

### **Core Knowledge Teacher Survey - Summary Report – May 2003**

For the past three years, Sam Ayers has assisted Lubbock area campuses with implementation of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. In addition to providing overview training, he has also organized additional professional development opportunities for teachers including an annual regional conference, an annual Summer Unit Writing Institute, and grade level roundtable sessions. Teachers and have also been provided with updates concerning resources, travel scholarships to the national conferences, and supplemental student programs. Through the professional development opportunities and periodic campus visits, Sam Ayers has visited informally with teachers about various aspects of their experience with implementing Core Knowledge in their classrooms. The purpose of this survey was to formally collect data from LISD teachers concerning their experiences, impressions, and opinions of implementing the *Core Knowledge Sequence*.

The survey was administered by campus principals at ten elementary campuses in the Lubbock Independent School District during the last week of April and the first week of May 2003. The campuses participating in the survey included Brown, Dupre, Honey, Iles, Murfee, Rush, Waters, Wheatley, Wheelock, and Roscoe Wilson. A total of 144 K-6 teachers completed the survey. Of the 144 respondents, 61% (88) were primary teachers (K-3), and 39% (56) were intermediate teachers and specialists-art and music (see chart A). They represented teachers completing their first year of teaching as well as veteran teachers. Of these, 85% (122) have three or less years with Core Knowledge. Their campuses have been involved in implementing the *Core Knowledge Sequence* for varying amounts of time ranging from one to seven years. The level of implementation ranges from one strand to all eight content strands included in *The Sequence*.

**Chart A**

<b>Teachers Grade levels</b>								
K	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	Spec.	Total
19%	17%	15%	10%	17%	8%	10%	4%	100%
27	25	21	15	24	11	15	6	144

**Chart B**

<b>Content Strands Addressed</b>						
Lang. Arts	World Hist.	Amer. Hist.	Science	Art	Music	Math
67%	56%	53%	54%	11%	7%	1%

The survey participants were asked to read and respond to eight statements related to their experience with implementing the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. The statements and the results of their responses are summarized as follows:

**Students find the Core Knowledge topics to be interesting.**

99.3%	143	Agree
.7%	1	Disagree

*Teachers have informally mentioned that many of the topics included in the Core Knowledge Sequence are innately interesting to their students, often times much more interesting than many of the topics addressed in the traditional curriculum. Although not intended as a direct comparison, the results of this survey item overwhelmingly indicate that teachers notice that their students find the Core Knowledge topics to be interesting.*

**Students find the Core Knowledge topics to be challenging.**

99.3%	143	Agree
.7%	1	Disagree

*Teachers have informally indicated when skimming the Core Knowledge Sequence that the topics appear challenging. The results of this survey item indicate that this continues to be the case when the topics are actually presented to students.*

**I often become a learner again before teaching a Core Knowledge unit.**

98.6%	142	Agree
.7%	1	Disagree
.7%	1	No response

*A side benefit informally mentioned by teachers is that they often become active learners themselves as they read background information and prepare units for the topics included in the Core Knowledge Sequence. The results of this survey item substantiate these comments.*

**I can teach TEKS while presenting Core Knowledge topics.**

99.3%	143	Agree
.7%	1	Disagree

*In initial training and at Core Knowledge staff development sessions, teachers are encouraged to incorporate TEKS (skills) into the Core Knowledge units (content). The units developed by Texas teachers and shared at the West Texas Core Knowledge always include related TEKS. The Core Knowledge Internet site includes a TEKS correlation with The Sequence, and a revised correlation of TEKS will be distributed to interested Lubbock area teachers in August 2003. While the revised correlation should be helpful to teachers, the results of this survey item indicate that teachers overwhelmingly indicate that they can address TEKS with their students within the context of their Core Knowledge units.*

**I am committed to using Core Knowledge in our school.**

98.6%	142	Agree
1.4%	2	Disagree

*Thus far, Core Knowledge implementation has been a site-based decision rather than a top-down mandate. The results of this survey item indicate that regardless of whether a campus is implementing one, two, or all eight Core Knowledge content strands, the teachers are overwhelmingly committed including the Core Knowledge supplemental topics in their classrooms.*

**My principal is committed to using Core Knowledge in our school.**

98.6%	142	Agree
.7%	1	Disagree
.7%	1	No Response

*Teachers must be committed to teaching specific content and skills if students are to be successful. Ideally, principals should be supportive of what is taught in their schools. The results of this survey item indicate that teachers overwhelmingly perceived their principals to be supportive of their efforts to incorporate Core Knowledge in their classrooms and schools.*

**Core Knowledge topics must always be presented using a specific instructional strategy.**

28.5%	41	Agree
69.5%	100	Disagree
2.0%	3	No Response

*In the initial training and related professional development sessions, teachers are reminded that Core Knowledge is about supplementing their classroom content. At the Summer Unit Writing Institute, teachers are trained in the Core Knowledge unit format used for consistency when sharing units between teachers from different states and utilized in unit presentations at the Core Knowledge National Conference. However, the format serves as an outline for organizing daily lessons. It does not specify particular methods for teaching lessons or units. Recognizing that teachers possess expertise in the areas of instruction (and they know which strategies are most effective with their specific students), strategies and teaching methods remain decisions to be made by individual teachers. While the results of this survey item indicate that a majority of the teachers surveyed understand that they are empowered to utilize the strategies they deem most effective with their students, still a sizable number seem to have misunderstood. Consequently, this probably needs to be addressed in future professional development sessions with new and existing Core Knowledge faculties. However, it is also possible that they interpreted the item to mean that once their own unit is developed, it should be presented following their prescribed instructional strategies.*

**The teaching of Core Knowledge topics is a distraction to preparation for the TAAS/TAKS.**

2.7%	4	Agree
91.8%	132	Disagree
5.5%	8	No response

*In the current age of educational accountability, parents, teachers, and administrators must be concerned about the teaching of TEKS and student preparation for the TAAS/TEKS. Novice and veteran teachers recognize that teaching the skills that will be tested must be a priority. They apparently recognized that skills must be taught through some content. The results of this survey item indicate that these teachers recognize that the incorporation of skill practice using Core Knowledge topics as content has not been a distraction to their responsibility.*

The response rate for the remaining eight items on the survey was down slightly. Apparently some teachers (24 or 17%) did not realize there were additional items on the back of the survey page. However, the response rate (120 or 83%) was still respectable and provides useful information. Additionally, these questions were open ended, and all the responses were beneficial.

The first four items on the second page addressed professional development in the form of the West Texas Core Knowledge Conference (held on the campus of Lubbock Christian University for the past three years) and the Core Knowledge National Conferences. The items recorded the number of conference teachers had attended and the perceived benefits of participating in these conferences. The results follow.

**How many West Texas Core Knowledge Conferences have you attended?**

*Of the original 144 survey participants, 120 or 83% responded to this question. A total of 67% (97) teachers have attended at least one of the regional conferences in Lubbock (see Chart 4).*

**Chart 4**

**Attendance at the West Texas Core Knowledge Conference**

No Response	Never Attended	Attended 1 Conference	Attended 2 Conferences	Attended 3 Conferences	Total
17%	16%	24%	30%	13%	100%
24	23	35	43	19	144

**How has attending the regional conference contributed to your professional development?**

*This survey item was open-ended. Consequently, the participants recorded a variety of responses. The most common response among the teachers were **new ideas, lesson plans, units, and instructional materials**. The collective responses of teachers excluding duplication are listed below under the subheadings **of useful instructional information and personal motivation**.*

**Useful Instructional Information:**

- Ideas learned from other teachers
- Use ideas from speakers
- Use sample lessons
- Ideas for units
- Sharing with other teachers
- Provided local resources for lessons
- Helped me understand the CK Sequence
- Topic information
- Teaching ideas and contacts
- More understanding of what to teach
- Application and strategies
- Ideas and resources
- Networking opportunities
- Little
- Talking to other teachers about lessons
- More aware of Core Knowledge strands
- Great examples of how to put together units
- Not much
- Lesson plan ideas and learned how to better incorporate
- Informed me about the purpose of CK

**Personal Motivation**

- New approaches and plans to teaching specific CK units
- Refreshing
- Keeps me interested
- Realize that I am a good teacher that does quality lessons
- Presentations are motivating
- Motivating to see units and teaching ideas
- I've had to evaluate my own units
- More enthusiasm about CK
- Gave me the motivation to use fantastic ideas!
- Networking opportunities
- Share ideas
- Encouragement to do more
- Motivational and contributed to more in depth unit studies
- Learn from different presentations
- New and exciting ideas

## How many Core Knowledge National Conferences have you attended?

*Of the original 144 survey participants, 115 or 80% responded to this question. A total of 30% (43) teachers have attended at least one national conference during the past four years (see Chart 5).*

**Chart 5**

<b>Attendance at the Core Knowledge National Conference</b>						
<u>No</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>Attended 1</u>	<u>Attended 2</u>	<u>Attended 3</u>	<u>Attended 4</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Response</u>	<u>Attended</u>	<u>Conference</u>	<u>Conferences</u>	<u>Conferences</u>	<u>Conferences</u>	<u>Conferences</u>
21%	50%	17%	6%	4%	2%	100%
29	72	25	9	6	3	144

## How has attending the national conference contributed to your professional development?

*This survey item was open-ended. Consequently, the participants recorded a variety of responses. The most common response among the teachers were **new ideas, lesson plans, units, useful information, and available resources**. The collective responses of teachers excluding duplication are listed below.*

### Useful Instructional Information

- Incredible ideas
- Specific units
- Different ways to develop units
- Watching others present
- Hearing professionals outside of the classroom is interesting
- Wonderful presentations
- Visiting new schools implementing CK
- Gain knowledge on how to deliver the content
- Received valuable lesson plans
- Helped me implement CK better
- Discover what other schools around the U.S. are doing
- Excellent vendors
- Opportunity to look at resources
- Informative speakers
- Wealth of materials

### **Personal Motivation**

- Grow professionally through sharing with educators from around the country
- I am having fun teaching it
- Always motivating and recharging for teachers
- Relaxation
- Inspiration
- Talking with people all around the U.S. really made an impression about how great CK is
- Getting to know other teachers
- Encouraged me and built up my confidence
- Re-enthusiasm

### **What do you identify as one of the benefits of teaching Core Knowledge topics to students?**

The Core Knowledge has identified many benefits for supplementing the existing content with that of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. However, this item was included in order for local teachers to record the perceived benefits based upon their experiences with implementing Core Knowledge with Lubbock students. Their responses were grouped under the subheadings of **knowledge, enrichment, high interest, individual student needs, challenging, and misc. comments**. Duplicated responses were omitted.

### **Knowledge**

- Builds on prior knowledge
- Sturdier foundation for students
- Well rounded students
- Students are growing intellectually – gaining knowledge
- Plant seeds for prior knowledge needed for upper grade levels
- Allows students to be very informed
- Widens our students' experiences
- Offers broader knowledge for students
- Being exposed to knowledge they wouldn't otherwise be exposed to
- Wider knowledge base
- CK is a guide to coherent content from grade to grade
- CK helps promote steady academic progress as students build their knowledge and skills from one year to the next
- Students gaining more knowledge in geography and history
- Students gaining life-long useful information
- Expanding students knowledge of topics that would not be taught except for CK
- Relates to life and life situations
- Learning is more global
- Giving students new information and extending information already taught
- Can build from year to year
- Establish a broad span of knowledge that allows connections to be made

### **Enrichment**

- Excellent content to teach skills and objectives
- Students are motivated to learn the content beyond the average grade level
- Offers students enriched content
- Challenging units
- More in depth study of a particular topic
- Higher order thinking thinks
- Enriched knowledge and vocabulary
- Exposed to literature they would not read otherwise
- Classical education
- Enrichment and expansion of many topics
- Challenges the students
- Higher level thinking

### **High Interest**

- The content is rich and meaningful
- Interesting
- Offers high interest topics
- Students are interested in topics
- Interesting subjects
- CK makes them excited about social studies each day.
- Kids get excited about history
- Students are actively engaged in learning
- Students excited about learning
- Not the same “boring stuff”

### **Individual Student Needs**

- Topics help close the gaps in student learning
- Always interactive
- Students become actively involved in learning
- All students learn through CK-not just the higher students
- Students are highly motivated
- Interesting to teachers and students
- In depth learning
- Interesting and exciting for students
- Extensions of learning for G/T and high achievers

### **Challenging**

- Julius Caesar is big with them at that age-normally they would not encounter Shakespeare until junior or senior high
- No routine question/answer sessions
- Challenges both the quick learners and the not so quick learners
- Makes students stretch their boundaries
- Broader concepts

### **Misc. Comments**

- The same benefits as teaching any other units that are curriculum and developmentally appropriate
- Fresh and exciting, eye-opening topics
- Students love it
- Vertically aligned
- Varied topics presented
- Fun activities
- Students learn more than you think they will – details
- You can make application to every subject area, and it makes more sense to the children
- Consistency in subject areas
- CK extends our traditional curriculum
- I love the rich content!
- Gives students the whole picture of learning
- Student interest and involvement
- New material every year
- School [curriculum] is more aligned
- Broad range of topics
- Deeper understanding of topics while doing TEKS
- Students really understand/ grasp the units because it is hands-on
- We don't reteach the same material every year
- Topics are age-appropriate
- No gaps or unnecessary repeating
- Don't repeat units covered in lower grades

**What do you identify as one of the primary challenges to teaching Core Knowledge topics to students?**

*As with any initiative, implementation of the Core Knowledge Sequence also entails additional challenges and responsibilities for teachers. This is true whether a campus has decided to implement one, two, or all eight content strands. While the responses varied, the consistent challenges listed by teachers included **lack of time to research the topics, lack of time to thoroughly plan or write units, and difficulty locating grade level appropriate instructional materials to teach the topics.** Since the initial implementation of Core Knowledge in Lubbock schools, the number of units available on the Core Knowledge Internet site has dramatically increased. The number of books and instructional resources has also increased. The recently released Pearson Learning geography and history books for K-5 have been a useful resource. Information about these resources is shared with interested teachers at the conferences and at grade level roundtables held in Lubbock during the school year. While principals have been encouraged to provide common conference/planning time by grade levels, this is not always possible. Some schools have utilized stipends to provide teachers with stipends for summer planning or to provide substitutes while teachers meet to research and plan. While time for planning and instruction will always be a concern, the Core Knowledge Foundation is developing Teacher resource binders similar to teachers' guides. These resources will include background information, activity/project suggestions, and instructional aids (maps and worksheets). This resource should provide teachers with much needed assistance addressing both the resource and time issues. The resource is expected to be ready for release in early fall 2003.*

*The challenges listed by the respondents did not seem to have a negative affect on the teachers' implementation efforts as indicated by the overwhelmingly positive responses to other items on the survey. In other items, teachers recorded significantly positive responses about Core Knowledge as a supplemental curriculum and identified multiple benefits of Core Knowledge for themselves and for their students.*

## **Time Concerns**

- Time for research and reading
- Time to develop units
- Time for searching for materials and lessons
- Fitting it all in
- Covering all of the topics while teaching district curriculum
- Researching the topics thoroughly
- Time-consuming
- Making up own assessment for grades
- Make sure I cover all the wonderful stories
- Learning the material before I teach it
- Writing new units in the CK format
- Integrating LISD material
- Teachers need to learn/relearn the topics before teaching

## **Resource Concerns**

- Finding information
- Not enough resources
- Need more lessons on the Internet
- Finding instructional resources
- Not enough information with starting new program
- Grade appropriate materials

## **Misc. Concerns**

- Teachers who aren't committed to it
- Hard to end units
- Teaching only partial areas
- Units are challenging to write initially
- Hard to grasp everything at once
- Too much information – hard to narrow down
- Teachers who use materials designated for our grade level
- I find myself always reading ahead to ensure I have learned all the details and facts
- Many topics are developmentally inappropriate-such as teaching Shakespeare to elementary students – watered down Shakespeare is not Shakespeare, so why bother?
- Needs to begin in kindergarten
- Lack of student background
- Communicating with grade level
- Money to buy books
- Teaching all the TEKS with all the CK units
- Students exposed to the basics and variety of topics
- Some topics are so above grade level
- Fitting CK into TEKS for the grade level
- Vocabulary
- Finding a stopping place-I could continue some units all year

## **What are some of the parent comments you have received concerning Core Knowledge?**

*This open-ended survey item invited teachers to record both favorable and unfavorable parent comments shared with them regarding Core Knowledge. The responses were overwhelmingly positive and consisted of paraphrased comments and direct quotes. The responses are listed below.*

- They love the projects.
- “Your teaching what?”
- Children talk about the subjects at home.
- Children want to do further study with parents
- “Wow! I didn’t learn that until high school or maybe even college.”
- The CK units are what the kids talk about at the dinner table.
- Parents are amazed and think their kids are smart.
- I only receive positive comments concerning CK from parents. They are excited that we go the extra mile to teach it.
- CK challenges their child.
- Parents like the way the curriculum flows together
- “My child knows more about Jane Goodall than I do.”
- Parents enjoy the projects students do at home.
- They really enjoy it.
- Their children look forward to the CK units.
- Students have gone home and taught parents things they didn’t know.
- Parents are impressed with the depth of the content.
- Parents can’t believe their children learn so much in 1<sup>st</sup> grade.
- Projects are high level
- Parents are impressed with their children learning about the seven continents
- Children are really excited and couldn’t wait to come to school each day
- Very cool
- Parents like the extra stuff-the festivals, displays, etc.
- They love it!
- Pleased
- Like things the children are learning
- Kids discuss commonalities at dinner
- Surprise and disbelief at young children knowing so much
- Challenging
- Interesting
- “glad we’re doing it”
- Parents like the culminating activities
- I’m glad they are learning what we learned
- My child is so excited about...
- Parents are thrilled with CK
- Parents see their children being challenged in new ways
- Parents are surprised that their children are learning and remembering all the subject matter

- Thrilled with the information their children know
- The children are teaching the parents new things
- Students love poetry
- Pleased with well-rounded knowledge
- Children come home talking about what they have learned
- It teaches them new things
- More enthusiasm for learning
- Interested in doing projects at home
- All positive
- Children share how exciting a unit is/was
- Parents love units!
- They can't believe their children are learning about the continents in kindergarten.
- Students talk to their parents about what we are doing
- Some projects are family projects
- Connects things together
- Impressed with students' knowledge
- Impressed with the difficulty of the topics and how their children learn and remember

**If you were the top administrator, would you be in favor of Core Knowledge topics being presented to your students? Why?**

*Of the original 144 survey participants, 17% (24) did not respond to any of the items on the second page. Of the remaining 120, an additional 7% (10) chose not to address this item. Based upon their professional experiences with implementing the Core Knowledge Sequence, a significant majority 94.6% (104) of the teachers indicated that they would be in favor of Core Knowledge topics being presented to students if they were the “top administrator, while only 5.4% (6) respondents indicated that they could not support this endeavor (see Chart 6).*

**Chart 6**  
**In Favor of Core Knowledge if the “top administrator”**

In Favor	Not in Favor	Total
94.6%	5.4%	100%
104	6	110

*Teachers were invited to indicate their reason(s) for supporting or not supporting the teaching of Core Knowledge topics as a supplement to the traditional content if they were the “top administrator.” Their responses were numerous, varied greatly, and are listed below.*

- As long as there are not a lot of other time consuming programs already in place
- Subject matter is interesting and content is emphasized
- Keeps repeated lessons from occurring between grade levels
- Because of our modern society, classical topics are not part of the average American culture anymore
- One must participate in a private or home school program to receive the high quality of content on CK
- I believe it is a large part of why we have students on a waiting list
- It builds on students background knowledge and the scaffolding nature of it ensures the same topics are taught year after year
- Students are receptive to the CK units!
- Students are learning things important to life and having fun doing it
- Provides a stronger foundation to build on
- Beneficial to school, teachers and parents
- CK makes learning interesting and fun
- It doesn't take a lot of time and preparation
- We do a great disservice to students moving away from the standard scope and sequence
- It gives them a “window to the world” and allows them to make important links to previous learning

- Interesting curriculum based on a carefully sequenced plan
- Pearson text is wonderful
- Information presented broadens students minds and allows them to learn about other cultures and customs
- Breaks the monotonous way we often teach year to year and grade to grade
- Because so focused, they want to read and write more about what we are studying
- Diverse curriculum
- Makes learning student-motivated and not teacher-directed
- CK works
- All students can learn about various number of difficult subjects using fun and inventive ways
- They are more challenging and interesting than the regular curriculum
- Opportunity for all students to learn
- We can build on their knowledge each year
- Topics are challenging
- Rich content for students
- Provides students with a well-rounded curriculum
- CK helps students build on previous knowledge rather than repeating topics each year
- Only as enrichment because there is already so much to present to students
- Not just skimming the surface
- Helps keep one topic from being beat to death
- Built on what other grades study
- Gives opportunity to study new things
- Subject matter is great and makes school more interesting
- A wealth of knowledge not normally addressed
- Exciting!
- Opens their minds to new experiences and information
- Consistency in what teachers teach
- Allows building or accumulated learning
- Good student involvement
- We have been dumbing down the curriculum for too long. Students need to experience this learning
- CK ties all subjects together in a meaningful way
- CK encourages higher level thinking skills
- Ck exposes children to topics never before addressed at the elementary school level
- Helps students get involved in learning – not just sitting and listening
- The content is so rich
- The exposure (to rich content) give students a base from which they can build upon in upper grades
- As long as the TAKS objectives are covered
- CK gives you a great topic to teach the TAKS with
- The depth of learning
- Enhances learning
- Students become actively engaged
- Students master learning objectives much more quickly
- CK is not TAKS driven

- Students are exposed to the classics
- The curriculum has so much more “meat”
- Allows topics to be integrated
- As long as manageable for teachers
- Builds knowledge
- Provides students with a purpose
- Reduces repetition
- Adds enrichment to our curriculum
- Challenges and captures students’ attention
- Topics expanded beyond basic curriculum
- Children exposed to interesting knowledge
- A strong and supportive curriculum
- Connecting and building learning is the only way to go!
- CK learning is more interactive
- Kids want to come to school so they don’t miss out
- Represents an integrated approach to curriculum
- Topics are things children in this country need to know to be successful and have an enriched life
- Motivates learning
- There is a national correlation of information being taught
- Students do better with a broader base of knowledge
- Units give students an overall view with hands-on approach
- Topics motivate students and make them excited about learning
- More challenging
- CK can be aligned with the TEKS and provides such rich and motivating learning experiences for students
- Teachers and students enjoy CK
- Great incentive to learn
- CK helps put some of the fun back in school.
- These are topics that every person should know, but won’t be learned unless explicitly taught
- Higher order thinking skills necessary for TAKS