

Implementation Strategies

Lakota Plains Junior School, Lakota Local School District
Liberty Township, OH

Grade(s): 7 – 8

Scenario: Computer Lab

Purpose: RtI, Improve State Test Scores, At-Risk Students, ESL Students

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 100%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 3.25 hours per week; 30 hours per term

ALEKS Course: Middle School Math Course 2, Middle School Math Course 3

Scott Mueller, Teacher

My overall experience with ALEKS has been good. Many students that have genuinely committed to the program have made amazing progress. I've seen students that initially assessed at 14 percent of the seventh grade curriculum and are now well over 80 percent of the eighth grade curriculum in just eight months. I have many other students who have not only bridged the gaps that existed when they first started this program, but have accelerated themselves and are excited about the notion of doing so. Students' performance in their regular classes is improving as is their overall confidence and most students are proud of what they've accomplished.

Scenario

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

Most students that we qualify for our ALEKS program have fallen short on their state test scores in math. These scores coupled with poor performance in their math class over the course of a few years prompts their placement. We also view this program as an excellent Tier 2 intervention program for use with at-risk students. ALEKS has also been utilized with several English as a Second Language (ESL) students and assisted them in bridging gaps in their knowledge base as well.

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?

40–42 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

ALEKS is primarily used as an intervention strategy that is coupled with a student's regular math class. Essentially, our ALEKS students are taking math for two periods a day, or what equates to approximately 84 minutes.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

No, I allow the kids to choose their own topics and encourage them to work in areas where they have the most to earn.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

Students work on their pies daily and have a weekly objective goal ranging from 7–15 objectives, depending on what level they're at. We also initiate weekly ALEKS quizzes that we generate based on current topics in their regular math classes. This reinforces what they're doing in class, as well as the fundamentals they are working on with ALEKS. We keep track of their performance on objectives on a weekly basis and their scores on the quiz each week. This coupled with an end of quarter assessment will culminate into a letter grade for each nine-week term.

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

I've individualized my instruction and started to modify concepts with greater ease using ALEKS. This program has also taught me how to present certain topics, such as graphing and constructions.

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

I encourage students to work at home daily; however, only a few of them actually do that. Typically the only time a student will get on ALEKS at home is when they have fallen behind or have been absent due to illness. I have offered bonus points for any objectives earned at home over the weekend or holiday breaks, but very few of my students have taken me up on that.

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

We make ALEKS available to parents for viewing during open house and conference nights so they can ask questions about it. We also provide links to the program on our district website.

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 objectives make up approximately 20 percent of a student's grade and 70 percent of their work time. The other 80 percent of their grade is based on quizzes, which take about 30 percent of their time to complete.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

Since we use ALEKS as the primary program for a full course, the program counts for 100 percent of a student's calculated grade.

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

We ask that our students show progress on their assessments as compared to their previous assessments. I have mini conferences with my students after each assessment to go over where they are achieving, what I would like to see them do next, and which areas I believe they should focus their attention in order to get the most out of the program.

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

Many students that have genuinely committed to the program have made amazing progress. I've seen students that initially assessed at 14 percent of the seventh grade curriculum and are now well over 80 percent of the eighth grade curriculum in just eight months. I have many other students who have not only bridged the gaps that existed when they first started this program, but have accelerated themselves and are excited about the notion of doing so. Students' performance in their regular classes is improving as is their overall confidence and most students are proud of what they've accomplished.

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

Be sure to have fun with the students using this program. I started having inter-class competitions where I group the kids in different ways, sometimes using small teams of students to compete against each other and award a prize at the end of the week to the winning teams. I've also had success using tournament bracket formats and allowing the students to compete as individuals as they showcase their talents. It got to the point where the kids loved doing that so much they were afraid to miss class for fear they would be eliminated from a competition too quickly.