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More kids entering ECC are college ready

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More high school graduates are ready to hit the ground running when they start at Elgin Community College, according to data presented this week by ECC.

The data, though, show that a large majority of incoming college students still are not college-ready and that large gaps persist in the preparedness of white and minority students.

"The general trend is in the right direction," said Lisa Wiehle, director of outcomes assessment for ECC. But, she added, "There is work to do. There are gaps in the different students coming in."

The percentage of incoming freshmen at ECC who were deemed college-ready in math, English and reading rose from 23.6 percent in 2006 to 31.8 percent in 2010, according to the data culled from results on the ACT and college placement exams.

At the same time, the proportion of high school graduates requiring remedial classes before starting college-level course work declined from 21.2 percent to 16.4 percent over the same period.

"Having to take developmental classes ... really slows down their progress," Wiehle said.

While incoming freshmen improved in all three subjects, math remains the area of greatest concern. Only 37.3 percent of high school graduates were ready for college-level math in 2010, compared to 62.8 percent for English and 76.9 percent in reading, according to ECC's data.

Data for 2010 show large differences in college preparedness among ethnic groups. More than half of incoming black students had to complete remedial classes, compared to about 30 percent for Latinos, just more than 10 percent for Asians and just less than 10 percent for whites.

ECC officials said they are taking steps to address the achievement gaps. ECC has assembled a team to coordinate college readiness initiatives for English language learners and Latinos. In the spring, the college plans to create three focus groups of students, educators and parents to gather feedback on the issue. Readiness efforts may not be limited to Latinos.

"Our goal is college readiness for all," said Julie Schaid, assistant dean of college readiness and school partnerships. "We definitely want to reach out and explore the ways we can enhance the transition for African-American students."

The data was presented Thursday night at the winter meeting of the Alliance for College Readiness. The Alliance is a partnership between ECC and the four public school districts that feed into it: Elgin Area School District U-46, St. Charles Unit District 303, Community Unit District 300 and Central Community Unit District 301.