

Implementation Strategies

Santa Clarita Valley International School, William S. Hart Union High School District
Castaic, CA

Grade(s): K – 10

Scenario: Computer Lab, Computers in Classroom, Home Access

Purpose: Supplement

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 25%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 1–2 hours per week

ALEKS Course: Mathematics – LV 5 (with QuickTables), Middle School Math Course 2, Middle School Math Course 3, Pre–Algebra, Algebra 1

Dustin Lengning, Facilitator

ALEKS has been a wonderful addition to our curriculum here at Santa Clarita Valley International (SCVi)! We implement some very powerful curriculums, but I believe that ALEKS has been just as powerful for our learners' understanding of mathematics. It is a great way for students to work at their own pace, to push themselves if they want to or get the extra help. Thank you ALEKS!

Scenario

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

Making sure that each learner, across the board, has their needs met. I have learners who are ready for ninth grade math in sixth grade, and learners who are still uncomfortable with basic math facts! How can I possibly meet both of those needs at the same time? ALEKS MATH!

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?

10–20 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

I try to use it as a supplement. I encourage them to finish the sections we do in class for extra practice. If we work on Proportions in class, it is always good practice to work on it again on the ALEKS program. It is also fun to give the learners a quiz on a certain topic and see how they do. It gives me the data I need to ensure that the learners understand the material.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

I do not. Besides using quizzes, I allow the learners to discover the topics on their own. I tell them that math is not always in order; therefore, you should be able to search it for yourself. This also allows them to randomly select and not fall into the practice of not seeing a concept for multiple sessions. When the students see that another learner is working on a section, they tend to follow suit. They like using the input tools, such as manipulating the bisectors, drawing the lines, using the protractors, and seeing the math work!

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

I use ALEKS as a supplement and give minimal time for ALEKS during class. If we have a minimum day, additional work time, or the like, I will allot some class time to ALEKS. I want them to use it to move at their own pace. I still have certain standards that I need to maintain; therefore I utilize the workbook provided by our school. We also have projects that we complete, which is another reason why we cannot always mandate class time. However, they do have study periods where ALEKS is an option. The students are also encouraged to work at home, but if they cannot, they have the time at school to do so. I really like that the program gives the learners the freedom to work on what they desire. When we learn a topic, they enjoy going in and burning through the material on that subject rather quickly. This gives them the supplement and additional practice they need to master the topic.

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

With multiple data sets from the program, I can spend more or less time on a topic depending on how the learners do on that section of their pie. If I see that learners are staying away from a section, trying and failing, or starting and stopping, I can spend more time on that section to increase their comfort with the concepts. I feel that ALEKS gives me not only more resources to utilize, but also more information to directly use.

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

They are required to do a certain amount of lessons for my class. If they choose to finish this at school, they can. If they choose to finish this at home, they also have that freedom. I like the freedom that this program allows. I have learners that have done almost no ALEKS at school but are way ahead of the other learners from their practice at home.

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

Parental involvement is crucial. I have set up a live document so the parents can see how their learner is doing with ALEKS. They can see how many lessons they attempted, how many they mastered, and how much time they have spent on their math skills. They can also email me at any time, and I can easily give them any additional information they may desire.

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?

It all depends on them as a learner. If they choose to not do their work at school, then it is a part of their homework load. ALEKS is about 50 percent of the homework load. If they do not complete it, they receive a lower score than those who complete the task.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

Since I require a lot of ALEKS math be completed by my learners, it does carry a pretty hefty grade. I make it a project grade, holding about 25 percent by total weight. I inform the learners that not only should this be fun, but it should also be an easy way to bring their grade up or keep their grade up. I feel as though it is a wonderful supplement for my learners, therefore, I don't want to take a lot of the fun out of it by making it a huge part of their final grade.

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

I want the learners to master at least six topics per week at the start of the session. After the learners became more comfortable with the program, I continuously increase my requirement to about ten topics per week. In my class, I make ALEKS a competition; therefore, I get many students who complete 2–4 times more than the basic requirements. I love this! It makes math fun, and it drives them to succeed!

Learning Outcomes

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

I have seen the students make large gains not only in their amount of knowledge, but also in their understanding of how to apply concepts to new situations. It is interesting to watch them make the connections between an angle discussion and an algebraic discussion. They start to make these connections, and it is so fun to be a part of! They love it! They are so competitive; I make it a friendly competition by putting up learners who have weekly highs – high percentages and overall high numbers of work done. Everyone has an equal opportunity to get on the board, and it gives them the push they need to do extra work. I also give the incentive of taking them out to lunch if they finish our sixth grade ALEKS math. This excites them, and they all want to finish!

Best Practices

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

Make it fun and competitive! Give the learners something to look forward to, such as a prize, recognition, etc. ALEKS is on to something here; I just hope the students don't find out!