

Implementation Strategies

South Sutter Charter School, Marcum Illinois Union School District
Folsom, CA

Grade(s): K – 12

Scenario: Home Access

Purpose: Exit Exam, At-Risk Students, Core Curriculum

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 100%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 5 hours per week, 80 hours per term

ALEKS Course: Mathematics – LV 4 (with QuickTables), Middle School Math Course 3, Algebra 1, California Algebra 1, High School Geometry

Brandy Anderson, Teacher

At first, I was slightly apprehensive to use ALEKS for my students' core math curriculum. Willing to experiment, I gave it a try. As a homeschool teacher at a public charter school, I am given the freedom to customize curriculum to specifically meet the unique needs of each of my students. For many of my students, the traditional textbook method for math has not worked. For those students, it was time to make a change. I used ALEKS based on a recommendation from a fellow teacher. The immediate feedback of ALEKS corrects student mistakes and generates learning at a faster rate. Also, it prevents the student from engaging in bad math habits by practicing the wrong way to solve a problem.

Scenario

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

None. Our school is founded on the basis of unique curriculum choices for each student. We are not a "one size fits all" school. ALEKS works well in our school format.

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

5 days per week.

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

60 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

Teachers at our school are given total flexibility in selecting from a variety of curriculum resources for any given student. In my experience, I have found that most teachers who use ALEKS select it as the primary source of math curriculum for the student. Occasionally, it is used to supplement a traditional textbook.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

No. In my opinion, this is one of the main strengths of the program. It does not follow a state-mandated schedule, but a logical progression that is based on the student's unique learning needs.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

All students are homeschooled at our publicly funded charter school.

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

I find that the students need less direct instruction from the teacher. This allows the student to work in a more independent fashion.

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

Every day.

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

I find it is much easier for parents to get engaged in the learning process with ALEKS. Typically, most parents are nervous about helping their child with math homework because they have trouble explaining the math concepts of a problem that their child is struggling with. In this situation, the student looks to the parent for an explanation. If the parent cannot help, the learning process ends. With ALEKS, the student simply presses the Explain button, and ALEKS will logically guide the student through the correct method of solving the problem. There are no longer any excuses for students or parents.

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?

ALEKS represents 100 percent of my students' math homework.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

100 percent of my students' math grade is based on their performance in ALEKS.

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

I set weekly benchmarks for my students. Based on the amount of learning objectives they need to master by the end of the year, I can calculate the amount of learning objectives that need to be mastered in each week of our academic calendar.

Learning Outcomes

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

ALEKS has closely followed our state's math learning objectives. The diagnostic test taken on the first day of use has effectively isolated the core concepts that need to be addressed before advancing on. This is where ALEKS shines and traditional textbooks fail. Regardless of the student's academic preparedness for a math concept, the traditional textbook requires them to solve math problems based on the academic school calendar. This results in student frustration and a negative attitude towards math. One student said, "I don't like math, but I like doing ALEKS." Others are driven by filling up their pie chart, which visually demonstrates their progress in the course.

Best Practices

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

Parent involvement is key. Students who show the greatest amount of improvement typically have parents who structure regular time each day for ALEKS. It just takes one hour per day! Your students will have amazing results.