

Introduction to the 6-12 English Language Arts Johns Hopkins Report

Student Achievement and
Accountability Subcommittee
December 9, 2019

Lack of Progress in Reading

- American students haven't gotten better at reading in 20 years
 - [The Atlantic](#)
- Why?
 - Schools usually focus on skills instead knowledge
 - Finding main idea or supporting details
 - Stating author's purpose
- Current research has established that background knowledge leads to durable learning

Knowledge Gap

- Why affluent students succeed on state tests



- Reading levels are linked to background knowledge
- Democracies around the world teach knowledge about the world

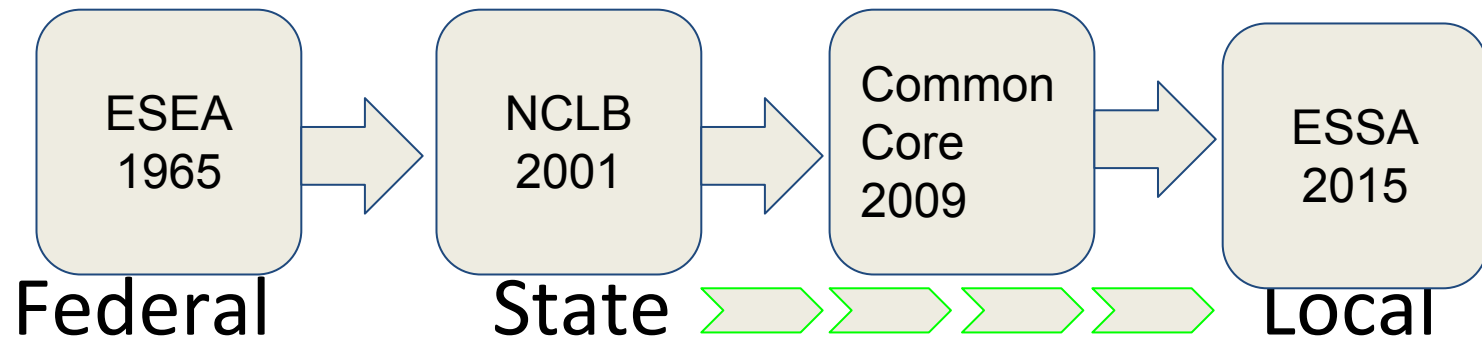
What Top Nations Teach

[What Top Nations Teach Their Students](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ857707) <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ857707>

- Over the years, American students consistently have ranked below those from Finland, Canada, Japan, and at least a dozen other industrialized nations on international tests of mathematics, science, and reading.
- The U.S. is the only leading industrialized nation that considers the mastery of basic skills to be the goal of K-12 education (e.g., finding main idea, author's purpose, etc).
- The best nations do what is best for their students and that means building a great education system, not just attempting to prepare them for tests or the labor market.
 - No Child Left Behind probably made things worse

Education Reform - Curriculum Control

- Who has control over the curriculum?



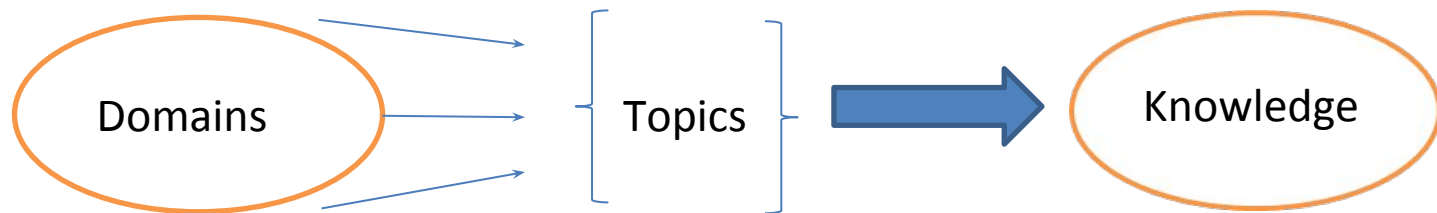
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- No Child Left Behind Act
- Every Student Succeeds Act

Key Shifts

- ESSA led to the new MA Standards for English Language Arts (“ELA”) in 2018
- As a result, three non-negotiable key shifts occurred in teaching ELA in United States:
 - Using complex texts for grade levels
 - Using evidence in claims and reasoning
 - Using instructional materials that build background knowledge

Knowledge Map

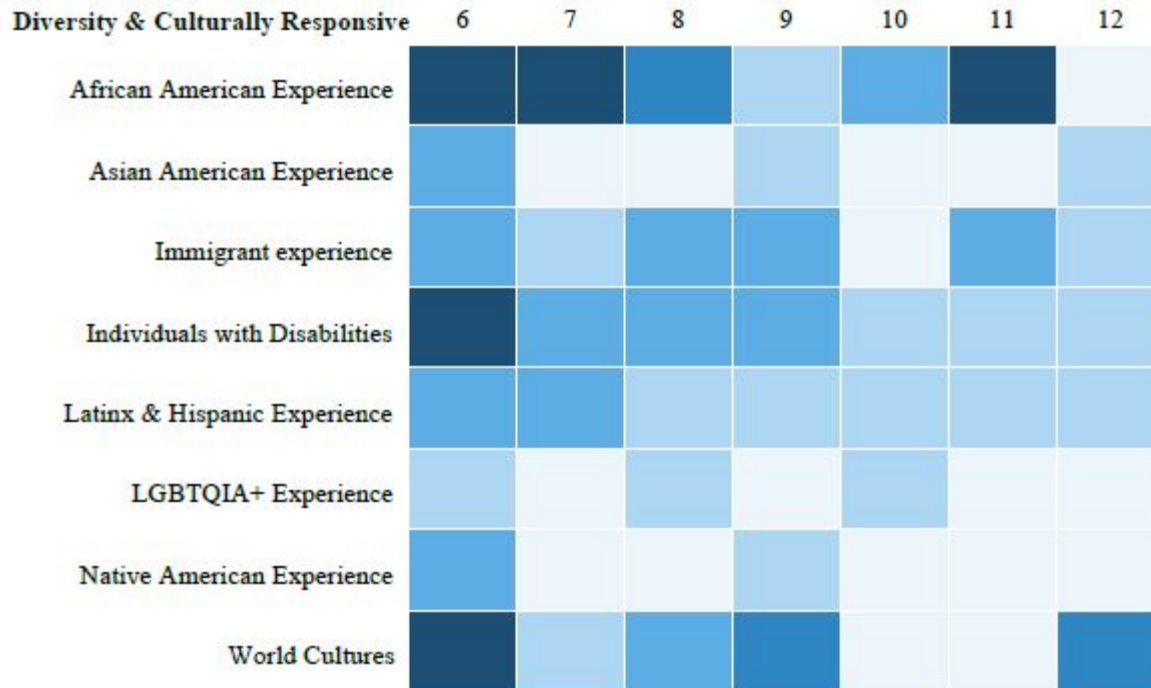
- How do we know when a curriculum provides rich background knowledge?
- Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy's *Knowledge Map Project*



- For e.g., Diversity & Culture domain includes topics such as the following that lead to knowledge
 - African American Experience
 - Immigrant Experience
 - World Cultures

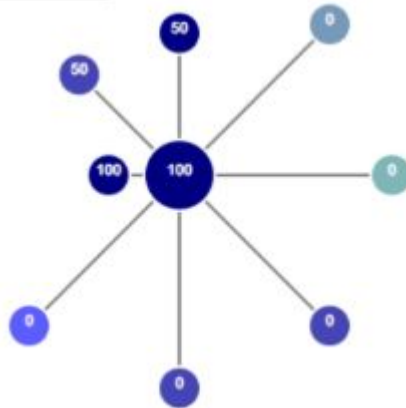
Knowledge Mapping Tool- Topics

- Coverage of domain/topics by grade (darker = stronger coverage)



Knowledge Mapping Tool - Proximity

- Coherence of topics



- Each ball represents a text from the unit
- The shorter the spoke the more coherent the text is to the anchor text (shorter = not far from)
- The number on the ball represents the proximity score; how close it is to the anchor text
- Minimum proximity of 70% is desired

What FPS Submitted For Review

- FPS submitted documents to the Institute to analyze and determine to what extent our curriculum represented the three non-negotiable key shifts (text complexity, evidence, and background knowledge)
- FPS submitted:
 - Assessments
 - Writing tasks
 - Scoring rubrics
 - Lesson plans
 - Projects/presentations
 - Planning guides/packets
 - Classroom activities/tasks
 - Homework tasks

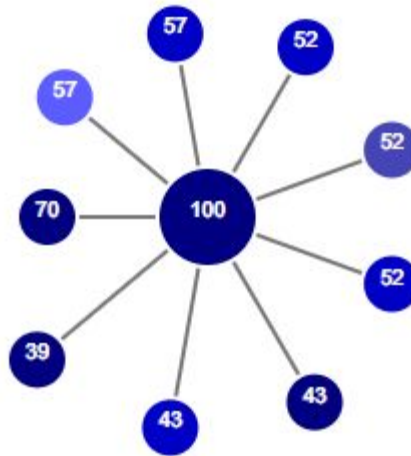
Analysis

- The Institute analyzed our material for proximity of topics and quality of text:
- Proximity
 - Anchor texts
 - Supplementary texts - how coherent they are with anchor texts
- Quality of text
 - Complexity
 - Evidence
 - Knowledge

Proximity- *Night*

Night and supplementary texts

Center = anchor text; then highest to lowest clockwise starting with proximity of 70



Proximity - *Night* (Cont)

Topics

Topic = tag

There are 23 topics in this text
Domain is listed in bold; topics are listed under each domain. For e.g., Religion is a domain and Judaism is a topic.



Night

by Elie Wiesel

Proximity rating 23/23

Qualitative Score 93.33%

Tags (23)

Emotions, Being, & Personal Psychology

Coming of Age, Death, Fate, Fear, Human condition, The Big Questions

Global Literature

Russian & Eastern European Literature

Religion

Judaism

Social Sciences (Politics, Economics, Sociology)

Community, Human Rights, Labor, Race, Religion and Society

World History Since 1600

Civil Disobedience, Genocide, Warfare & Militarization

Diversity & Culturally Responsive

World Cultures

Proximity - Code Name Verity

Topics

This is a supplementary text to *Night*. This text contains 9 tags that match with those from the 23 contained in *Night*. Therefore, this text's proximity is 9/23 or 39%.

The quality score 93.33 relates not to topics but to the text quality complexity, evidence, knowledge building

Proximity
The unit q
matches i

Code Name Verity

by Elizabeth Wein

Proximity rating 9/23

Qualitative Score 93.33%

Matching Tags (9)

Emotions, Being, & Personal Psychology

Death, Fear, Human condition, The Big Questions

Social Sciences (Politics, Economics, Sociology)

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World History Since 1600

Civil Disobedience, Warfare & Militarization

Other Tags (25)

Emotions, Being, & Personal Psychology

Character development, Heroism, Human fallibility, Moral Dilemmas, Relationships, Solitude, Sorrow, The Self, Trauma

British Literature

Post-World War II & Contemporary

American Literature

Post-World War II & Contemporary

Social Sciences (Politics, Economics, Sociology)

Class, Feminism, Gender, Law & Criminology

World History Since 1600

Dictatorships & Totalitarian Regimes

Earth, Life, & Medical Sciences

13/23

16/23

9/23

Proximity vs. Quality

Tag=Topic

Title	Proximity Score %	Matching Tags #	Quality Score %
<i>Night</i>	100	23/23	93.33
<i>Maus</i>	70	16/23	93.33
<i>Hitler's Canary</i>	57	13/23	60.00
<i>The Boy in Striped Pajamas</i>	57	13/23	80.00
<i>Between Shade of Gray</i>	52	12/23	86.67
<i>Milkweed</i>	52	12/23	73.33
<i>The Book Thief</i>	52	12/23	86.00
<i>The War Saved My Life</i>	43	10/23	93.33
<i>Number the Stars</i>	43	10/23	86.67
<i>Code Name Verity</i>	39	9/23	93.33

Text Complexity

- The ability to comprehend complex texts differentiates college ready readers
 - Question types (literal vs. inferential thinking, main idea vs. supporting details) do not differentiate college ready readers
- Great disparity among income groups
 - 51% more students from higher income groups comprehend college level texts (Lexile = 1300; vs 12th grade lexile 1130)... it's like
 - Asking a 6th grader to read 10th grade text

Text Complexity-Findings@FPS

- The **high school core texts are high-quality** and worthy of students' time and attention; however the majority of **supplemental texts fall below the quantitative complexity required** for the grade level.
- For **grades 6-8, texts vary in quantitative and qualitative complexity.** The majority of texts fall below the quantitative complexity required for the grade level; however, just some include qualitative features that are appropriate for the grade level. In general, **materials do not include a sufficient mix of informational and literature.**
- **It does not appear that text analysis features are considered in choosing the middle school level texts (and high school supplemental texts),** hindering teachers' ability to strategically plan to enhance student understanding or use the complexity of the high-quality texts.

Using Evidence

- Research in cognitive science demonstrates that attending to evidence in the text leads to greater understanding and retention of the content
- Students able to use evidence in discussions and writing are three times more likely to succeed in college text comprehension than students who only use skills (main idea, etc.)

Using Evidence-Findings@FPS

- At times, questions and tasks relate to the text but are not fully dependent on or specific to the text.
- The questions do not always stay focused on the text.

Building Knowledge

- Knowledge of topic (vs. theme) aids thinking, memory, and learning new information
- Reading more informational texts (vs. narrative texts) grows the knowledge necessary to comprehend complex texts
- Knowledge based curricular programs are correlated to results on standardized tests

Building Knowledge-Findings@FPS

- The materials are often disjointed and are organized by theme instead of by topic.
- There are minimal opportunities for students to engage in a high volume of reading, limiting the extent to which students can build knowledge within and across grade levels.
- The tasks do not readily facilitate student understanding of vocabulary; vocabulary is predominantly assessed in a siloed context, as opposed to being grounded in the text.

Summary-Findings@FPS

Grade	Text Complexity	Evidence based Discussions and Writing	Building Knowledge
6	Does not meet	Does not meet	Does not meet/ but approaching
7	Does not meet	Does not meet/ but approaching	Does not meet
8	Does not meet	Does not meet/ but approaching	Does not meet/ but approaching
9	Meets	Does not meet	Does not meet
10	Meets	Does not meet	Does not meet
11	Meets	Does not meet	Does not meet
12	Meets	Does not meet/ but approaching	Does not meet/ but approaching

Next Steps

- Adopt a stronger curriculum across grades 6-8 and supplement specific weaknesses in grades 9-12, or
- Redesign middle school curriculum so as to remove low quality texts and replace them with higher quality texts, and
- Ensure proper coverage and quality in key domains as prioritized by the District for all secondary grades