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**COMMON KNOWLEDGE™**

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### Core Knowledge Students Show 4-to-1 Advantage

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*Clegern Elementary students visualize Core Knowledge lessons*

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Core Knowledge was artistically represented this year at Santa Barbara's I Madonnari festival.

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Congratulations are in order for **Oglethorpe Charter School** in Savannah, Georgia. They were one of only eight outstanding charter schools described in a publication recently released by the U.S Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement. You can link [here](#) to the entire chapter devoted to Oglethorpe in **Successful Charter Schools**.

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Crestwood students continued singing even as volcanic eruptions signaled the last days of Pompeii. Veteran music teacher, Debra Lindsay conducted the final chorus, leading some sixty elementary school students in a multi-media recreation of this famous episode in Roman history. Sixth graders playing Tacitus and Pliny the Younger were among the characters who mourned the burial of the elegant city under the molten lava spewed by Vesuvius.

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## A Minnesota Teacher Puts His Hunches to the Test

Bruce Rodgers reflects on his teaching of Core Knowledge in middle school and gives us a glimpse of a larger study he is doing on the influence of Core Knowledge on student achievement and student discipline.

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## 14<sup>th</sup> Core Knowledge National Conference

From March 3–March 5, 2005, the famously friendly city of Philadelphia will be the temporary home to upwards of 2,200 educators and administrators at the 14<sup>th</sup> Core Knowledge National Conference. The conference is an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas, expand their knowledge, and even receive college credit for professional development.

# Core Knowledge Students Show 4-to-1 Advantage in North Carolina

by Matthew Davis

A rigorous new independent study that compared Core Knowledge schools in North Carolina to non-Core Knowledge schools in the same state has found that the Core Knowledge schools outperformed other schools in the state in achievement progress in both reading and math for four of the five grades that were studied.

The study, conducted by Herb Walberg, Emeritus Research Professor of Education and Psychology at the University of Illinois and Distinguished Visiting Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, and Joseph Meyer, Vice President for Research at Metalytics, Lincoln, Illinois, is based on an extensive database. The study examined data for 1,592 students in six Core Knowledge schools and 533,919 students in more than 1,300 other North Carolina schools. In essence students in a half-dozen Core Knowledge schools were compared to students in the remainder of the state's public education system.

Initial analysis of the test scores of 1,592 eligible Core Knowledge students' and 533,919 students in other schools showed that much of the variation in their scores, about 80 percent, is attributable to differences among students rather than differences between Core Knowledge schools and non-Core Knowledge schools. Since the majority of the variation was attributable to differences among students, the analysis was designed to take into account the variations among them. Specifically, during the analysis, "value added" gains from the 2001–2002 to the 2002–2003 school year were calculated — and the analysis also took into account the poverty and minority status of each student.

The researchers calculated the effect of Core Knowledge scores in contrast with other schools, adjusted for previous achievement, poverty, and racial/ethnic status. Core Knowledge students made more progress on the state's achievement tests in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading ( $\beta = 1.59$ , standard error = 0.72) and math ( $\beta = 1.46$ , s.e.= 0.86), 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading ( $\beta = 0.05$ , s.e.= 0.85) and math ( $\beta = 1.28$ , s.e.= 1.53), 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading ( $\beta = 0.70$ , s.e.= 0.11) and math ( $\beta = 0.64$ , s.e.= 1.45), and 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading ( $\beta=0.13$ , s.e.= 0.22) and math ( $\beta = 0.73$ , s.e.= 0.80). The only grade in which Core Knowledge students fell below the non Core Knowledge students was the earliest grade studied — 3<sup>rd</sup> grade — where the control group held an advantage in both reading ( $\beta = -2.19$ , s.e.= 0.63) and math ( $\beta = -2.43$ , s.e.= 0.60).

Although none of the Core Knowledge advantages reached the threshold of statistical significance, the study's authors emphasized that the results were nevertheless positive:

This evaluation suggests an affirmative answer to the chief question: Do Core Knowledge Schools generally excel the academic progress of other schools adjusted for individual students' previous achievement scores and poverty and minority status. Unlike most previous curriculum evaluations, the comparison involves a huge sample, indeed, the entire population of eligible students in a state rather than a few hand picked Core Knowledge and comparison schools. The comparison also involves the North Carolina state test, which can be assumed a priori to be neither fair nor unfair to Core Knowledge or comparison schools. ...

Although the previous and the present research confirms that Core Knowledge schools excel, they may be capable of even better and more uniform results both through implementation of even more rigorous Core Knowledge features and conditions and the wider application of the best practices of teaching and school leadership.

In a telephone interview, Walberg remarked that the results were "promising" and indicated that he believed

future studies might show even more impressive and statistically robust results if a larger Core Knowledge sample could be attained.

In their report, the researchers speculated on the causes of the disappointing results for third grade: "Perhaps the third-grade Core Knowledge curriculum may be less well matched to the North Carolina tests than in the later grades in which the Core Knowledge students uniformly excelled. In any case, an 80 percent success rate is impressive."

Core Knowledge Founder E. D. Hirsch offered another possible reason for the anomalous third-grade results. He pointed out that "third-grade reading tests are primarily tests of accuracy and fluency in decoding, in which Core Knowledge does not differentiate itself. Third-grade tests do not probe into broad world knowledge and vocabulary, which become crucial factors in reading comprehension in later grades, and which Core Knowledge is specifically designed to boost."

Details on the report are available from the Foundation.

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## Travels with Cyndi



*Tribute to Core Knowledge  
at Three Oaks Elementary Library*



*Three Oaks Middle School Interprets  
Animal Farm*



*Cyndi's road assistant, Catherine,  
and Three Oaks Student, Derek Delago,  
playing "Explorer Concentration"*

Although I enjoy the varied aspects of my work as Director of K–8 Professional Development at the Foundation, my favorite part of the job is visiting teachers, students, and schools to see Core Knowledge in action across the country. When I journeyed last spring to Ft. Myers to visit Three Oaks Elementary School, the very first school to

implement Core Knowledge, and Three Oaks Middle School, the very first middle school to do so, I didn't know what to expect. I hadn't officially visited Three Oaks Elementary since the first Core Knowledge Conference in 1992, and I wondered if Core Knowledge would have faded away. Instead, I couldn't have been more elated by what I found.

I found inspiration. I found enthusiasm. I found knowledge. I found schools to which I would send my own children. These first-in-the-nation schools are still going strong today. Visiting the classrooms of Pat Scott, Joanne Anderson, and Becky Poppe at Three Oaks Elementary, I was inspired by these Core Knowledge pioneers whose commitment to Core Knowledge strengthened as they saw student achievement rise. Their classrooms are lively, engaging places. As their students excel through Core Knowledge, they actually perform better on their state standards as well. Ms. Scott's third grade students excitedly shared their Power Point presentations on New World explorers and proudly displayed the explorer concentration games they had made themselves. Ms. Anderson's fourth grade students were bursting with insights derived from on-line field trips to historic Williamsburg. Ms. Poppe's students presented adjectives in the shape of flowers relating language arts with their study on life cycles in science. Displays of a recent study of insects, including a Venn Diagram comparing moths and butterflies, adorned the classroom walls. Principals Vivian Posey and Linda Caprarotta both gave me personal tours of their schools, where I experienced the pride they have in their teachers and their students.

When asked what has been their biggest struggle in implementing Core Knowledge and how had they overcome it, each had a similar response. You probably can guess what this response was. Yes — district and state standards. Ms. Caprarotta said,

Probably the biggest struggles have been constantly aligning and realigning the Core Knowledge curriculum to our district/state curriculum. ...The other struggle [occurs] when we have new teachers join our staff after pre-school week. It is very difficult to provide them the overview they need to understand Core Knowledge after school has already started. This is an area that I continue to work on and we have greatly improved.

Dr. Posey responded,

The biggest struggle has been to maintain our focus on the teaching of rigorous content while still meeting the state demands for accountability. It is so important to assure our teachers that the standards are not the curriculum, and that testing is one event in the student's school life — it does not by any means measure all that the student knows or is able to do.

My visits convinced me that all schools have common concerns and common obstacles, but that with strong leadership and help from the Foundation, these concerns can be addressed and these obstacles overcome.

Later in the spring, I visited another group of schools in Oklahoma, and was impressed with Clegern Elementary and with its commitment to Core Knowledge. With only three more days left in the school year, the students responded as if it were the middle of the year. Students were still actively engaged in learning. Student work covered the walls. In Jeanie Vance's classroom, second grade students were engaged in a game summarizing the year's learning. Sheepishly, I must admit that although I have been involved with Core Knowledge for many years, I learned some new answers that day! Diane Paine's fifth grade students re-enacted their civil war biographies for me, impressing me with their depth of knowledge and understanding. Giving me a tour of his school, Principal William Powell exhibited the same pride and supportive attitude toward his staff that I had seen in Ft. Myers. When asked about the success of Core Knowledge at Clegern, Mr. Powell responded,

Administrators, teachers, parents and students believe in and support Core Knowledge at our school. Everyone's coming together has created better educational opportunities for our students than we could have come up with on

our own. Core Knowledge is so successful because it is truly a joint effort.

Making Core Knowledge a whole-school effort is reinforced in our professional development workshops and I certainly saw the results at Clegern!

In early July, I made only a short trek across town, but what an exciting journey it was. At the Cavalier Inn in Charlottesville, Gerald Terrell and I had the opportunity to interact with a talented group of up-and-coming leaders and Core Knowledge Coordinators at Core Knowledge Schools. They received information and personal attention, learning in advance many of the lessons that the outstanding leaders at Three Oaks Elementary, Three Oaks Middle School, and Clegern Elementary had to learn the hard way. I am pleased to share with you what some of the participants had to say during and after the Institute:

- "After the Leadership Institute, I am aware of how much I need to do and why. I think the Institute simply reinforced for me the needs of my students, and parents, and staff."
- "After the Leadership Institute, I have a far better understanding of Core Knowledge, and what it takes to become a successful Core Knowledge school. I also have the tools I need to support my teachers."
- "The Institute was wonderful and I learned so much that I didn't know - especially the reasoning and research behind Core Knowledge. Even though we have been firm believers and cheerleaders of Core Knowledge for some time, we gained valuable insight. We are energized and excited about becoming an Official Core Knowledge School!"

Such comments urge me on and make me wish that all Core Knowledge teachers and administrators could share in the rewards of the [Leadership Institutes](#).



*Some of the hard working staff members of McCullough Academy.*

At the end of July, I spent a week of professional development time with the hard-working staff at McCullough Academy of Excellence in Austin, Texas. This school, which is new to Core Knowledge, has all the key elements in place for successful implementation. McCullough faces the same challenges as other schools across the nation, but it has the internal support needed to implement Core Knowledge successfully. The administration and Board of Directors firmly believe in and support Core Knowledge. Reverend Dr. Raymond Bryant, Chairman of the Board, researched Core Knowledge and, dedicated to having it adopted at McCullough, he brought me in last October to deliver the "Overview Presentation." Teachers, parents, administrators, and board members were in attendance and asked terrific questions. The administrative team attended the two-day Leadership Institute; the

entire school attended a regional conference; and a number of teachers attended the Core Knowledge conference in Atlanta. The school purchased all the recommended materials: a school kit, the Pearson Learning materials, the Baltimore Curriculum Project lessons, and various other resources selected from *Resources to Build On*.

When I arrived at the school in July, the teachers were eager to begin. Principal Symanthia Harris said, "I am ready to go. I feel like we have been preparing for a year." Simali Suthar, Core Knowledge Coordinator, already had ordered materials and begun organizing them to support her colleagues in all aspects of implementation. Having participated in the entire week of professional development, she is sure to become a key resource for successful implementation. Nothing inspires me more than seeing this kind of thorough preparation.

I also want to note that McCullough piloted the new *Day-by-Day Planner* during their school-wide professional development. I was gratified by the many positive comments about the Planners, comments like:

- "Thank you for doing all of this work for us."
- "I have so much to work with, I feel so lucky."
- "I have an outline of a plan for the entire year — WOW!"
- "Yes — *the Day-by-Day Planner* helps the teacher to get organized and plan for the whole year, and then focus on one quarter at a time."

When asked at the end of the week if they felt prepared to implement Core Knowledge, one of the teachers wrote, "I am on my way. I know the direction I am going. I received great tools that will make my job planning much easier so I can focus on developing my lessons. I also have lessons and materials to choose from, and I can't wait to begin teaching this material." Like my new friend Jarrod at McCullough, I believe that Core Knowledge will still be "work, work, work," but I also believe that the *Day-by-Day Planner* will be true to its motto: "Spend less time organizing and more time teaching."

I asked Vivian Posey of Three Oaks Elementary to paint a picture of what new schools like McCullough will look like ten years down the road. Dr. Posey responded,

Teachers and administrators who work in Core Knowledge schools for this many years can expect to find parents who are proud that their children attend a "Core Knowledge" school because the school has a reputation for its rigorous academic program. [Over the past twelve years,] our community has become much more diverse economically, culturally, and socially. We have a state university in our backyard which brings university students in as mentors and tutors, while at the same time, the number of children that we serve from economically disadvantaged situations continues to grow. We still expect that all children will have equal opportunities to learn from Core Knowledge. [Schools that continue to implement through change] will also be able to experience a high level of collegiality from all staff members that results from the collaboration and teamwork that this program requires.

Asked the same question, Ms. Caprarotta of Three Oaks Middle School responded,

New schools can expect to find "a staff that has become cohesive and focused on developing integrated units. The staff is very involved in their specific curriculum because it is so well planned and so thorough. Common planning [time] provides the opportunity to dialog and plan together with departments and teams. Core Knowledge has been a very rewarding program for Three Oaks Middle. To schools just starting out, I suggest that they have a plan for the first year of thorough training and follow-up sessions. Also, have a year-to-year plan that allows for the administration to verify follow-through of the implementation. Expand on expectations each year. Make time for celebrations, not only for students, but for staff members as well. Be sure to send as many teachers and staff members as you can to the National Conference. It's a real motivator!!!

Being on the road can be exhausting, but also exhilarating. Visiting these schools has reinforced for me the

importance of leadership, dedication, and commitment. I have also been convinced of the vital importance of good resource materials and effective professional development. Clegern, Three Oaks Elementary, and Three Oaks Middle School have almost completed the formal process for becoming Official Visitation Sites. I imagine you will see them all up on stage at the national conference in Philadelphia! I also anticipate seeing McCullough Academy joining this prestigious group of model schools in the near future!

I have learned much about what schools want and need, but I'd like to know more so expect to see me, like Willie Nelson, "on the road again."

*Newsletter opening page: Clegern Elementary students visualize Core Knowledge lessons in a mural.*

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## I Madonnari in Santa Barbara

by Diana Brewster

Core Knowledge was artistically represented this year at the **I Madonnari festival** in Santa Barbara, California. I Madonnari refers to the Italian tradition



of ephemeral street-paintings of the Madonna. In Santa Barbara, the I Madonnari festival benefits the **Children's Creative Project**, a non-profit children's art education program. Every year people come to Santa Barbara in tour buses to see the brilliant chalk paintings on the street outside the old mission.



This year, parents of students in the Santa Barbara Community Academy, an official Core Knowledge School and visitation site, organized a group of K-6 student volunteers to participate in the festival. The two parents and seven children met four times before the event to plan their work. I spoke with Kirsten Zecher, one of the parents. "We decided right away," she said, "that our theme would be Core Knowledge." Challenged by how to represent Core Knowledge graphically, they alighted on the simple image of an apple core.

The design concept reinforced the students' visual arts curriculum, using repetitive design

elements in the manner of Andy Warhol and selecting warm/hot colors to make their designs appear to "pop" out of the two-dimensional plane. They dove deep into their Core Knowledge background where warm and cool colors are studied in kindergarten and anticipated future study since Andy Warhol and post WWII art are reserved for eighth graders. The children made many practice drawings to prepare for the big day and the pictures here demonstrate the splendid results of their efforts.

The Santa Barbara Community Academy School, a K-6 public elementary school, tries to implement the Core Knowledge Sequence fully and to correlate it closely with the California state standards in all subject areas. Principal Joan Jamieson claims, "Our school is particularly fortunate in having many enthusiastic parents who support the Core Knowledge curriculum, support exemplified by the I Madonnari project." Some parents bring their children from outlying districts to attend the downtown school. Ms. Jamieson notes that their school population is, on the



socio-economic scale, average for Santa Barbara's inner city area, the home of many laborers and service-providers. Fifty percent of the students receive some federal subsidies.



"We open our doors to visitors; we are very proud of what we are doing," Jamieson says.

For more information about Santa Barbara Academy visit their [website](#).



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## Oglethorpe Charter School Earns National Acclaim



Congratulations are in order for Oglethorpe Charter School in Savannah, Georgia. They were one of only eight outstanding charter schools described in a publication recently released by the U.S Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement.

You can link [here](#) to the entire chapter devoted to Oglethorpe in [Successful Charter Schools](#).

In his Introduction to the volume, Secretary of Education Rod Paige points out that all eight schools selected demonstrate the fallacy of thinking that a focus on student achievement would result in teaching nothing but reading and math. "Excellent schools," he asserts, "have always focused on delivering a well-rounded education. Certainly that's the kind of education the children of our nation's elite have always enjoyed, and it's the kind of education all of our children deserve."



Martha Nesbit, a founder of Oglethorpe school and currently its Director of Instruction, believes that Core Knowledge has helped Oglethorpe deliver this well-rounded education. "Because it is sequenced," she says, "We always know what our teachers are teaching and their units improve from year to year. ...Our students do well on state-mandated tests because of our emphasis on critical thinking and the teaching of basic skills." Besides the Core Knowledge curriculum, Ms. Nesbit lists some features of Oglethorpe that helped bring it to the notice of educational leaders on the national level:

- Mandatory parental involvement enforced by a family contract
- Exemplary teachers and ongoing professional development
- Collaborative decision-making
- Terrific on-site leadership
- High expectations for students

Ms. Nesbit's pride in her school, its teachers, and its students is as obvious as it is well-earned.

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## A Music Teacher of Note

by Mary Kathryn Hassett

*Crestwood students continued singing even as volcanic eruptions signaled the last days of Pompeii. Veteran music teacher, Debra Lindsay conducted the final chorus, leading some sixty elementary school students in a multi-media recreation of this famous episode in Roman history. Sixth graders playing Tacitus and Pliny the Younger were among the characters who mourned the burial of the elegant city under the molten lava spewed by Vesuvius.*



The audience who watched this production of *The Last Days of Pompeii* at

the end of last year at Crestwood Elementary School in Springfield, Virginia must have marveled that elementary students could reach so far into the distant past and grasp it so completely. But people familiar with the past performances of music teacher, Debra Kay Robinson Lindsay, were not in the least surprised. The musical drama, which Ms. Lindsay composed and conducted herself, demonstrates Core Knowledge working at its best.

Lindsay took inspiration from her own trip to Pompeii and translated her excitement into a project that combined music, drama, oratory, history, archeology, stagecraft and yes, even science. Student set designers for the production studied how volcanoes are formed and what causes them to erupt. Speeches by Tacitus and Seneca touched on Roman rhetoric and philosophy. Everyday life in a provincial city of the Roman Empire was made real for audience and actor alike in a banquet scene featuring a menu of sow's udders and dormice and honey sprinkled with poppy seeds. Ms. Lindsay's devotion to thorough research was apparent in this as in her previous productions of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *the Wizard of Oz* and *Julius Caesar*. Students can hardly wait for the *Aenied*, which is she working on now.



"The kids have so much fun," she exclaims, "They hardly notice that their work on the play covers not only several Core Knowledge topics, but also many benchmarks of learning cited in the state standards. "They especially like it when I include gladiators in the scene," she adds, "but neither the students nor I promote any "sugar coating" of historical topics. Ms. Lindsay accepts any performer who wants to perform on a "first come" basis. Participation is not based so much on talent as on persistence and willingness to learn. She credits her colleagues for supporting and adding to her creative efforts, especially her former principal, Patricia Zissios, who left Crestwood this year to assume the principalship at Lyles Crouch Traditional Academy (a Friend of Core Knowledge school) in Alexandria, Virginia.

Ms. Lindsay has taught at Crestwood for five years and spent the twenty-four previous years as a general music teacher in the Fairfax County School District. After graduating from Shepherd College in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, she began her teaching career in that state. Despite her considerable experience as an educator, Ms.

Lindsay's enthusiasm for learning has not waned. "Core Knowledge," she declares, "continues to be a learning experience for me."



Ms. Lindsay's work has been recognized in many ways, including by a Fulbright grant to study in Japan and a Virginia Department of Education grant in Russian studies. In 2004 she was nominated for the National Teacher Hall of Fame and in 2003 was designated as the Virginia Outstanding Virginia Music Educator. That same year she was the Al and Winnie Hodgson Award Winner in the teacher awards sponsored by the *Washington Post*. Her work is familiar to many other Core Knowledge teachers from her popular presentations at four different Core Knowledge conferences, most recently in Atlanta, where her session was entitled "Realism in Music, the Underground Railroad." Several of her musical works have been published by Peg Hoenack's Music Works.

She is generous in sharing ideas for music curriculum with colleagues. Interested parties can contact her at [Debra.Lindsay@fcps.edu](mailto:Debra.Lindsay@fcps.edu).

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## A Minnesota Teacher Puts His Hunches to the Test

by Bruce Rodgers

*The following essay is the first of an occasional series designed to let teachers, administrators, and parents tell the story of their experiences with Core Knowledge. In this story, Bruce Rodgers reflects on his teaching of Core Knowledge in middle school and gives us a glimpse of a larger study he is doing on the influence of Core Knowledge on student achievement and student discipline. We're looking for more stories for future issues - research studies, opinion pieces, personal experiences, student triumphs - whatever you think might interest the subscribers to Common Knowledge, all of whom are united by a common interest in children getting the best possible education.*

During the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) movement of the late 1980's and early 1990's, a group of concerned parents in Rochester, Minnesota began to question the merits of this educational philosophy that stressed a vague, skills-based approach to learning and seemed to undervalue solid knowledge and content learning. Many teachers were skeptical as well, but administrative pressure was applied at the highest levels to implement OBE as the stated philosophy of the Rochester Public Schools. Concerned parents began to lobby the local school board to create a "choice" elementary school that would not focus on OBE. These parents were well versed in educational matters and realized that the curriculum they wanted in this new elementary school was Core Knowledge.

Responding to a vigorous grass roots campaign that ran from 1991 to 1995, the school board agreed to the proposal of having one elementary school in Rochester (out of about twenty) adopt Core Knowledge as its K-5 curriculum. The board also agreed that the students in this elementary school would have the opportunity to continue with the Core Knowledge curriculum in middle school.

The school board, however, was reluctant to change the entire curriculum of the middle schools to Core Knowledge or to displace neighborhood students by changing just the required number of sections to accommodate Core Knowledge students. A compromise was reached. Two middle schools in Rochester, where the majority of the Core Knowledge elementary students were slated to attend, would each adopt the Core Knowledge curriculum in two sections. This would give about seventy students the opportunity to study the *Core Knowledge Sequence* at each middle school. Since there were only approximately fifty fifth graders at the new Core Knowledge elementary school, the program was thrown open to volunteers who wanted to participate. The response was enormous and then, as now, there is a large waiting list at both Washington Elementary and Kellogg Middle Schools in Rochester.

This brings us to the point where I come in. I had been teaching eighth grade history and geography in the middle school for many years and I was intrigued by the content of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. The seventh grade Core Knowledge history and geography program was very similar to the eighth grade school district curriculum I had been teaching for ten years. Also, I was told by the administration that if I wanted, I could have both the seventh and eighth grade sections of Core Knowledge, allowing me to keep students in my classroom for two years. This continuity was something I had always wanted to have. The decision to begin teaching Core Knowledge was one of the best moves of my career. I discovered very quickly how valuable the entire philosophy of Core Knowledge was to students' lives. What I wasn't prepared for, however, was the difference in attitude, discipline, and academic motivation of the Core Knowledge students who came to my room. They were focused,

motivated, and positive. It was indeed a shocking change from the kind of apathy I have seen over the years in many students.

I am now in my sixth year of teaching Core Knowledge in grades seven and eight, and as the years went by, I continued to discover more positive differences in kids who were exposed to the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. The issue that puzzled me, however, was the performance of the students who had volunteered for the program without a Core Knowledge background from elementary school. Half of our Core Knowledge students were new to the program at grade six; yet they seemed to catch up very quickly and became very successful students in a short period of time. I decided to find out if my imagination was playing tricks on me, or if the Core Knowledge curriculum was indeed a part of the success I was seeing. Quite honestly, I was also getting a little tired of hearing many people claim that Core Knowledge students were no better off than other students and that we were wasting our time. I became very passionate about discovering the truth.

As part of a larger graduate-level study for Hamline University in Minnesota, I began to track Core Knowledge students in several areas. As a basis for the study, I looked only at characteristics of students who entered the Core Knowledge program in grade six and compared them to a randomly selected control group, matched in number and gender. I used student scores in the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) to group students together as of grade six. This means that the students in both the subject group and the control group, generally speaking, had the same ability levels at the start of middle school. I compared student gains in CogAT score, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, The Minnesota Basic Standards Reading Test, and grade point average. I also studied the differences in absenteeism and discipline referrals to the main office administration. When I started to compare the numbers, the results were staggering. I now firmly believe that Core Knowledge not only helps students to acquire a solid knowledge base, but helps them to become better citizens as well. This is true for both kids who started Core Knowledge in elementary school and for those who started in grade six. See for yourself:

- Students who began Core Knowledge in grade six made a 14.3 gain in their mean Verbal Standard Age Score on the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) by grade nine while the control group made a 1.3 gain.
- Students who began Core Knowledge in grade six made a 53.8 increase in their mean standard score from the grade six Iowa Tests of Basic Skills to the grade nine Iowa Tests of Educational Development while a control group made a 38.8 gain.
- Students who began Core Knowledge in grade six had higher mean scaled scores on the Minnesota Basic Standards Reading Test (705) compared to the control group (675). This translates to 94% of correct answers for Core Knowledge cohort and 90% for the control group.
- A randomly-selected control group missed entire days of school 1.6 times more than the Core Knowledge students.
- A randomly-selected control group received disciplinary office referrals 2.3 times more than Core Knowledge students.
- Core Knowledge students in grade six through eight had a mean grade point average of 3.24 while a control group had a mean GPA of 3.03.

It is clear to me from my research that the Core Knowledge curriculum not only helps students gain a solid foundation of knowledge and literacy, but also helps create a sense of community and good citizenship, even when the curriculum is implemented in only a few classrooms within a larger school.

The first students who began Core Knowledge in grade six at my middle school are going to be seniors in high school in the upcoming school year. It is no surprise to me that they are amongst the leaders of their class in all areas of interest. I shall look forward to watching their successes in college and beyond!

**Bruce Rodgers** has been teaching at Kellogg Middle School in Rochester, Minnesota for 15 years. He is an avid historian and genealogist and has even been seen in costume throughout the country portraying Thomas Jefferson. Bruce is currently working on a novel about the state of the eighth grade mentality in the United States today and plans to complete his doctorate in education at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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# Meet Your Core Knowledge Friends in Philadelphia!

by Emily Cherry

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."  
-Benjamin Franklin

## 14<sup>th</sup> Core Knowledge National Conference



From March 3-March 5, 2005, the famously friendly city of Philadelphia will be the temporary home to upwards of 2,200 educators and administrators attending the 14<sup>th</sup> Core Knowledge National Conference. The conference is an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas, expand their knowledge, and even receive college credit for professional development. Sessions include teacher-created lesson plans, subject area presentations, conversations with experts in the field, and instruction in the implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum. This year, attendees will gather at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown to reaffirm and reinvigorate their commitment to education.

New to this year's conference is a panel that will discuss how schools can build better relationships with the press. Conference attendees will hear from such experts in the field as Ruth Wattenberg, editor of *American Educator*, and Julie Blair, education reporter at *Education Week* and author of the recently published book, *Building Bridges with the Press: A Guide for Educators*. Other panelists include senior education reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dale Mezzacappa, and Karin Chenoweth, formerly with the *Washington Post* and currently on staff with the Education Trust.

School administrators will enjoy an expanded leadership strand and all teachers can benefit from a brand new media and technology strand showcasing software advances that will contribute to the learning and teaching experience. Both science and history teachers will be pleased to find many sessions inspired by Philadelphia's favorite son, Ben Franklin, man of letters and invention.

This year's keynote luncheon speaker is, in fact, none other than Ben Franklin himself - as portrayed by Ralph Archbold, the city of Philadelphia's official Franklin representative and one of the 15 members of the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission, a group established by the President and Congress to oversee Ben's 300th birthday in 2006. Conference participants will enjoy a complimentary luncheon as Ben shares his wit and witticisms.

After looking towards the past with Mr. Franklin, attendees will look towards the future as they spend some time with technology: virtual school tours add a new and exciting element to the 2005 conference. These

school-produced media presentations will highlight teachers and students in classroom settings and live-action lesson plans. Participants will have the opportunity to "visit" and observe schools that have succeeded with the Core Knowledge curriculum.

Preschool teachers and administrators can also take advantage of the pre-conference Preschool Institutes. To be held at the Philadelphia Marriott in the days preceding the National Conference, the Institutes provide attendees with instruction and guidance in the implementation of the content-rich preschool program. Working with the new preschool assessment tool will be featured in many institute sessions.

For more information on the 14th Core Knowledge National Conference in Philadelphia, please visit our [website](#) or contact Conference Registrar [Emily Cherry](#). The web site lists the many local attractions that are easily accessible from downtown Philadelphia, cradle of American democracy and one of our most vital urban centers

Teachers and administrators interested in submitting a unit for presentation during the conference can also find detailed information at our [website](#). We hope that you will be able to join us in Philadelphia to see old friends and meet new ones, encounter the spirit of Ben Franklin, and learn why "an investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

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## COMMON KNOWLEDGE™

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORE KNOWLEDGE®  
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VOLUME 17, NUMBER 3, SEPTEMBER 2004

### [New Member on the Core Knowledge Board of Directors](#)

Ruth Wattenberg, Editor of *American Educator*, has accepted an appointment to the Core Knowledge Board of Directors effective June, 2004. She previously served as Director of Educational Issues for the American Federation of Teachers, a department responsible for helping to improve schools through union-sponsored professional development programs for teachers, through redesigning programs for low-performing schools, through publications devoted to academic standards in the United States and abroad, and through publicizing NICHHD standards on early reading. In the 1980's, she was Coordinator of AFT's Education for Democracy Project, which tried to build public support for programs intended to instill in students a deep commitment to democratic principles. She has represented the American Federation of Teachers on committees that reviewed proposed national standards and other materials in history, civics, and geography.

# Colorado Conference Open to ALL

*by Holly Hensey*

## What is the Colorado Core Knowledge Conference?

This yearly conference, which has been sponsored for the last five years by the Regional Center and the National Core Knowledge Coordinator of Colorado, Holly Hensey, provides teachers, administrators, and others involved with Core Knowledge schools with opportunities to network and share ideas with each other. It also provides those wishing to learn more about Core Knowledge with an opportunity to attend sessions and network with others regarding Core Knowledge. The conference will provide concurrent breakout sessions during the day that cover a variety of grade levels, subject areas, and topics.

Core Knowledge Conferences in Colorado began in 1999 when over 300 teachers, staff members, and administrators attended the one-day conference with over 34 sessions. Attendance has steadily increased and in 2003, 850 people from over 90 schools and organizations attended the conference held at Jefferson Academy where 150 sessions were offered. Dennis Denenberg, well-known author and speaker, initiated the conference with a moving general session.

This year, the conference will take place once again at Jefferson Academy in Broomfield, CO on Friday, October 22nd. At least 150 sessions will be offered and Dennis Denenberg, Jim Weiss, and Marcy Cook have already been scheduled to present.

## Who Can Attend the Conference?

- Teachers from Core Knowledge schools
- Administrators from Core Knowledge schools
- Board members from Core Knowledge schools
- Parents from Core Knowledge schools
- District level personnel
- Brand new Core Knowledge schools
- Experienced Core Knowledge schools
- Anyone interested in finding out more about Core Knowledge

## Breakout Sessions

We will have concurrent sessions throughout the day that will cover many grade levels, subject areas, and topics. Presentations will be made by educators currently working in Core Knowledge schools as well as by experts from various institutions. Some of the areas covered will be:

- Presentations for Preschool–8<sup>th</sup> grade topics covered in the Core Knowledge Sequence
- Presentations for special areas (art, music, technology, library science, special education, etc.)
- Presentations for both new and veteran administrators
- Presentations on programs well adapted for use with Core Knowledge
- Presentations on how to better implement Core Knowledge

## Vendors

The conference will feature a large number of vendors from around the state and country. Vendors that attended the conference last year include: Oxford University Press, Harcourt School Publishing, Mad Science of Denver, Shurley Instructional Materials, and Usborne Books.

## How can I register for the conference?

Click [here](#) to read more and register.

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## Links We Recommend

If you love Common Knowledge and would like to receive other free electronic newsletters on education, consider the following links.

- **The Education Gadfly** — a weekly newsletter issued by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and edited by Chester Finn. The Education Gadfly focuses on academic standards, testing and accountability, charter schools, school choice, and other educational reform issues.
- **Twenty-First Century Schools Project Bulletin** — a biweekly electronic newsletter published by the Progressive Policy Institute. Topics covered include federal education policy, education standards, and charter schools.
- **PEN Weekly Newsblast** — a weekly newsletter from the Public Education Network, with links to education stories, chiefly from newspapers, around the country. Each issue also includes updates on Grants and Funding Source.
- **A Closer Look** — a new biweekly electronic newsletter from the American Federation of Teachers that "seeks to bring a more balanced debate to education and labor issues and counter the biased educational research, distorted news stories and uninformed opinion that too often parade as fact."
- **Teacher Quality Newsletter** — a bi-monthly newsletter published by the National Council on Teacher Quality; focuses on ideas and initiatives designed to increase teacher quality, including teacher education programs, teacher tests, merit pay, and alternative teacher certification programs.
- **EdWeek Update** — a weekly newsletter that features current articles from Education Week, including news from early childhood, K-12 education, and higher education. This is one of several newsletters offered by EdWeek.
- **EducationNews** — a daily newsletter from EducationNews.Org. This features education news and commentary from national and local media in the US, Canada and the UK.
- **NIEER Online Newsletter** — a biweekly newsletter featuring the latest news and information on early education research and policy.
- **The Education Innovator** — a weekly newsletter published by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement to promote promising and innovative practices in education.



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## New Publications

This section can lead you through website descriptions of the new publications being featured in our latest catalog. For content summaries and news about price and availability click on any of the following titles:

### [PreK Assessment Tool](#) — now available

For teachers who think early childhood education should be about learning and who want to know how well their students are mastering the content and skills presented in the Core Knowledge Preschool Sequence

### [Day-by-Day Planners K–5](#) — now available

For teachers who want to spend less time planning and more time teaching, a versatile new tool. Grades 6-8 will be ready by March 2005

### [Art Prints K–5](#) — now available

For art teachers (and those covering the fine arts) who are looking for a convenient way to teach the notable art works presented in the Core Knowledge Sequence

### [Text Resources K–5](#) — now available

For teachers longing to be released from copy machine duty and library searches, all the short texts discussed in the Core Knowledge Sequence, now in one packet

### [Teacher Handbooks K and Grade 1](#) — available Oct. and Dec. respectively

For teachers needing to brush up on select topics, find new resources, discover new teaching strategies, and make cross curricular connections

Order now for later shipment

### [King Arthur](#) — available in October

For teachers looking for the perfect introduction to this enduring legend, the latest addition to the Core Classics series — ready in early October

### [What Your Fourth Grader Needs to Know](#)

For teachers and parents who want the latest additions to and alignments with the latest *Core Knowledge Sequence*

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## Autumn Preschool Institutes

Each autumn preschool directors and teachers from around the county come to Charlottesville to expand their professional horizons and enjoy Virginia's lovely fall colors. Two new training modules are included in this fall's Preschool Institutes: **Mathematical Reasoning and Number Sense/Orientation in Time and Space** and **Scientific Reasoning and Knowledge**.

The Institutes give teachers a rich and empowering four days of solid professional development conducted in a room full of energetic preschool teachers and administrators. "I can't wait to get back to class and get started!" Preschool teachers exclaim frequently.

On Monday and Tuesday, October 18–19, in the **Mathematical Reasoning module**, teachers will learn tools to help build their students' competence and confidence in mathematical reasoning and number sense using proven teaching techniques and game activities from the Number Worlds Math Program. Math skills assessment as well as the connections between math and literacy will also be explored. Click [here](#) to see more training objectives.

The registration fee for Math (\$400/teacher) includes a complete classroom-ready Number Worlds Math kit and manual. Because the Number Worlds Math program is integral to the Core Knowledge Preschool approach to mathematics, acquiring the kit is mandatory.

On October 20–21, Wednesday and Thursday, in the **Scientific Reasoning module**, teachers will explore ways of teaching the scientific reasoning process to preschoolers. Click [here](#) to learn more about this training. The registration fee is \$200/teacher.

Participants stay in the **Cavalier Inn**, which is owned by the University of Virginia and is adjacent to the campus. Within walking distance, you can find a range of eateries suitable for any budget. The Inn provides free shuttle service to and from the Charlottesville airport. Ask for the Autumn Institute's rate of \$75/night, which includes a deluxe continental breakfast.

Area attractions, to name a few, include the University of Virginia, whose central architectural feature, **The Academical Village**, is a World Heritage Site, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, the vibrant downtown walking mall. Click [here](#) for more tourist destinations in Charlottesville and Albemarle County.

To be part of this invaluable training opportunity click [here](#) to download a registration form in PDF format, or click [here](#) to register online using our secure website.

Participants interested in more introductory level training might want to consider the **Getting Started** or **Social Skills** training scheduled for Colorado and Arizona this fall. See our [calendar of events](#) to learn about these additional opportunities.

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### [Link» Reading Too Much Into the Need for Reading Instruction](#)

From time to time we will offer links to articles from other publications that address various educational issues. This article about reading from the *Washington Post* references some experts well known to folks in the Core Knowledge network: E. D. Hirsch, Jr., G. Reid Lyon, and Louisa C. Moats. We have invited the author, Karin Chenoweth, to join our panel on school/media relations, a new session being offered at our national conference in Philadelphia next March.