

Implementation Strategies

El Camino Creek Elementary School, Encinitas Union Elementary School District
Carlsbad, CA

Grade(s): K – 6

Scenario: Computer Lab, Home Access

Purpose: Intervention, After-School, Improve State Test Scores, At-Risk Students

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 20%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 1 hour per week, 6 hours per term

ALEKS Course: Mathematics – LV 3 (with QuickTables), Mathematics – LV 4 (with QuickTables), Mathematics – LV 5 (with QuickTables)

Jaclyn Vasko, Teacher

The ALEKS program was used in my afterschool intervention program as a motivating tool for struggling students. The program was highly successful in providing immediate and constructive feedback to my students and in prompting them, gently, to use the appropriate strategy to solve a concept. ALEKS is also a fantastic tool that promotes student autonomy. Students are able to check their progress, choose which concepts to focus on, and visually see their progress. This power made it easy to set personal monthly goals. Most often, students would achieve and surpass their personal goals. In my classroom, I used the ALEKS program every day to reiterate the basics for my students. During long school breaks, where our class would not meet after school, I created contests to motivate students to expose themselves to the material at home. I encouraged my students in every way to use ALEKS as a study tool, and to not stress over getting answers incorrect, but to learn from their mistakes and understand where they went wrong. Overall, the ALEKS program added a lot to my afterschool intervention program. Many of my students were highly successful in their personalized plans and were headed towards mastery and grade level. Not only is it rewarding for me to see their progress, but it is also extremely rewarding for the students and their parents to continually see and track the student's progress at home.

Scenario

What challenges did the class or school face in math prior to using ALEKS?

Prior to using ALEKS, my students really lacked confidence in math. My kids would feel unsure of how to solve problems and would be reluctant to take risks to solve a problem. They lacked the sense of how to conceptually tackle a problem they did not understand. With ALEKS in the students' daily routine, students learned that taking a chance to solve a problem, asking for help, or being incorrect had its advantages. Students got immediate feedback and a second chance, which is not something that whole class instruction can give.

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

2 days per week.

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

30 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

I did not implement it into my classroom curriculum. I only use it for my afterschool kids.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

No, students are free to choose what to work on and when, which adds to learner autonomy.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

The first half hour of our afterschool intervention program is centered on mathematics homework help and study time. The second half of class is dedicated to focused attention and effort on ALEKS.

How did you modify your regular teaching approach as a result of ALEKS?

I spend time monitoring the students while they are on the program, asking conceptual questions and elevating their thinking about a particular problem they are working on. This creates a student-teacher-ALEKS interaction that involves me more in their understanding and also allows me to relate it in a language that the students are familiar with from their classroom environment.

How often are students required or encouraged to work on ALEKS at home?

Students are often encouraged to work on ALEKS at home. Students are aware of their personal goals, and if they are not successful at reaching their goals while working on ALEKS at school, they are responsible for working on it at home. I also encourage at-home work during long holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. I motivate the students; for example, the top three students to master the most topics would win a prize. Or, if they use ALEKS four or more times for at least 30 minutes each time, they would get a free play opportunity.

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

I send home monthly progress reports with ALEKS print-outs that show their current pie chart. I highlight their topics mastered, hours spent online, and their progress from the assessments. I also create a comparison each time, so the parents can see their student's progress over time.

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?

I do not include it into my grading system. I just give simple progress notices to monitor progress and where students still need to practice basic skills.

Do you require students to make regular amounts of progress in ALEKS?

Progress is measured and monitored both by where they should be according to grade level and time of the year, as well as by how much they are advancing their scores on each given assessment.

Learning Outcomes

Since using ALEKS, please describe the learning outcomes or progress you have seen.

The students who took the program seriously as a tool for progress and learning were highly successful in mastering topics. These students used their free time to explore topics at home, and dedicated focused attention and strategy toward the program. It was great to see their achievements. All students were excited about their positive progress and loved sharing it with the group. Mastering topics was a celebrated occasion we all would cheer on. The direct feedback allowed the students to feel instant satisfaction. It was easy to track their progress, and in my class, we had monthly personal goals set by myself and the student. The students were always aware of where they should be, according to their goal and their pie chart. It was a self-motivating process that was highly successful across all of my students.

Best Practices

Are there any best practices you would like to share with other teachers implementing ALEKS?

Having students track and monitor their own learning by holding monthly conferences where students reflect on their progress and set new goals for themselves with the help of the teacher is something that is highly motivational for students, and makes them feel responsible and accomplished when they reach their goals.