

Implementation Strategies

S.F. Austin Middle School, Irving Independent School District
Irving, TX

Grade(s): 6 – 8

Scenario: Computers in Classroom, Home Access

Purpose: ESL Students, Intervention, At-Risk Students

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 100%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 4+ hours per week

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

Olga Herrera-Omar, ESL/ExcELL Teacher

It has been fantastic! My students really enjoy working with ALEKS. All of my students come from a background where they have had little, interrupted, or no education. ALEKS not only allows my students to feel successful while they are working on their math skills, but they also feel a sense of accomplishment and self-worth – something that they really have NEVER experienced in their lives. It has been an unbelievable experience. My students would like to thank you.

Scenario

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

Individualizing assignments for different grade levels and different academic levels. I have students in grades 6–8 and their levels range from pre-kindergarten to fourth (at least). It is extremely difficult for one teacher to teach grade level objectives to different grade level students that are each working on a different academic area. Oh, and did I mention that directions, explanations, and corrections need to be presented in both English and Spanish? I thank the wonderful inventor of ALEKS, that person has made my job 100 times easier.

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?

50 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

Easy squeezey-lemon pleazy. ALEKS was presented as a pilot program to our school district and to my ExcELL class. It has been an absolute blessing.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

Once students take the ALEKS Assessment, I know what areas of deficit they need assistance in learning. With some of my kids who had interrupted schooling, some knew how to add and subtract, but not multiply. Some knew how to multiply, but not add and subtract with regrouping. ALEKS helps my kids catch-up in the areas they missed-out on when they were or were not in school.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

My classes are double-blocked; one period an academic lesson is delivered, and one period of ALEKS – love that class!

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

Here's the really cool thing about ALEKS: It has taught some of my students some material that, as a whole class, I know I would not have time to touch on. Students work at their own pace, in their dominant language with the occasional flipping back and forth of both languages to see what questions are being asked. If they don't know how to work a problem, the "help" or "explicar" button comes in handy. That way my very shy students who don't want to ask for help get the assistance they need without embarrassing themselves. It also makes them feel smart, when they see someone else is struggling with a problem and they clarify to the other students (or rather show-off to them) on how the problem is solved.

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

Every single day, but my students do not have computers at home – so it is just limited to school.

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 homework; because of the double-blocking, they have two hours of math a day and one of those hours is only for ALEKS.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

One class period equals 100 percent for participation; this is worth 25 percent in the gradebook. I also give 25 percent for their daily grade, and 50 percent for their assessment grade.

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

If my students make ANY kind of progress, I am grateful. If my students want to work on ALEKS, I give them full reign on that. These kids are not used to going to school on a daily basis from where they came from, much less getting any kind of education. So, if my students express an interest in working on ALEKS – I tell them to go for it.

Learning Outcomes

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

Honestly, I don't think I would have been successful without implementing ALEKS. The program is such that a student can work at their individual academic level without feeling inadequate in comparison to others in my class. It is a difficult task to individualize for each child; however, using ALEKS in class allows me to give more support for those students who need one-on-one assistance, while ALEKS challenges those students who are ready to tackle more difficult assignments. My students are making wonderful progress. I am absolutely thrilled with their work habits. They know what to do, they know how to enter in the answer, AND ALEKS has shown them HOW to use the computer. My students did not have ANY computer skills at all, and ALEKS has opened a whole new world for them – the world of technology.

Best Practices

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

Just one statement really: If you want your students to feel and be successful in math, and learn vocabulary in the process, implement ALEKS as soon as possible.