also look for announcements about early development of Core Knowledge Science (CKSci).

Ready to get started with CKLA? Find resources in the CKLA Guide.

Need Core Knowledge materials? Find them in our store.
About This Guide

This implementation guide provides direction and resources for implementing a coherent, content-rich curriculum based on the Core Knowledge Sequence. Most of the resources, including the professional development materials, are made available for free under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, so that our work can be shared broadly and built upon by others to support educational excellence and equality for all children. The guide is organized around four stages of implementation:

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Additional Resources
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Share Your Core Knowledge Story
Effective implementation of a Core Knowledge curriculum is guided by a set of practices that demonstrate both understanding of the Core Knowledge approach and alignment of curriculum, teaching, and leadership with this approach. These practices have been culled from our most successful Core Knowledge schools.

Coherent Domains are the Key to Successful Implementation

The difference between a successful Core Knowledge implementation and one that is emerging or developing can be subtle. A school, for example, may address Core Knowledge content but not in domain-based units, or with insufficient attention to cross-curricular connections. The duration of instructional units may not be long enough to foster student familiarity with the content, concepts, and vocabulary of the domain or planning may be insufficient to maintain language development during instruction.

The key to understanding the difference between optimal and less than optimal implementation is in understanding both what a domain is and isn’t and the concept of coherence.

What is a Domain?

A domain is an area of study that has a related set of language and vocabulary. Domains, like traditional units of study, are comprised of related topics. However, domains differ from themes or concepts in a few important ways.

First, domain sub-topics are related to one another and build coherently. Second, domain knowledge offers built-in and across-grade-levels. Third, the vocabulary of domain sub-topics is also related and builds coherently. Finally, overarching conceptual knowledge is built within the context of the domain content. It is precisely this building of content and maintenance of vocabulary that provides the benefits of domain-based instruction. Consider the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Sub-topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Body</td>
<td>Cells, fluids, tissues, hormones, diseases, and illness prevention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Helpers</td>
<td>Police, firefighters, doctors, nurses, teachers, and other professionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Sun, energy sources, efficiency, transformation, digestion.</td>
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</table>

Domains also provide a vehicle for achieving a variety of concepts in context (e.g., concepts demonstrated through study of the human body include change, interdependence, cycles, and systems).

Key Practices of Implementation

Philosophy and Approach

Curriculum Planning

Effective Teaching

Resources

Strong Leadership

Community Partnerships

Continuous Improvement

What It Means to Be a Core Knowledge School (video)

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The Guide to Effective Implementation of Core Knowledge is part of a suite of tools designed to guide planning, implementation, development, and the effectiveness of Core Knowledge instruction. This suite of tools includes:

- **Curriculum Planning Tools**, which are essential templates and job aids for planning how to apply the Core Knowledge approach in the classroom. These tools include templates for school-wide planning as well as lesson plans and unit plans that align to the Core Knowledge approach. Learn more in the Plan Your Implementation section of this guide (page 14).

- The **Core Knowledge Leadership Institute**, an event held in Charlottesville, Virginia, for administrators, curriculum coordinators, and lead teachers, where they can network and learn more about how to support their colleagues and students while engaging with Core Knowledge. Topics addressed through the Institute include: the Core Knowledge instructional approach, implementation planning, resources, effective teaching, parent and community involvement, and high-leverage leadership strategies. Upcoming Leadership Institutes and registration information can be found on our website.

- The **Implementation Feedback Rubric**, a template for self-reflection and analysis of fidelity to the Core Knowledge approach in grades K–8. Learn more in the Enhance Your Implementation section of this guide (page 22).

- The **Preschool Snapshot: Implementation and Observation Checklist**, an excellent tool for preschools looking to reflect on their implementation of Core Knowledge. Learn more in the Core Knowledge Preschool section of this guide (page 8).
Core Knowledge Sequence for Preschool

With a strong focus on challenging but appropriate content, the Core Knowledge Preschool Sequence is unique among early childhood frameworks. It outlines a cumulative and coherent progression of knowledge and skills in all developmental areas and builds a strong foundation for kindergarten and beyond. The Core Knowledge Preschool Sequence and Teacher Handbook describes how developmentally appropriate practices for both content and instruction can be integrated with a curriculum based on the Sequence. Knowledge and skills for both three-to four-year-olds (level I) and four- to five-year-olds (level II) are outlined for the following developmental areas:

- Movement & Coordination
- Work Habits
- Mathematics
- Science
- Music
- Autonomy & Social Skills
- Language & Literacy
- History & Geography
- Visual Arts

Read the Introduction to the Preschool Sequence now!

Turnkey Professional Development Kits

Getting Started with the Preschool Sequence
- Presentation
- Instructor Guide
- Participant Workbook

Supporting Language Development
- Presentation
- Instructor Guide
- Participant Workbook

Assessment and Planning to Meet Children’s Needs
- Presentation
- Instructor Guide
- Participant Workbook

Get Support from a Core Knowledge Licensed Professional

If you are looking for a trainer to conduct any of the Turnkey PD Kits, or are interested in a school visit, please contact one of our Core Knowledge Licensed Professionals. These educators have experience implementing the Core Knowledge Sequence and can assist you with on-site professional development and support. Only those individuals designated on our website are permitted to offer on-site Core Knowledge Sequence training for a fee.

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Core Knowledge Language Arts for Preschool

The Core Knowledge Language Arts Preschool (CKLA Preschool) program is a comprehensive ELA curriculum. It includes lessons and activities that address Preschool Sequence language and literacy skills in the context of rich content, such as science and the living world. CKLA Preschool is a great starting point for those who wish to implement a comprehensive curriculum based on the Preschool Sequence framework.

If you would like to learn more about CKLA Preschool, please review the CKLA Implementation Resources Guide. This CKLA Guide contains a plethora of support tools, including additional alignments, more turnkey professional development, demonstration videos, and more.

Anchor Video Presentation

Scaffolding to Support Early Learners

This presentation is designed to help participants identify opportunities to effectively scaffold instruction. Viewers will be able to identify three primary methods of scaffolding using examples from the CKLA Preschool program. You may also download additional turnkey presentations regarding scaffolding and support using the CKLA Implementation Resources Guide.

Related Resources and Programs

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<td>Preschool Activity Books (1 and 2)</td>
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### Frequently Asked Questions

- **How do we know that Core Knowledge works?**
- **How does the Preschool Sequence relate to the K-8 Sequence?**
- **How are the Preschool Sequence and Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) Preschool program related?**
- **Is the Preschool Sequence developmentally appropriate?**
- **How does the Preschool Sequence relate to the Head Start Child Outcomes?**
- **Are preschool teachers expected to teach everything included in the Preschool Sequence?**
- **How do we get started?**

Read more [FAQs about Core Knowledge Implementation](#)
Additional Resources to Learn More

Want to learn more about CKLA Preschool? Download the program overview now!

Ready to get started with CKLA? Find more resources in the CKLA Guide.
Learn About the Core Knowledge Sequence for K–8

The Core Knowledge Sequence is a detailed outline of specific content and skills to be taught in language arts, history and geography, mathematics, science, music, and the visual arts. It is an effort to state and describe the specific core of shared knowledge that all children should learn in U.S. schools and that speakers and writers assume their audiences know. To learn more, we suggest you begin by reading the Introduction to the Sequence (pages vi–ix), which describes the intent of this resource and how the consensus was formed around it as a framework for high-quality education.

Anchor Video Presentations

Why Is Core Knowledge Important?
This video is Part One of a three-part overview of Core Knowledge. You will learn more about the simple and powerful idea behind our approach: that knowledge builds on knowledge. This fact, well-established by cognitive science, has profound implications for learning and instruction, even though it is often overlooked in today’s educational landscape.

COMING SOON—What Is the Core Knowledge Approach?
Part Two of the overview series will describe the 4C approach that we encourage educators to apply to their unit and lesson design. The Core Knowledge approach involves delivering instruction that is content-rich and commands rigor; creating opportunities for knowledge to build coherently within a grade-level and cumulatively across the grades; and immersing students in cross-curricular instruction that promotes critical and creative thinking. Be sure to read more about the Core Knowledge approach on our website.

COMING SOON—How Is Core Knowledge Taught?
Part Three of the overview will take you into the various publications and job aids that have been created by the Core Knowledge Foundation to support educators as they apply the 4C approach. You will learn about key resources used by teachers and parents to design their own instruction and about where the most successful schools start their journeys as they join our Core Knowledge community. Be sure to read more about our curriculum on our website and about how you can get started.
Related Resources and Programs

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Frequently Asked Questions

How do we know that Core Knowledge works?
What is "knowledge-based schooling"?
Who decided what’s in the Sequence?
Does the Core Knowledge Sequence teach respect for diverse peoples and cultures?
Where can I see Core Knowledge in action?
How do I get started?
Read more FAQs about Core Knowledge Implementation
Plan Your Core Knowledge Implementation

From our extensive experience working with schools, we know that the most successful Core Knowledge educators have well-documented curricula and instructional plans that guide their work.

We have created a tool that can help draw lines of sight between the Core Knowledge Sequence and your state standards. The cumulative nature of the Sequence lays out specific grade-level content. Our alignment packet walks you through the process of creating a Sequence-to-standards crosswalk. It also guides you through a cost-benefit analysis of various implementation options based upon how well the topics align.

It is up to each school to reach a consensus as to how Core Knowledge content will be taught relative to their standards. A position statement, created as part of the alignment crosswalk, will guide further curriculum mapping efforts at the school (e.g., see the Professional Development Kit for Curriculum Mapping, below).

Turnkey Professional Development Kit

Curriculum Mapping with the Core Knowledge Sequence

This training, also known as “Getting Started,” will guide participants as they map the Core Knowledge Sequence across the academic school year. Participants will have the opportunity to directly apply the 4C characteristics of Core Knowledge to their grade-level planning. At the completion of this training, participants will have created a draft of a yearlong curriculum plan and several domain maps, which will directly support planning efforts at the unit and lesson level.

Day 1 Presentation and Day 2 Presentation

Instructor Guide

Participant Workbook
Get Support from a Core Knowledge Licensed Professional

If you are looking for a trainer to conduct any of the Turnkey PD Kits, or are interested in a school visit, please contact one of our Core Knowledge Licensed Professionals. These educators have experience implementing the Core Knowledge Sequence and can assist you with on-site professional development and support. Only those individuals designated on our website are permitted to offer on-site Core Knowledge Sequence training for a fee.

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### Frequently Asked Questions

- **How do I teach Core Knowledge content or implement a Core Knowledge program?**
- **Who decided what’s in the Sequence?**
- **Does the Core Knowledge Sequence teach respect for diverse peoples and cultures?**
- **Why doesn’t the Core Knowledge Sequence include guidelines for special areas such as Physical Education, Technology, or Drama?**
- **Can teachers pick and choose which topics to teach and which to leave out?**

Read more [FAQs about Core Knowledge Implementation](#)
Teach Core Knowledge

Core Knowledge implementation goes beyond mere coverage of Core Knowledge topics and requires a focus on **effective language and vocabulary development**. Teachers proactively and intentionally plan to meet both content objectives and language development objectives in a manner that builds conceptual knowledge and uses the content as the basis for critical thinking and problem-solving opportunities.

Additionally, Core Knowledge teachers use **pedagogical best practices** that include, but are not limited to, ongoing use of assessment to guide instruction, scaffolding instruction to differentiate for individual learner needs, providing feedback that goes beyond praise to guide student learning, and the use of engaging activities that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate higher-order thinking.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

### Turnkey Professional Development Kits

**Teaching, Learning, and Assessment: Meaningful Instruction**

Through this training, participants will understand key concepts to apply when aligning instruction, assessment, criteria for success, and meaningful activities. Engaging in exercises, discussions, and collaborative activities, participants will be able to implement quality instructional practices that they can apply in their own classrooms.

- [Presentation](#)
- [Instructor Guide](#)
- [Participant Workbook](#)

**Domain-Based Unit Writing**

This training will guide participants in designing a comprehensive unit that leverages Core Knowledge content, promotes active student engagement, and facilitates vocabulary acquisition.

- [Presentation](#)
- [Instructor Guide](#)
- [Participant Workbook](#)

**Close Reading in the Early Grades**

This presentation will support participants with developing close reading opportunities in the early grades.

- [Presentation](#)
- [Participant Workbook](#)

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Frequently Asked Questions

How do I teach Core Knowledge content or implement a Core Knowledge program?

Who decided what’s in the Sequence?

Does the Core Knowledge Sequence teach respect for diverse peoples and cultures?

Why doesn’t the Core Knowledge Sequence include guidelines for special areas such as Physical Education, Technology, or Drama?

Can teachers pick and choose which topics to teach and which to leave out?

How can I get started in my classroom?

Read more FAQs about Core Knowledge Implementation

Introducing a Read-Aloud

Watch this classroom in action now!
Enhance Your Implementation

Whether you begin implementing Core Knowledge using the Sequence or the Core Knowledge Language Arts program, the resources aligned to both can help you to enhance your learning environment and meet your students’ needs.

 Anchor Video Presentation

  What It Means to Be a Core Knowledge School

  This presentation introduces the Guide to Effective Implementation of Core Knowledge, as well as the Foundation’s efforts to define what implementation with fidelity looks like in action. The best schools undergo concerted and collaborative efforts to continuously improve how they use the Core Knowledge approach to meet their students’ needs. You can also learn more in the Core Implementation Practices section of this guide (page 6).

 Turnkey Professional Development Kits

  COMING SOON

  Check back to this guide for updates and additions to our library of resources and turnkey professional development kits. Trainings, such as our New Teacher Orientation, will be added as we convert our training materials into turnkey kits.

Sample Domain-Based Units from CKLA
Related Resources and Programs

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</table>

Additional Resources to Learn More

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I enhance my practice of the Core Knowledge approach?

Who decided what’s in the Sequence?

Does the Core Knowledge Sequence teach respect for diverse peoples and cultures?

Why doesn’t the Core Knowledge Sequence include guidelines for special areas such as Physical Education, Technology, or Drama?

Can teachers pick and choose which topics to teach and which to leave out?

How can I help others in my community, school, district, or state to get started?

Read more FAQs about Core Knowledge Implementation
The Core Knowledge Foundation is dedicated to making its materials and resources as widely available and as cost-effective as possible. To that end, almost the entirety of the Core Knowledge Language Arts program has been made available for free download. As we develop more comprehensive curricular resources in the future, we will continue to make these available for free, with low-cost purchase formats also available.

Download the CKLA Materials for Free

Visit our Curriculum Download Manager to download the preschool through grade 5 materials under a Creative Commons License. All units and student materials are available for grades P–3. In grades 4–5, four units for each grade are available for free download.

In addition to the open curriculum files, eighteen trade books are required to implement the CKLA Preschool program.

These titles include:

- A Fruit Is a Suitcase for Seeds
- Families
- Flowers
- Full, Full, Full of Love
- Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King Jr.
- Here Is the Southwestern Desert
- Houses and Homes
- Is Your Mama a Llama?
- Life in a Pond
- My Amazing Body
- My Five Senses
- See Me Grow
- Shades of People
- Sunflower House
- The Three Horrid Little Pigs
- What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?
- Career Day
- In the Woods: Who’s Been Here?

These trade books can be purchased as a kit from the American Reading Company. Visit http://www.americanreading.com/core-knowledge.
Purchase Complete Kits from Amplify

The Core Knowledge Foundation has partnered with Amplify Education, Inc., for nationwide distribution of CKLA P–5. Amplify is a leader in teacher-friendly, rigorous, digital educational resources that has the capacity to support tens of thousands of schools and, over time, to create a technologically rich version of CKLA. This partnership further allows the Foundation to remain focused on developing more knowledge-building instructional materials.

A Note About Additional Resources

We have been deliberate in our attempts to make the Core Knowledge materials widely available, and to license them in a manner that allows others to build on our work. We are happy to see a plethora of resources evolving on numerous websites, including Pinterest, YouTube, and Quizlet. The following considerations will help you discern the most helpful resources available:

- Are the materials factually accurate?
- Do the materials include or target the core vocabulary of the domain?
- Does the resource encourage or create opportunities for students to use domain-specific and general academic vocabulary aligned with core vocabulary?
- Beyond aligning with the Core Knowledge topics, do the materials enable students to learn or participate in practice that helps them achieve your measurable objectives?
- Do the materials adhere to the Core Knowledge approach? The key components of this approach include:
  
  - **Content-rich instruction that focuses on building knowledge**
  - **Coherent learning progressions across units and lessons to leverage prior knowledge and skills**
  - **Cumulative building of domain knowledge and skills across the grades**
  - **Cross-curricular instruction that promotes critical and creative thinking**
  - **Use of formative assessments to inform instruction**
Additional Considerations for Technology-Based Resources

- Does the resource engage the learner with content rather than with features of the medium or platform on which it is presented?
- Does the resource include illustrations, diagrams, primary source documents, and/or videos that enhance understanding of Core Knowledge Sequence content?
- Is the text displayed by the resource within the student’s reading ability? (i.e., decodable at an attainable level of text complexity)
- Is the audio narration presented by the resource aligned with the student’s level of listening comprehension (i.e., above the student’s own reading ability, but within his or her comprehension ability)?
- Does the resource encourage or create opportunities for students to use domain-specific and general academic vocabulary aligned with the Core Knowledge content and skill guidelines?
## Why Content Matters

*Why Knowledge Matters*, by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

“Teaching Content IS Teaching Reading,” by Daniel T. Willingham (video)

### The Knowledge Matters Campaign

“The Origins of Knowledge-Based Learning: Q & A with E.D. Hirsch, Jr.,” by Rebecca Rothbaum

“Why Knowledge Building Makes the Difference in Reading Comprehension,” by Amplify Education

“Building Knowledge,” by E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

“How Knowledge Helps,” by Daniel T. Willingham

“Knowledge at the Core,” by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute

“The Science of Learning,” by Deans for Impact

“Kids Love Knowing Stuff,” by Karin Chenoweth

“To Narrow the Achievement Gap, Teach Kids Knowledge in Elementary School,” by Natalie Wexler

“Taken for Granted: Why Curriculum Content Is Like Oxygen,” by Carolyn Gosse & Lisa Hansel

## The Connection to Vocabulary

“The Word Gap,” by Laura Colker

“A Wealth of Words: The Key to Increasing Upward Mobility Is Expanding Vocabulary,” by E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

## Standards Are Not Curriculum

“The 57 Most Important Words in Education Reform,” by Robert Pondiscio (video)

“It's the Curriculum, Stupid,” by Daniel T. Willingham
### Reading Instruction

*The Knowledge Deficit*, by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

“Can Reading Comprehension Be Taught?” by Daniel T. Willingham and Gail Lovette

“Teaching Kids to Read,” by Ted Hirsch

“Literacy Is Knowledge,” by Robert Pondiscio

“Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Language Use During Literature Discussions,” by Alina Reznitskaya

### Assessment

“What a Difference a Word Makes: Assessment FOR Learning …,” by Rick Stiggins and Jan Chappuis

“What Research Says About Balanced Assessment,” by Tracy A. Huebner

“Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment,” by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam

### Other


“Why Don’t Students Like School?” by Daniel T. Willingham

“Schooling Makes You Smarter,” by Richard Nisbett

“Lost in Wonderland”, by Karin Chenoweth

"Why Knowledge Counts More Than Skill"
Share Your Story

Help us tell the stories of how you are making a difference for students using Core Knowledge. Stories like yours inspire and support others. Simply email your story with photos and/or video to info@coreknowledge.org to make a submission. Tell us about surprising or memorable moments with students, how Core Knowledge has impacted day-to-day classroom life, benefits to and new capabilities of your students, how you got started, etc. All stories are appreciated and welcomed!

If you send photos or video that include pictures of students, please make sure you have written permission from parents to share those pictures with us. Many schools already have standard photo permission forms, but if you need one you may use the Foundation's Permission to Video/Photograph Form.

If your story is selected for sharing, a member of our staff will contact you about being interviewed for additional details for our website and/or social media sites including Facebook and Twitter.
Contact Us

Send us a message now!

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Fax: (434) 977-0021