Report: More in Ky. head to college

But remedial work remains common

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More Kentucky high school graduates are enrolling in college and fewer are requiring remedial courses, according to a report released Friday by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

But the report, which examined college entrance rates and performance among high school graduates who started postsecondary education in the summer or fall of 2008, still highlights the state's need to better prepare students for college-level work.

Overall, 38 percent of the students included in the report were required to enroll in one or more remedial or developmental courses. That's down from 45 percent in 2002.

More than a quarter of students needed remedial math; 22 percent needed English and 17 percent reading.

"We are pleased with these gains, but we know that serious challenges remain," Council President Bob King said. "This report will help us identify where and how to make changes necessary to improve student success in the future. While we celebrate the improvement, we need to produce even greater improvement, faster."

The state spends more than $35 million a year on college remedial education, according to the most recent figures available from the council. Taking remedial education courses also costs the students, who must pay to take the courses but who receive no college credit toward a degree for them.

Higher education officials say the state must do a better job of preparing students to succeed in postsecondary education or it will never meet its goal of increasing the number of residents holding bachelor's degrees. More degrees, they say, equals a better of quality of life for residents, and economic stability for the state.

The Kentucky College and Career Readiness High School Feedback Report for the Class of 2008 was released during the council's meeting Friday at Eastern Kentucky University. The council, the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority and the Kentucky P-20 Data Collaborative produced the report.

The report's findings mirror data released earlier this year by the Kentucky Department of Education, showing that only a third of the state's 2010 high school graduates were prepared for college or careers.

Education Commissioner Terry Holliday called the findings in that report "abysmal" and said the state's schools must do more to get students ready for postsecondary education and the workplace. The state wants 67 percent of Kentucky students to be college ready by 2014; only 34 percent were ready in 2010.

Key findings of the high school feedback report released by the council Friday include:

▶ Sixty-three percent of the 43,362 graduates of Kentucky's public and private high schools in 2008 entered college by the fall semester, with 57 percent attending colleges and universities in Kentucky and 6 percent attending out-of-state institutions. That is up from 51 percent in 2004.

▶ Across the state, significant gaps in college going and college readiness are noticeable. Students fared better in urban and higher-income areas, and lower in rural and low-income areas, especially in eastern Kentucky.

Holliday echoed King's comments on the council report, noting while there has been some improvement in college readiness in recent years, "we still have a lot of work to do."

"We must have stronger expectations in high school and college, and this work does not belong just to those institutions," Holliday said. "Every parent, school, teacher, business leader and politician in Kentucky must work together to impact the future for our children."

State education leaders and lawmakers have taken steps in recent years to spur college readiness among high school students. That includes the council's revising the state's college admission regulation in 2007 that increased the scores needed on ACT college-entrance exams to enroll in college-level courses.

The new admission regulations dovetail with requirements contained in the recently passed Senate Bill 1, which scraps the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System and requires the Department of Education to devise new standards and a new test for elementary and high school students in the 2011-12 school year.

The legislation, which seeks to better prepare Kentucky students for postsecondary education and the workplace, also calls for the number of students taking remedial classes in college to be cut in half by 2014, and for college completion rates for students enrolled in one or more remedial classes to be increased by 3 percent annually from 2009 to 2014.

High school feedback reports for specific school districts and public and private schools are available on the council's website, apps.cpe.ky.gov/temp_docs/prototypes/dataportal/hsfr.shtm.

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