Implementation Strategies

Richfield Middle School, Richfield Public School District
Richfield, MN

Grade(s): 7 – 8
Scenario: Computer Lab, Home Access
Purpose: Intervention, After–School, Supplement, Improve State Test Scores
ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 20%
Time Spent in ALEKS: 2 hours per week; 20 hours per term
ALEKS Course: Middle School Math Course 2, Middle School Math Course 3

Ken Friel, Teacher
I made up the following pneumonic devices for the letters in ALEKS to describe how it helps our students. A – Assists me in finding out where each of my students is so I can help them achieve. L – Lets my best students advance as fast as they want. E – Evaluation of student work is timely and thorough. K – Kid−friendly; easy to read graph helps students see their progress. S – Students get immediate feedback so they know if they are understanding or not. Another pneumonic device: A – Achievement: raises test scores. L– Leveled instruction: to meet all needs. E – Enrichment: to challenge your fastest learners. K – Kid−paced, not book−paced. S– Sanity! I can meet the needs of kids at all different levels to maximize learning.

Scenario

What challenges did the class or school face in math prior to using ALEKS?
We struggled to meet the diverse needs of all the learners, and continue to do so in our general classes. Now that we have ALEKS, we can focus on standards and core content in the regular class and do remediation or enrichment in ALEKS. Our test scores continue to rise with ALEKS.

How many days per week is class time dedicated to ALEKS?
2.5 days per week.

What is the average length of a class period when ALEKS is used?
40 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?
One of our administrators started the program as an afterschool intervention to help students on the border of passing the state test to get over the hump. Based on the success, it was implemented school−wide for grades 7–8 (not sixth yet) as a supplement to the general content class. Ten teachers in our school use ALEKS 2–3 times per week. I have contacted the public libraries to make sure ALEKS plug−ins are loaded so our students can access ALEKS there as well.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?
I require students to finish the green pie piece (Numbers and Operations) first. I give them freedom to do the other five sections next. I also encourage them to go clockwise from the green section, but do not require it. Often I tell them which sections match our current unit of study so they can get extra practice or master that section.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?
Students alternate between a reading workshop and ALEKS each day. In quarter one, we do the Initial Assessment and students set a goal. They are graded on use of time and progress. If they go up 20 or more, they get an A for progress; 16 is a B, and down from there. Quarters two and three are similar, but we have run into some issues with kids getting bored and kids hitting a plateau before. Quarter four I put kids in teams of 5 and teaming seems to help. Kids help each other (except on assessments) and work toward a team prize for the most progress. Each week I announce the team with the most progress and they get to line up first or have another team turn off their computers. Teaming has re−energized the class.

How did you modify your regular teaching approach as a result of ALEKS?
I do less remediation in the general class because I know students will get a chance to work on skills during ALEKS.

How often are students required or encouraged to work on ALEKS at home?
I encourage them to do so all the time. Our district has a high free/reduced lunch population and Internet access may not be as high
as other surrounding districts. However, I know several students have made a lot of progress at home or at the library.

**How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?**
We send home a letter at the beginning of the year and I talk about it at conferences. It is part of their grade, so it is on progress reports.

**Grading**

Is ALEKS assigned to your students as all or part of their homework responsibilities? If so, what part of the total homework load is it?
No.

**How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?**
Students have four core classes, two exploratory classes, and SMART (Specialized Math and Reading Time). ALEKS is part of SMART and makes up half of their SMART grade.

**Do you require students to make regular amounts of progress in ALEKS?**
Yes. In quarter one the goal was 20 percent progress, with the idea that most started at 20 percent and would complete 20 percent each quarter to finish the level. Based on student progress we have modified this. Once students got to 40 percent their progress slowed and I lowered the goal to 15 percent. I will continue to adjust this in the future.

**Learning Outcomes**

Since using ALEKS, please describe the learning outcomes or progress you have seen.
Some students are so proud of themselves and can’t believe how much they have learned. After our state test they talked about how they knew answers because of their work on ALEKS. Some students are frustrated that they have not progressed more, but they at least know they are not making enough progress and can make a plan to change that. Learning progress has been varied, which is to be expected. I have students who have finished or are finishing the level we started and others struggling to make progress. ALEKS is so helpful in letting me evaluate progress so I can intervene as needed.