

# Montgomery Advertiser

## INFORMATION ON STUDENT PROGRESS VALUABLE

### Data key to improving education

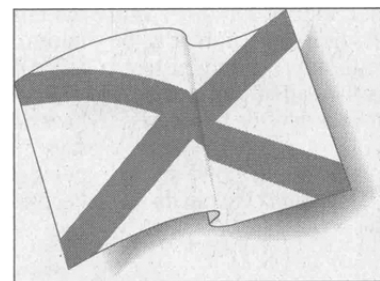
By Gregory G. Fitch

A recent news article on remedial education has brought a nationwide problem closer to home. Using data gathered by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), on college enrollment and reports on high school graduates supplied by the Alabama Department of Education, ACHE reports show that more than one-third of Alabama high school graduates who attend public colleges in-state must take remedial courses.

This need for remediation is costing the state and students money in challenging economic times. Beyond the initial investment in education, it creates a threat for the development of a future workforce. Students may not earn college credit for remedial courses and may not qualify for financial aid.

Sadly, many become discouraged and discontinue their education.

Alabamians always have been faced with questions about the state's educational system, but with the future of the state dependent upon a qualified workforce, it is more of a challenge today. We must expand the use of data as a much-needed tool for recruiting new industry and improving our educational system. Faced with limited resources, hard facts must be used to make correct decisions for business and education.



**Alabama Voices**

The High School Reports, which contain remedial education information, are only a few of numerous reports generated by ACHE as a result of 1996 legislation that created the Alabama Statewide Student Unit Record System Database. This database, recognized as one of the best in the country for its quality and integrity, is a viable tool for educators and economic developers. The database contains more than 6.5 million records. In order to track a student's progress through the Alabama public higher education system, each student is assigned a unique

identification number. No information is released identifying specific students, only aggregated data is made available.

This information is valuable to business/industry leaders, educators and administrators, lawmakers, chambers of commerce, civic/community groups, and parents because it can be used to identify educational problem areas and the development of a potential workforce for all regions of the state. The state can provide employers with data that reflect how many students are studying in various instructional fields, such as engineering, nursing, welding, and when they will potentially be ready to enter the workforce.

Additionally, these records, like the remedial numbers, provide educators the opportunity to evaluate how well students perform as they move from K-12 to higher education and to address any overall deficiencies that may be identified. In addition, the data have been used in writing grant applications that brought thousands of dollars to the state.

The submission and coordination of data at a central focal point becomes one element of a partnership that must be expanded in a coordinated effort to ensure maximum student success.

There still must be an overall dialog of interested parties for integration and alignment of resources to provide a seamless system from preschool through higher education and lifelong learning. This could be accomplished through a PK-20 Council that would combine the strengths of our educational system with industry needs. The expertise by these various groups would work to promote staying in school, high school graduation, college readiness, college transition and success.

The dividends would be huge and the potential limitless. It is time to bring to use the data to improve access, additional choices in educational fields, student advising, reduced time in school and cost, and improved employment options.

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