



CASE STUDY

**At-Risk Students Advance with *ALEKS®* at Central Junior High**

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Name

Central Junior High and High School

Location

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Enrollment

Total - 871  
Junior High School - 299  
High School - 572



Central Junior High and High School is part of the Tulsa School District, the second largest school district in Oklahoma. Central faces the challenges of an urban district, including high levels of poverty, high-needs families, attendance issues, lack of discipline, and low student achievement. For the 2013 – 2014 school year, Central Junior High received a school report card grade of F, while the high school received a grade of D.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL



HIGH SCHOOL



ENROLLMENT

## THE PROBLEM:

Students at Central Junior High are, on average, two to three years behind grade level, especially in math, which consistently derails the school's mission of college and career readiness for its students.

### Central Junior High works towards its goal of readying its students for future success

Central Junior High has set high expectations for its students. "Our goal, of course, is to get our students beyond where they are currently, but we also want to see them grow even after they leave us. The culture within our building is college and career readiness. We're promising to prepare them for that next level and we're asking them to commit to this as well," says Principal Dr. Ebony Johnson, who has been with Central for three years.

Dr. Johnson is known for her ability to improve low-performing schools in Tulsa. Tulsa World listed Dr. Johnson on its "10 to Watch in 2015" list of

community impact players for her efforts to improve Central's performance. She notes, "Central students are typically two to three years behind where they need to be, and while it's getting better, we have a ways to go."

In addition to college and career preparedness, Dr. Johnson focuses on increasing proficiency in reading and math at Central. To improve the deficiencies in students' foundational skills, Dr. Johnson sought a program to help. Her research revealed *ALEKS*<sup>®</sup> from McGraw-Hill Education, which stood out for its diagnostic and prescriptive math-based intervention.

## THE SOLUTION:

Find and implement a program that not only excites student learning, but personalizes the experience for them as well.

### The *ALEKS* effect

Central implemented *ALEKS* in its eighth grade Algebra during the 2014-2015 school year. Dr. Johnson noticed immediate enthusiasm from students for its focus on personalized learning.

"When I would go into the classroom while students were using *ALEKS*, they would call me over with excitement to show me their progress and tell me what level they reached," recalls Dr. Johnson. "This was very different from before."

*ALEKS*, an acronym for Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces, is an online math program that uses adaptive, open-response questioning to identify what students know and don't know. Through

individualized learning and assessment, *ALEKS* targets instruction on the exact topics each student is most ready to learn.

When asked which *ALEKS* features work best for Central, Dr. Johnson notes its focus on personalized learning, mastery, and instant feedback. She notices students have shown great engagement with, and excitement for, the customized learning experience.

"*ALEKS* provides students with a nontraditional learning environment, meaning that students experience both traditional instruction, but also interface with digital instruction," states Dr. Johnson. "This is key in preparing them for the world beyond the classroom."

## Students take responsibility for their learning

The *ALEKS* program tracks student progress in a highly visual form: a customized pie chart that shows what the student knows and what the student has yet to learn. As the pie chart changes and the mastered portion grows, students can track their improvement and feel a sense of ownership over their education,

and accomplishment in their progress, which plays into Central's mission statement.

"When our students go to college or on to a career, they will need to be tech savvy and create a personalized learning path. *ALEKS* is exposing them to this early on," remarks Dr. Johnson. "This is why *ALEKS* has been a good fit."

## THE OUTCOME:

*ALEKS* builds confidence in the classroom. Students begin to believe in themselves and their ability to master tough skills, while teachers have more flexibility and management over their students' progress

## Learning future looks bright at Central Junior High

Students at Central using *ALEKS* have shown substantial improvement in a short time. In 2014, prior to using *ALEKS*, Central had a 43 percent pass rate in the Algebra I End-of-Instruction (EOI) test. After one year with *ALEKS*, 59 percent of students passed their Algebra I EOI.

Dr. Johnson says, "This sort of improvement is excellent to see. It tells us that we are meeting our growth goals and helps us track a course for future improvements."

Central students using *ALEKS* have not only showed great results in terms of score improvement, but their confidence levels have risen as well. "The immediate feedback and recognition of mastery *ALEKS* provides has helped students gain confidence in their abilities to master skills," notes Dr. Johnson. "This confidence has flowed into their work in their other classes, and I believe this also demonstrates great improvement."

## Engaged teachers make a difference

Teachers, too, are finding *ALEKS* offers them the opportunity to break from the traditional learning environment. They have much more flexibility to facilitate students' learning, and the ability to engage

with each student at whichever level they are. *ALEKS* provides educators with student, class, and school reports that detail concept mastery and can guide teachers in targeting their instruction.

"Teachers are excited because they see their students understanding concepts and can provide student-specific guidance where needed," says Dr. Johnson. "They have found it easy to navigate and integrate, and they are very pleased with the ability to differentiate their instruction, which makes it easier to scaffold and catch students up to their grade level."

Overall, Dr. Johnson says *ALEKS* has strengthened Central Junior High's academic culture and bolstered its mission statement. She aims to bring *ALEKS* to more students at Central in the near future.

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