Innovative Tool Empowers Districts and School Leaders to Focus on “Closing the Knowledge Gap” and Increasing Student Content Knowledge

Baltimore, Md. (Feb. 12, 2019) – The Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy (“Institute”), in partnership with Chiefs for Change, is proud to introduce the Knowledge Map – an innovative tool that analyzes English Language Arts (ELA) curricula in terms of the content knowledge they offer students. This proprietary tool equips states, districts and schools, for the first time, with actionable data that can lead to stronger content knowledge to support student learning.

Research indicates that the achievement gap between low- and high-income students is often, in large part, a “knowledge gap,” and that reading levels – especially from fifth grade onward – are closely related to students’ level of background content knowledge, rather than abstract skills. By mapping the domains of knowledge implicit in each text across an entire curriculum, the Knowledge Map helps education leaders answer the critical question of whether their ELA materials provide the depth, breadth and level of content students need to become excellent readers, engaged learners and informed citizens.

“The key point is that knowledge matters, and the research compels us to focus on addressing the ‘knowledge gap’ to help close persistent achievement disparities among students’ reading levels,” said David Steiner, executive director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy and a professor in the School of Education. “We look forward to engaging with local policymakers, district and school leaders as we use this transformative tool.”
Initial partnerships with both Baltimore City Public Schools and the Louisiana Department of Education have shown that this information helps leaders institute changes that support more effective teaching and learning, while also remaining grounded in the district's or state's needs. Introducing the education policy world to the Knowledge Map means that the Institute and Chiefs for Change can build on this work and bring the power of the tool to more districts and schools.

“The Knowledge Map has given us the insight we needed to diagnose the strengths and needs within our curriculum and the support to help prepare Baltimore students for college and career. For the first time, we have been able to look at how we're building content knowledge not only within a grade level, but across the full continuum of grades from Pre-K through 12,” said Janise Lane, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning for Baltimore City Public Schools.

**How it Works**

The Institute partners with state, district and school leaders to map their ELA curricula—and the results provide compelling, actionable data used to adopt or amend classroom materials. A team of teacher-experts trained by the Institute reviews all required texts in the ELA curriculum and rates them based on their depth of knowledge, accuracy and academic rigor. The final reports help leaders assess whether their materials encompass a variety of rich texts - including those that reflect the diverse cultures and experiences of their students – and the degree to which those texts expose students to cumulative knowledge across key domains.

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The Institute for Education Policy at Johns Hopkins University, headquartered in Baltimore, MD, is a policy-focused Center at the School of Education committed to translating research on what works for educational excellence and equity to those on the front lines of policy and practice. The Institute is particularly focused upon ensuring that all children have access to deep and intellectually challenging curricula, school models that meet students' diverse needs, and highly-effective educators.

Chiefs for Change is a nonprofit, bipartisan network of diverse state and district education chiefs dedicated to preparing all students for today's world and tomorrow's through deeply committed leadership. Chiefs for Change advocates for policies and practices that are making a difference today for students, and builds a pipeline of talented, diverse Future Chiefs ready to lead major school systems.