

# Gains and Growth: Data-Driven Reading Intervention at Quanah ISD

By Michelle Brandon

A growing number of students are entering middle and high school without the foundational skills needed to access grade-level content, let alone prepare for life beyond graduation. District leaders across the country are calling on principals, reading specialists, and teachers to find solutions that go beyond remediation and proactively close the gap.

It's a widespread challenge, impacting communities large and small – including Quanah, Texas. Since the reckoning of the pandemic, the landscape of education and reading intervention has steadily evolved. At Quanah ISD, that evolution is being met with intention.

Under the steady leadership of Superintendent Tom Johnson and with seasoned Elementary Principal Jack Noles set to transition to the high school in Fall 2025, the district is paving a new path forward—one grounded in a strong academic foundation and high standards. It's a return to the excellence that has earned Quanah Blue Ribbon recognition at both the state and national levels.

## ✧ — Turning Insight Into Action — ✧

How did Quanah lay the critical groundwork for innovation and success? By teacher's shifting their mindsets over the past school year. At Reagan Elementary, Principal Jack Noles led that charge by building buy-in, establishing clear systems for implementation, and tapping into the natural passion his teachers bring to the classroom.

A silver thread across campuses has been the shift toward data-driven instruction, anchored not just in identifying gaps, but in amplifying what's working. And that shift couldn't be more urgent. Many middle and high school students are still grappling with the aftermath of learning to read in a digital-first environment, entering high school reading as many as three- to five- grade levels behind.



As a seasoned educator with nearly two decades of experience, Noles has spent his career working alongside teachers to sharpen their instructional practice—particularly in reading.

*“MindPlay is a great example of how you can get access to all this data without having to build it yourself,” Noles shared. “I was kind of blown away by what was available. It makes getting what we need really simple—and that’s where the real work begins.”*

J. Noles

**Educators need more than just snapshot data at benchmark intervals—they need consistent, real-time insights to measure the impact of high-quality instruction and supplemental tools.** With this level of visibility, teachers can pinpoint exactly which skills students have mastered, where they’re struggling, and how to act quickly to keep growth on track. Principal Noles recognizes the value of this approach and sees it as part of his responsibility: championing programs that deliver actionable data and support that educators can truly use.

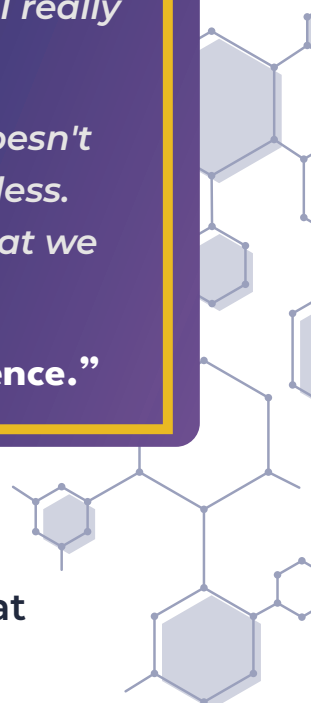
*“By the time you get to the STAAR test, you know we’ve worked on what we need to work on, and it’s been logical. It’s been practical—and I really think that’s the key. It has to be practical data.*

*There’s a lot of data that looks cool and says a lot of things, but doesn’t mean a thing to the day-to-day teacher. Therefore, it’s kind of useless. What data needs to do is inform not only what is working and what we need to work on, but how we do it.*

**MindPlay actually does that—and that’s what makes the difference.”**

J. Noles

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## ✦ — A Vision That Starts Early — ✦

As Noles prepares to transition into high school leadership, he reflects on a reality that spans grade levels; many students arrive at school without the foundational tools they need to learn. The challenges he sees in elementary grades don't disappear, they compound.

Imagine if we didn't wait until high school.

What if students arrived in ninth grade already reading at or near grade level—confident, capable, and ready to take on rigorous content?

That's the vision Quanah ISD is pursuing: a future built on early, intentional support that sets students up for long-term success. While foundational gaps still exist, especially among 9th and 10th graders, they're now met with a powerful combination—dedicated educators and targeted intervention.


Dr. Candra Cade, a veteran educator who returned to the classroom after retirement, sees the difference:

***"This program gives hope to kids who haven't experienced success and gives them a fighting chance—not just in English Language Arts, but across the board. You have to be able to read in Biology and do word problems in Algebra."***

C. Cade

Foundational components like fluency and comprehension are essential to continued academic growth. According to the Simple View of Reading, once students develop automaticity in decoding, they're ready for the next challenge: reading for meaning. That's when comprehension deepens and true learning begins.

This is why early intervention matters. By identifying and addressing reading gaps well before high school, students enter secondary grades prepared to access content in science, social studies, and beyond. The goal isn't to play catch-up in ninth grade—it's to arrive ready to thrive.



*"I'm going to be patient with you; you have to be patient with yourself."*

C. Cade

It's a phrase Dr. Cade often shares with students learning to trust themselves again. But that mindset is beginning to shift. More students now realize that their struggles aren't their fault—and more importantly, that progress is possible.

With programs like MindPlay, students begin to recognize their sea of strengths while receiving targeted support to navigate areas of difficulty. As Dr. Sally Shaywitz famously stated, "Dyslexia is an island of weakness in a sea of strengths" (Shaywitz, 2003, *Overcoming Dyslexia*). When students begin to see their challenges through that lens, they stop viewing them as personal failings—and start believing in what's possible.

Dr. Cade has seen that belief come to life. One student she supports—who has an intellectual disability that affects reading began the school year reading at a 2.8 level. With consistent support and access to the right tools with MindPlay, he's now reading at a 6.6 level. His next goal? To reach a seventh-grade reading level—a milestone that would allow him to read a newspaper, engage with the world around him, and build toward an independent, career-oriented life.

## ◀ ————— Schedule for Success ————— ▶

In Dr. Cade's classroom, intervention is intentional and consistent. On Mondays and Tuesdays, students work in MindPlay during class, receiving differentiated support that strengthens foundational reading skills. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, Dr. Cade leads whole-group lessons to reinforce and extend those skills through direct, explicit instruction.

**MindPlay is more than just practice—it's a targeted, individualized reading intervention** that builds the exact skills each student needs to move forward.

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*“When I see a student struggling, I can jump in right then with a mini lesson,” she explains. “That immediate support removes frustration. Suddenly, grammar terms like independent and dependent clauses or conjunctions don’t sound like a foreign language—they click.”*

C. Cade

This cycle of real-time support and skill-building is grounded in data. And while improving standardized test performance is important, Dr. Cade is focused on something bigger: giving students the tools to read, understand, and think critically—in any subject, and in everyday life.

**Because reading isn’t just an academic milestone—it’s a life skill.**

It’s what allows students to complete a job application, follow safety instructions, or read a prescription label. It’s the foundation for independence, confidence, and future opportunity.

Some students walk into Dr. Cade’s classroom unsure of themselves. But with the right support and steady encouragement, they leave with something far more lasting: belief in their ability to grow and succeed.

—References—

Shaywitz, S. E. (2003). *Overcoming dyslexia: A new and complete science-based program for reading problems at any level*. Alfred A. Knopf.