

Implementation Strategies

Beachwood Middle School, Beachwood City School District
Beachwood, OH

Grade(s): 7 – 8

Scenario: One-to-One Laptop Program

Purpose: Improve State Test Scores, Supplement

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 40%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 3 hours per week, 30+ hours per term

ALEKS Course: Middle School Math Course 2, Middle School Math Course 3, Pre-Algebra, Algebra 1

Barbara Urbanski, Teacher

This is my third year using ALEKS, and I am totally sold on it. It is quite amazing how accurate the results are with regard to student testing and progress. I have also found that students who complete a minimum of three hours per week in ALEKS are succeeding in class. With ALEKS, I am able to design reviews and quizzes to help students at all levels. Also, if there is question or an idea that I have about the program, I am able to contact ALEKS Customer Support and have the question answered very quickly.

Scenario

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

We struggled with correctly assigning work to students at various levels in a given classroom.

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

1 day per week.

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

40 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

I generally look at the textbook to see where the students should be by a certain time of the year. I set the objectives for the quarter and give students an opportunity to earn bonus points for finishing early. This encourages the students to work toward the goal. I also create quizzes that coincide with the units that we are working on throughout the year. ALEKS Quizzes allow me to make sure that students are working on a particular concept. I also create classes to move students to when they are progressing at a faster pace than other students. I use the report feature to see how students are progressing. I also require that all students have a notebook while they are working on ALEKS. I allow students to periodically use their notebooks for a requested ALEKS Assessment that is taken during class for a grade.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

I use the ALEKS Intermediate Objectives to structure my class. I also create quizzes in the order in which concepts are covered in the textbook. I find that if I allow students to work at their own pace, they can either cover concepts that need more practice or they can move ahead.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

I usually have an "ALEKS Day" on Fridays, and students look forward to it. Because their homework is ALEKS, I have students keep a notebook for their work and they are instructed to write down any concepts they do not understand. The students are constantly asking questions and working throughout the class period. They are also encouraged to answer questions from their peers.

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

My teaching approach has changed in that I assign ALEKS for all homework (with minimal exceptions). Students are able to ask questions during lecture that correspond to concepts they are learning in the program.

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

Three hours of homework are required every week. I see a direct correlation between those completing their homework (the right way) and those achieving good grades. I give them their hours on Monday and keep a running total from week to week. I make sure to monitor their progress from home. The students really like that I can see them working at night. I encourage them by emailing them when I see them working online.

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

I am careful to inform the parents early on about the benefits of ALEKS. Parents are particularly excited to know that the students can work ahead and not be held back. I encourage parents to email me with questions if they have any problems. I also notify parents when their child meets the Intermediate Objectives I set using the ALEKS Teacher Module. Parents are quick to review these objectives and encourage their child to complete remaining objectives.

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?**

Yes, 100 percent.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

Students can earn 50 points per week. I tell students that if they complete their ALEKS homework, they will not earn anything lower than a "C-." The grading system breaks down as follows: ALEKS homework is 50 percent of their grade; ALEKS Quizzes and final is 26.5 percent of their grade; pencil/paper test/homework is 23.5 percent of their grade. In addition to ALEKS Quizzes, I also have my students take an ALEKS final at the end of the school year. I test my students by giving them a new ALEKS Assessment that they need to take in class. I also put together a final by setting up two ALEKS Quizzes with concepts that are covered in our texts.

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

I check the student progress at least every week. If I see that a student is not progressing, I speak with the student. I also give students their ALEKS hours every Monday so they know where they should be with regard to time.

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

Students are always looking at their own progress and looking at how many concepts they have learned. I believe that the use of ALEKS has given some of my "regular" students the opportunity to excel and earn their way into an advanced class. I always enjoy having a student come to class and inform me that she just finished an assessment and now has more concepts completed. My students know that I watch their progress and they are very eager to announce their ability to learn new material. Students who are working in ALEKS are definitely earning better grades on exams. I can look at a student's total time in ALEKS and can almost predict what grade she is earning for the class. My first-year ALEKS students have come back to me and have stated that high school math is "so easy" because they had already seen many concepts in ALEKS. Several students have doubled up on math classes because they have learned so much in ALEKS.

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

I use ALEKS in preparation for the Ohio Achievement Test. I create two ALEKS Quizzes by going through the Ohio Achievement sample test and selecting concepts in the ALEKS Quizzes. I make these quizzes available in early December and notify students and parents. Parents are thrilled to have these quizzes available to their students. Students are told to look over their quizzes and write missed questions in their ALEKS notebook. I believe that it is imperative to make sure that students know you are watching them. For whatever reason, my students really like the fact that I can see who is working online at night. I have students come up to me and say, "Hey Ms. Urbanski, did you see me working last night?" I really think this says something for the program when my students want to do the work.