Why the Absence of a Content-Rich Curriculum Core Hurts Poor Children Most

High-level reading comprehension depends on a solid base of background knowledge and vocabulary. Without these building blocks, plus strong decoding skills, children cannot develop into strong comprehenders. They will be unable to comprehend secondary school texts, score well on SAT-like tests, or succeed in college or a career. Knowledge and vocabulary matter for all children’s minds. But the evidence is clear: Children who are from less educated, less affluent homes are especially dependent on schools to impart this critical knowledge since they are unlikely to pick it up at home. If schools are able to impart this knowledge cumulatively through a rich, common grade-by-grade curriculum core— where each teacher can systematically build on the knowledge and skills taught by previous teachers—children from less language-rich homes will enjoy and benefit from the kind of curriculum often offered only to wealthier kids. And, when children move from school-to-school, they won’t face a wholly new curriculum on top of all else that is new to them.

1. 3-year-olds from lower income homes hear—and use—less than half the words of more advantaged peers

2. Children from at-risk families enter kindergarten behind in reading, and then fall further behind

3. Changing schools hurts students’ achievement

4. Poor children change schools the most