**Foundational Skills for Reading: Anna Swenson (4:52)**

ANNA SWENSON: Foundational skills are the building blocks of the reading process. We usually think of foundational skills as being most important in those early grades: in kindergarten, first, second grade. Foundational skills include developing literacy concepts, things like the front cover, the back cover of the book, how we turn, pages how print's read or how braille's read from left to right and top to bottom, and foundational skills also include the development of sound similar relationships, what's called the alphabetic principle.

We want to make sure that when we teach foundational skills, we don't teach them in isolation. We want to include them within the context of a broad based reading program. Foundational skills have their own set of anchor standards in the Common Core State Standards. There are four standards, print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency. Let's take a look at each one along with some special considerations for braille readers.

Let's start with print concepts, or, of course, braille concepts for our tactile learners. These concepts develop in kindergarten and first grade, and the first thing these young children need to learn is that spoken words can be written down and read back. Children learn that print or braille is read from left to right, top to bottom.

They learn to identify letters and braille contractions. And they learn about sentence conventions, starting a sentence with a capital and ending with a period, a question mark, or some other kind of ending mark. Braille readers have more symbols to learn than print readers, so typically, this standard lasts a little bit longer for our braille readers than for print readers. We generally expect our braille readers to master all the contractions in the braille code by the end of second grade.

The next standard is the phonological awareness standard. And this standard also focuses mainly on skills that children need to acquire in kindergarten and first grade. It includes their ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in a variety of ways.

For example, they may work on recognizing and generating rhyming words or counting the number of syllables in the word. It's also important that they develop the ability to segment and blend sounds. When they see the letters C-A-T, they associate those letters with the sounds "kuh" "a" "tuh" and they're able to blend them together to form a word that they recognize. Phonological awareness also includes substituting sounds, taking the word "dog," for example, taking off the ending sound, "guh," adding an ending sound, "tuh," and ending up with a new word, "dot." Research shows that the effectiveness of phonological awareness instruction is increased when children have a chance to manipulate letters and words related to the sounds that they're learning.

Our third standard is phonics and word recognition. And this standard actually applies to students in kindergarten through fifth grade. When we're applying it for students in kindergarten through second grade, we're looking at skills like basic decoding and the recognition of high frequency words. As students move into grades three through five, they study more complex phonics and word recognition skills. For example, they might learn Greek and Latin roots and apply that knowledge to decoding and understanding multisyllabic words.

Our final standard is fluency, and this standard also applies to students in kindergarten through grade five. At each grade level, students are expected to read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. This goal can be achieved through successive rereading.

There's a strong research base that supports rereading as a strategy for developing fluency. Our braille readers, because of the braille code, may take a little longer to develop fluency. Rereading is a really important strategy to use with them as they assimilate braille contractions and develop automatic word recognition.