

Implementation Strategies

Shoreline Middle School, Live Oak Elementary School District
Santa Cruz, CA

Grade(s): 6 – 8

Scenario: Computers in Classroom

Purpose: Special Education

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 50%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 1–2 hours per week, 10–15 hours per term

ALEKS Course: Mathematics – LV 3 (with QuickTables), Mathematics – LV 4 (with QuickTables), Pre–Algebra

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Overall, I'm very pleased with ALEKS. I especially appreciate the individualized work each student gets, and how it is customized exactly for each student. I also appreciate the ability to switch a student to a different level with ease.

Scenario

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

It was discouraging to do work as a class and have it be too hard for some and too easy for others. Even knowing what each student needed, it was VERY time-consuming to provide different materials at different levels for each student, and then have to grade all of those different things.

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

3 days per week.

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

20–30 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

I plan on students having regular time to use ALEKS each week. They are also encouraged to use QuickTables to boost their knowledge of basic math facts.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

No, the students are free to work at their own pace and choose which topics to work on.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

We do warm-ups together as a class and then split the class. Half of the students are on ALEKS, and the rest of the students work on paper-based math.

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

If I notice quite a few students are getting hung up on a particular topic, I will tailor the daily warm-ups so I can address that topic as a group.

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

Though all students have been encouraged to work on ALEKS at home, very few have done so. I don't require it as not all students have a computer at home.

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

I send a letter to all parents that includes a short description of ALEKS and how their child is using it in the classroom. I give the parents their student's login name and password and ask them to encourage their child to use it home (if able). I also let them know they are free to call me for more information at any time.

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.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

Since a fair amount of class time is devoted to ALEKS, I count it as about 40–50 percent of a student's grade.

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

Because of the nature of the student population I serve (learning disabled, far below grade level, etc.), we celebrate any amount of progress. If the program seems too difficult, I will move the student to a lower level to increase his or her chances of academic success. In one case, the student progressed upwards through several levels before we found one that was appropriately challenging.

Learning Outcomes

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

Although I have sixth grade students with a range of disabilities, most of them are 2–3 levels below their grade. I have one student who originally assessed at 15 percent, but I wanted to at least give her a chance, so I let her work in that level. She is now at 76 percent mastery. Another student, who is autistic, started out at 8 percent and has progressed to around 50 percent! One student originally assessed at 32 percent and is now at 65 percent. In addition, she has completed 100 percent of the multiplication section in QuickTables and is at 67 percent in the division section (she started with 9 percent mastery). Because of this, she will be mainstreamed at grade level math next school year!

Best Practices

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

I highly recommend that teachers become familiar with all of the ALEKS support that is available. The different reports are invaluable! They have helped me see areas where many students are unsure and be able to address the whole class on those topics. It has helped me see what areas I don't need to spend time on as well. Also, by offering the students free choice in selecting topics, ALEKS has offered some students the ability to set off in all directions and learn things that no one else in the class was ready for (and I suspect those students were surprised to see they could learn some of those things).