

Igniting Writing Growth: An Ysleta Middle School Impact Story

- Focus Areas**
- Limited Instructional Time
 - Emergent Bilingual Support
 - Immediate, Actionable Feedback
 - Student & Teacher Confidence

A School on the Border with Big Goals

Ysleta Middle School sits less than two miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, serving a student body where many are emergent bilinguals navigating language learning on a daily basis.

For 6th-grade teacher Melissa Castillo and 8th-grade teacher Lori Kohan-Nanez, the challenge was clear: teaching both reading and writing to students with diverse language needs in just 45 minutes per day. Every minute had to count.

“We have a lot of emergent bilingual students,” Elyse Hernandez, Instructional Technology Coach, shared. “The border is less than two miles from where I’m sitting... using the language is a daily struggle.”

The veteran teachers—with 64 years of combined experience—needed a solution. With Hernandez’s coaching, **they turned to Curipod to maximize every minute.** With real-time feedback and increased engagement, they achieved their goals and more.

The Challenge

Time was short, engagement was inconsistent, and feedback often came too late to make an impact.

“When you hold back feedback for more than 24 hours, it becomes less meaningful,” Hernandez reflected. “Being able to give immediate feedback is a game-changer.”

Traditional feedback cycles stretched over days, leaving students disengaged. Many struggled to see themselves as capable writers.

Teachers knew what mattered—timely feedback, active participation, and visible growth—but without the right tools, delivering on those priorities felt impossible.



The Curipod Shift

With Curipod, classrooms at Ysleta Middle School transformed:

With AI feedback, students revised and improved on the spot

“Curipod transformed writing into something immediate, motivating, and measurable for my students.” - Castillo

Engagement soared, fueled by variety and collaboration

“My classroom feels like a community. Students engaged, discussed, and held each other accountable.” - Castillo

Best-practice pedagogy returned to the forefront in every classroom

“Curipod has our students excited. It brings Kagan-style strategies back into the room.” - Hernandez

Students no longer hid in class; every learner felt safe to participate

“It’s electric! Like a fire rocket—you’re igniting it, and then we watch the kids go off. It’s beautiful to see.” - Kohan-Nanez

The Results

Though district-wide comparisons are complex, the outcomes were undeniable:

- In Castillo's class, the number of **students who received a zero on their STAAR ECR was drastically reduced**
- Castillo's consistent use of Curipod **boosted student confidence**, allowing them to take more risks in their writing, leading directly to improved results on their state test scores
- In Kohan-Nanez's classes, students' consistent use of Curipod for practice and assessment on STAAR writing prompts allowed them to incorporate the feedback and improve their writing skills, **contributing to the growth and success of her classes' scores**

For students, the shift wasn't just about scores but also about confidence. One student who had never earned points on a STAAR writing task finally did, and the achievement carried him for weeks.

Curipod's built-in anonymity when sharing responses played a key role, lowering barriers and helping emergent bilinguals take risks.

Kohan-Nanez explained, “It doesn't put them on the spot because it changes their name. But it helped them give a little extra effort because they knew it was going to be on the screen.”

Together, these shifts—**immediate feedback, visible growth, and safe participation**—transformed how students approached writing and how teachers measured success.

From Challenge to Change

For Ysleta Middle School, Curipod provided what teachers had always wanted: a way to fit best practices into limited time, to give feedback that mattered, and to see growth in every student.

As Castillo summed it up: “Curipod is the most innovative tool I've used in my classroom in the last five years!” When strong teaching meets the right tools, students rise, no matter how limited the minutes or how high the hurdles.