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Many need remedial college courses

BIRMINGHAM -- An analysis by the Birmingham News shows that more than a third of Alabama high school graduates who attend college in-state must take remedial courses in their freshman year because they are not ready for college level work.

The analysis of data from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education shows that 34.4 percent of 2010 high school graduates who went on to the state's public two- and four-year colleges had to take at least one remedial course to bring their English or math skills up. The Birmingham city school district is among the worst-performing systems in the state, with more than 50 percent of in-state college freshmen from six of the district's seven high schools having to take at least one remedial course in 2010.

The problems are not unique to Alabama. The state's 2010 average is similar to the most recent national figures available. Gregory Fitch, the executive director of ACHE, said it's costing the state and students extra money and makes students less likely to finish college and be productive workers. He said ACHE began collecting remediation data in 2007.

CRUNCHING NUMBERS

34.4 percent of 2010 high school graduates who went on to the state's public colleges had to take at least one remedial course to bring their English or math skills up.

Fitch said the definition of remedial education and the requirements that determine who needs it vary from college to college. Instead of admitting low-performing high school students, many of the state's bigger schools direct them to local community colleges first.

Students don't earn credits for remedial courses and may not qualify for tuition aid.

The nonprofit Alliance for Excellent Education said the state's economy would see an \$80 million bump if it weren't for remedial students, including \$51 million in direct costs of remediation and \$29 million in lost earnings.

State school superintendent Joe Morton said that Alabama has shown progress over the years despite these findings. Alabama made the highest gains in the nation in fourth-grade reading in 2008 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Morton said the state is establishing a Career and Technical Education Commission to review high school career-tech programs and offerings, research employers' work force needs and study ways to create a seamless transition between K-12 and post-secondary preparation for careers.