Education Commission of the States to Honor E. D. Hirsch, Jr. with the 2012 James Bryant Conant Award

Denver – E. D. Hirsch Jr. is the recipient of this year’s Education Commission of the States (ECS) James Bryant Conant Award for his decades of work in developing and spreading the idea that students become proficient readers and learners only when they also have wide-ranging background knowledge. ECS Chair and Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper will present the award at the ECS National Forum on Education Policy in Atlanta on July 10.

This award, named for the former Harvard University president and co-founder of ECS, James Bryant Conant, is one of the most prestigious in the national education community. The honor recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to American education. Hirsch joins an esteemed list of past recipients that includes Thurgood Marshall, Fred Rogers, John Goodlad, Claiborne Pell, and Ted Sizer.

E. D. Hirsch, Jr. is a Professor Emeritus of Education and Humanities at the University of Virginia. As the result of an early research project, he developed the groundbreaking concept of cultural literacy—the idea that reading comprehension requires not just formal decoding skills but also background knowledge. In 1986, he founded the Core Knowledge Foundation, and a year later published the best-selling book, Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know.

Today there are over 800 Core Knowledge schools which teach all or part of the Core Knowledge Sequence. The strongest evidence of Hirsch’s impact can be seen in the development of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts, which rest on the intellectual underpinnings of his work.

“For decades, Dr. Hirsch has been a thoughtful contributor to understanding how kids learn and helping our educational system better meet their needs. He is truly deserving of the Conant Award,” said ECS President Roger Sampson.

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About ECS
ECS is the only nationwide, nonpartisan organization that works directly with governors, legislators, chief state school officers, higher education officials and other leaders across all areas of education, from PreK to college and the workforce. Since 1965, we have tracked policy, translated research, provided unbiased advice and created opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another. ECS is located in Denver and maintains the nation’s most extensive clearinghouse on education policy.

Equipping Education Leaders, Advancing Ideas