

Implementation Strategies

Meridian Academy, Joint School District No. 2
Meridian, ID

Grade(s): 9 – 12

Scenario: One-to-One Laptop Program

Purpose: RtI, Special Education, Improve State Test Scores, Supplement

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 90%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 2.5–3.5 hours per week, 54 hours per term

Kim Zeydel, Math Department Chair

We have had very positive results using ALEKS with our at-risk high school students who are 3–5 years below grade level in their math skills. We are seeing an average growth rate of 25 percent within a semester. In addition, two-thirds of our Pre-Algebra students are now working on the course curriculum. They are still below grade level, but they are improving very quickly.

Scenario

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

Our biggest challenge was how to teach a class of 20 students who are 3–5 years below grade level. Students come to us with gaps and misconceptions in their understanding of math, and their weaknesses and needs are so varied that it is hard to address them as a whole class. In addition, our students wanted to be taught in a one-on-one setting. ALEKS has allowed us to implement one-on-one instruction and enabled the students to work on their specific needs.

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

2–3 days per week.

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

60–70 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

We use ALEKS as the main course curriculum for our Lab courses, which support our core Pre-Algebra and Algebra 1 courses.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

I have aligned ALEKS to my textbook. We basically cover the textbook from start to finish, but some chapters are skipped as we get closer to our state math testing period. This seems to be working really well for retention, as students see material at least twice, once in their core class and once in their lab class. Additionally, the few students who are behind the class use ALEKS to review the basic skills they need to move forward.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

The students do a quick activity outside of ALEKS and QuickTables or take a weekly skills test. Then they spend the rest of the class period, 45–75 minutes, using ALEKS.

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

Before we switched to ALEKS, we used worksheets and another computer program which was very slow. Now, I still work one-on-one with students but ALEKS assists me in providing more focused help, which is very beneficial to the students.

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

We encourage the students to work at home. However, since not doing homework is one of the main reasons students are at our school, they usually do not do any work at home. We do have students whose parents are involved and those students work on ALEKS most evenings for 20–30 minutes.

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

Once the parents understand the value of ALEKS, they encourage their students to work in the program.

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?

We do not assign ALEKS as homework unless the student is very behind in skill level. Unless parents are involved, ALEKS does not get done at home.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

Grades are broken down as follows: 40 percent for growth on progress assessments, 30 percent for meeting the required number of topics mastered each week (required to master ten topics), ten percent for NBA Hoops program, ten percent for QuickTables, and ten percent for their final exam.

Learning Outcomes

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

Many students are excited about their progress, especially the few who are way ahead of the class. These students will be placed into the Algebra 1 course once they finish the Algebra Readiness course. ALEKS has helped to explain some of the concepts which the students were really struggling with. They still need the teacher for support, but now the questions are more specific and the learning process is centered on the needs of each individual student.

Best Practices

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

Teachers must walk around and talk with their students. Do not expect them to ask for help, especially the at-risk, ADHD, shy, and below grade level student who is embarrassed to say "I don't get this."