Foundations for Literacy is an early literacy curriculum designed to teach pre-kindergarten children who are deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) the sound-symbol relationship skills (phonological awareness; alphabetics) and meaning-based knowledge (vocabulary and connected language) they will need to compete successfully in kindergarten. The curriculum comprises 25 main units and 4 supplemental units conducted for one hour four days a week. Many DHH children will not develop proficient literacy in the absence of explicit instruction. Key foundational knowledge is taught experientially through language-based, meaningful activities that lead the child to make a semantic association between a sound (phoneme) and a letter (grapheme). For example, in Foundations, DHH children learn to associate the letter n with the drone of an airplane (nnnn). Visual support of the plane becomes an icon for the sound that they either do not hear or hear poorly. The theme of the experience is carried through a sequence of Plan-Do-Recall activities that help children solidify their knowledge and skills, which they then practice in a variety of activities including but not limited to games, game-based decoding activities, connected reading, and story book time. Activities within the curriculum are designed to promote alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, early word decoding, vocabulary, and connected language.

DHH children taught through Foundations make significantly better gains on alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, and vocabulary than comparison groups of DHH children, with educationally meaningful effect sizes. Our project has data on 7 years of participants. Gains have been documented in all target areas of the curriculum. The project was funded by the Institute of Education Sciences.

References
Lederberg, A., Miller, E., Easterbrooks, S., & Connor, C. (submitted). Are Early Literacy Skills Malleable for Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing?