Publisher's Response, CKLA Grades 3-5

We wish to thank the team at EdReports for a thorough and insightful review of our Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) program for Grades 3-5. For Amplify it has been a labor of love to partner with the Core Knowledge Foundation to create and continuously improve the CKLA program, so it was gratifying to see such careful attention to, and appreciation for, what we have created. We find such rigorous feedback useful for making our program better, and we routinely adjust and improve the program based on such insights.

CKLA originated in response to the reading crisis in today's schools. Too many students are not reading on grade level by the end of Grade 3—an indicator of future success. We knew that new approaches were necessary, because research demonstrates that the act of reading requires both decoding, that is, translating the written code to oral language, and comprehension, the act of using prior knowledge, language skills, and reasoning skills to form connections and make meaning (Gough and Tunmer, 1986; Graesser, Millis, and Graesser, 2011; Graesser, Singer, and Trabasso, 1994). Recht and Leslie (1988) have further documented the significance of background knowledge in text comprehension. In their study, students were asked to reconstruct a story about a half-inning of baseball, and students who were weak readers but had prior knowledge of the sport did as well at the task as strong readers. Clearly, background knowledge plays a crucial role in students' comprehension of texts. Too many students, however, lack access to this kind of knowledge about the world. CKLA closes the achievement gap by bringing the world to kids, offering them a wealth of information and teaching them the necessary skills to read, write, and think critically about texts and their contexts.

In developing CKLA, Amplify partnered with the Core Knowledge Foundation to build on the work of Dr. E. D. Hirsch. Our team comprises experienced teachers, leading scholars of

literature and researchers of learning, and technical innovators—all united in the mission of providing educational excellence and equity for all children.

We will not make any of our own comments on the review, except to say that CKLA 2nd Edition, available for the 2017-2018 academic year, will include some improvements based on the EdReports feedback. We are also happy to report that we will also offer several optional components to compliment CKLA 2nd Edition. These components include our new hybrid option (which provides interactive, digital Teacher Guides) and our companion programs, Language Studio (which offers designated instruction for EL students) and Writing Studio (which extends CKLA core content and offers students additional writing opportunities).

Thank you, EdReports, for the important work you do in helping educators discover high□quality programs and for the feedback you have given us. We will add your insights to the comments we receive from teachers and students using our program every day, providing the foundation for how we will keep improving CKLA.

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Background information on Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA)

Our Philosophy

Our philosophy is that we can only close the reading gap, and make students "college and career ready," by preparing students to encounter complex, written text from Kindergarten (and earlier). That requires systematic exposure to knowledge-rich content, often above grade level, so that students can develop the necessary vocabulary and connections to understand new, unfamiliar texts.

To read, a person needs to be able to decode the words on the page and then make sense of those words. The first task is made possible by decoding skills and the second by language comprehension ability. If the person cannot decode the words on the page, they will not be able to achieve reading comprehension, no matter how much oral language they can understand. But decoding the words on the page is still no guarantee of reading comprehension. If a person attempts to read sentences they could not understand if they were read aloud, then it is unlikely that they will understand them during independent reading either.

In K–2, CKLA CA students receive strong foundational skills and language instruction, along with background knowledge, vocabulary, and analytical skills. By Grade 3, when students encounter increasingly complex text and are asked to grapple with those texts in more challenging ways, they will have received the base of content knowledge and foundational skills they need. In Grades 3-5 students move fluidly between reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language activities. Through these activities students continue to build background knowledge, with an increasing emphasis on individual and small group interaction with complex text.

Our Research Basis

Combining well-established findings from cognitive science with classroom-based feedback from hundreds of teachers, CKLA ensures that children will learn to listen, speak, read, and write well. Reading comprehension and critical thinking are only possible with relevant prior knowledge. Since students should be able to read and think about a wide variety of topics, their education must deliver broad knowledge of a wide variety of topics. But they shouldn't just jump from one topic to the next. Learning about an academic domain, and acquiring the vocabulary of that domain, depends on staying focused on a topic and progressing from basic to in-depth materials and activities over several weeks. This gives students time to digest new concepts and practice using new words. These basic findings from cognitive science form the research foundation for CKLA (and the Core Knowledge Sequence). This foundation is explored extensively in *CKLA Curriculum: Links to Research on Teaching and Learning, by the Core Knowledge Foundation.* For a pdf of the complete CKLA research basis, please contact us at 1-800-823-1969.

Principles of CKLA Instructional Design

1) **A Two-Strand Model is Essential for Developing Skills and Comprehension in K–2**

Developmental research points to the importance of a reading curriculum that provides equal weight to children's decoding development and oral language/comprehension development in the early years. However, cognitive research suggests the challenge, if not impossibility, of creating a single reading experience that would equally drive development of these two distinct cognitive processes (i.e., decoding and comprehension). Cognitively, engaging a young child in independent reading does not create an experience in which the child spends equal mental energy on building decoding skills and building language and comprehension skills. Further, to foster oral language skills, young children need language interactions with texts at levels that far

surpass their decoding ability (Cunningham, 2005; Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994). CKLA addresses both cognitive and developmental bodies of research through its two-strand design in the early grades.

2) A Language-Based, Knowledge-Driven Approach Increases Comprehension

Young children's capacity for comprehending complex text is understood, within cognitive science research, as an intertwining of oral language skills, vocabulary knowledge, and world knowledge. Being able to read is, essentially, "understanding speech written down" (Goswami et al., 2003, p. 273.). Although developmental and cognitive perspectives on reading emphasize the strong relationship between early language skills, background knowledge, and later reading comprehension (Dickinson, Golinkoff, and Hirsch-Pasek, 2010; Kintsch, 1994; Neuman and Celano, 2006; Scarborough, Neuman, and Dickinson, 2009), instructional materials have not consistently mirrored this understanding. CKLA's read-aloud component works to blend language support, vocabulary, knowledge building, and comprehension skill development in an integrated manner. In this way, CKLA read-alouds aim to close the gap between what we know about comprehension development (from cognitive and developmental research) and what we do in the classroom by taking a language-rich, knowledge-based approach to building children's skill in text comprehension.

3) Explicit and Systematic Instruction is Critical to Building Efficient Word-Level Skills

It is not enough to ask whether a reading program has explicit phonics instruction. Research shows that phonics instruction is not simply present or absent but rather exists in degrees. What research suggests is that the degrees may matter—substantially—to children's outcomes. Effective phonics instruction includes: (1) systematic ordering of phonetic targets that progress

in number and complexity over time; (2) systematic practice in which children have intentionally designed opportunities to apply and use the sound-spellings they are taught (DeGraaff et al., 2009); and (3) systematic instructional planning whereby methods of instruction are consistent and progress depending on students' learning (Bodrova and Leong, 2006; DeGraaff et al., 2009). CKLA embodies these three dimensions of systematic instruction. Its emphasis on building in systematic, mastery-oriented practice distinguishes the program from many other explicit phonics instructional programs.

For more information about CKLA and its research base, please see *CKLA Curriculum: Links to Research on Teaching and Learning, by the Core Knowledge Foundation.* For a pdf of the complete CKLA research basis, please contact us at 1-800-823-1969.

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