

Implementation Strategies

Haas Elementary School, Genesee School District
Genesee, MI

Grade(s): K – 6

Scenario: Computer Lab, Computers in Classroom, Home Access

Purpose: After-School, Summer School, Improve State Test Scores, Core Curriculum

ALEKS Portion of Curriculum: 75%

Time Spent in ALEKS: 3–5 hours per week, 40–50 hours per term

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

James Zwerican, Teacher

My experience with the entire ALEKS program has been incredible! I am so fortunate on so many levels that I found this amazing web-based program. In 2008, our fifth graders scored toward the bottom on the math Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) in our district out of 21 schools. After we implemented ALEKS, the same students (who were now sixth graders) scored first in the entire district! This obviously had everyone convinced and now our entire school uses ALEKS for grades 3–8 and will continue to use it. The program is awesome in so many ways! ALEKS challenges the students, plus the assessments help achieve mastery of all levels. All of the students love the program too because they can constantly see how they are progressing each and every day!

Scenario

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

Our students lacked motivation. Now, they can see a visual of what they know, what they are ready for, and what they need to learn before the end of the year.

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

3–4 days per week.

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

55 minutes.

Implementation

How do you implement ALEKS?

We use ALEKS 3–4 days per week in the computer lab and when I am teaching a certain strand, students work on that area if it's not mastered yet. I set goals each week for my students for a grade. They also work on ALEKS at home for extra credit.

Do you cover ALEKS concepts in a particular order?

Yes; I have my students work on topics in the following order: whole numbers, fractions and decimals, geometry, measurements, algebra, and proportions/probability.

How do you structure your class period with ALEKS?

I teach a certain strand prior to going to the computer lab and then we focus on that piece of the ALEKS Pie. I then go over some examples on an LCD projector and encourage students to use the explain button when they run into problems. I also allow them work by themselves on other days because most students are on so many different levels.

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

I have modified my teaching approach by breaking my students into groups within my classroom. The ALEKS program allows me to see their level and what they are ready for next.

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

Students are encouraged to work on ALEKS every night!

How do you cultivate parental involvement and support for ALEKS?

I send weekly progress reports home that contain students' pie charts. Parents can also email me or call me when they need assistance. Parents love ALEKS and they are constantly giving positive feedback on how their child is making progress throughout the year.

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, ALEKS is part of their homework. Students also do other homework out of their book.

How do you incorporate ALEKS into your grading system?

ALEKS is 25 percent of a student's grade in my class. Additionally, tests account for 35 percent, homework is 25 percent, and notes taken in class are 15 percent.

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

Yes, I require students to make weekly progress. It depends on how many sections they have mastered when they take their first assessment at the beginning of the year. My whole goal is to have all of my students complete their grade level by the end of the year. I meet with each of my students, one at a time, and set up their goals for each week, month, and for the year. I am having a huge "Pie" party at the end of the year for whoever has achieved their goal.

Learning Outcomes

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

All of the teachers at Genesee Schools have seen amazing progress for all students who use ALEKS, including at-risk and gifted/talented students. The program allows each child to work at their level and achieve success without pressure. Our MEAP scores have improved leaps and bounds! In 2009, our sixth graders were number one out of 21 districts after using ALEKS! Students who use ALEKS are self-motivated and love watching their individual pies grow throughout the year. Nearly all of my students are now working at grade level and there are even a few going beyond the next grade level!

Best Practices

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

Group students after they have taken their first assessment, so you are able to differentiate instruction for each child. Also, make students work at home for a homework grade. I also recommend always following up with each student every week to show them the progress they are making. Show students that teachers are able to see how often they are logged on and how many strands they are mastered daily and give incentives!