

Implementation Strategies

St. Edward School, Diocese of Little Rock
Little Rock, AR

Grade(s): K – 8

Scenario: Computer Lab, Home Access

Purpose: Intervention, Enrichment/Gifted and Talented, After-School, Summer School

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 25%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 2 hours per week, 24.75 hours per term

ALEKS Course: Mathematics – LV 3 (with QuickTables), Mathematics – LV 4 (with QuickTables), Mathematics – LV 5 (with QuickTables), Middle School Math Course 2, Middle School Math Course 3

Patricia James, Resource Title I Teacher

Our school's experience with ALEKS has been amazing! We are a small school with a diverse student population. We have a Title I program, but we also have students who excel and are ready to be challenged above grade-level. ALEKS is a program that benefits everyone! Initially, we completed a three-month pilot for the first semester. As a side note, I commend ALEKS for offering such a long pilot program. Even though ALEKS is intuitive, it still takes time and effort to become proficient. The generous time allowance gives ample time for students to become indoctrinated so that they can see results. Our teachers, parents, and students have been so impressed with the program that we purchased it for the second semester. We are now using it in our Title I Summer Program. In addition, 15 families purchased the extended summer plan to use ALEKS at home. Because our school is small, we have been able to implement ALEKS in grades 3–8. On our end-of-the-year standardized testing, 67 percent of participating students went up in math at an average of seven percentile points per student. The most dramatic gains were with our seventh and eighth graders who improved an average of 13.7 and 13.9 percentile points, respectively. One third grade student went up an amazing 59 percentile points! Three students finished two ALEKS courses, and ten students finished one ALEKS course or made above a 90 percent on their final ALEKS assessment. For our first year using ALEKS, we are very proud!

Scenario

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

Our goal as a school is to have all students excel in math. Not only do we want to provide appropriate intervention for students who are behind or struggle, we also want to provide an enrichment opportunity for those students who are ready and motivated to work ahead. ALEKS is a program that meets the needs of any student.

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

1 day per week.

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

45 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

Our third grade classrooms use ALEKS as reinforcement, but for no grade. The upper grade levels (grades 4–8) use a quarterly assessment as a test grade. Next year, all students will receive quarterly assessment grades and will also receive points based on the number of topics they master.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

ALEKS topics are covered in the order of our textbook.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

Class periods are structured by which groups of students are being served. Regular classes go to the computer lab once per week for 45 minutes to work on ALEKS, with the classroom teacher and the resource teacher circulating through the lab helping students. Students are also assigned to work on ALEKS at home for another two hours per week. Our Title I students get an additional 45 minutes per week in the resource room. Afterschool tutoring students receive an additional one hour per week, and summer school students work on ALEKS for one hour per day, five days per week.

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

Teachers cover math objectives during the week and the students then work on the corresponding ALEKS topics on the days where

ALEKS is used in the computer lab. Once they complete these topics, students are free to explore other topics of their choosing.

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

Students are encouraged to work on ALEKS for two hours per week at home.

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

We send home a parent letter and hold mandatory conferences with all parents at nine weeks into the term. We discuss ALEKS progress at the conferences. ALEKS progress is also noted in monthly newsletters that are sent home.

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?

In the future, ALEKS will be part of their homework. Students will be expected to do ALEKS at home for 30 minutes, four days per week.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

Every teacher does their breakdown a little differently, but ALEKS is typically about 25 percent of a student's grade.

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

Progress depends on the ALEKS course the students are enrolled in, since each course has a different amount of topics. Basically, on the quarterly assessments, 25 percent of a student's pie needs to be completed by the end of the first nine weeks, then 50 percent completed by the end of the semester, followed by 75 percent completed by the third nine-week period, and finally 100 percent completed by the end of the year. The grading scale changes according to the time period. For example, for the first nine weeks, an "A" is 20–25 percent completion; a "B" is 15–19 percent completion; and so on. For the end-of-year period, an "A" is 90–100 percent completion; a "B" is 80–89 percent completion; and so on.

Learning Outcomes

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

Since using ALEKS, we have had 21 students improve their standardized test scores in math by 20 percentile points or more. Students have told me that they are no longer afraid of math, nor do they dread the subject anymore—in fact, they feel more confident! Students now finish their math work more quickly and with higher rates of accuracy. Teachers have also said it is common to hear, "Oh, I've already done that in ALEKS!" when they tell students what the lesson objective is for that day.

Best Practices

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

Make it fun, keep things upbeat, encourage students, and motivate them any way possible! During the year, we announce students' names on the intercom as they finish their pies and they receive a Math Medal. At the end of the year, we hold a Pie Party for students that complete their pie or make a 90 percent or above on their final assessment. We eat pizza and cookie pies! For the finale, students get to "pie" the teacher of their choosing if they complete their ALEKS Pie. This year, we had about 12 percent of the participating students get to do this!