COLLEGE MILESTONES
ENROLLMENT IN GATEKEEPER WRITING: VIRGINIA

What Is Measured?
Percentage of students who enrolled in gatekeeper writing courses within four years, by writing course referral status and enrollment in developmental courses.

Who Is Counted?
First-time students enrolled in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) in the summer or fall 2004 terms.

What It Tells Us
Four-fifths (82 percent) of first-time VCCS students who were referred to college-level writing enrolled in a gatekeeper writing course within four years. Students who were referred to developmental writing were less likely to enroll in a gatekeeper writing course; however, students who enrolled in the developmental writing course to which they were referred enrolled in a gatekeeper course at a slightly higher rate than those who skipped the developmental writing course (54 percent vs. 50 percent).

Why It’s Important
A gatekeeper course is the first or lowest-level college-level course students take in a subject such as mathematics, reading, or writing, often following completion of one or more developmental courses in that subject. Most certificate, degree, and transfer programs require students to pass gatekeeper courses in one or more subjects. Yet the largest obstacle to passing gatekeeper courses seems to be that students do not enroll in them. One study found that only 63 percent of those who finished developmental mathematics and 72 percent who finished developmental reading enrolled in gatekeeper courses for those subjects within three years of starting college. However, of those who did enroll, 79 percent passed gatekeeper mathematics and 75 percent passed gatekeeper reading (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010).

ABOUT THE DATA
Gatekeeper writing courses: include ENG111.

Developmental writing courses: include writing one level below the college level (ENG03) and two levels below the college level (ENG01).

First-time college students enrolled in a VCCS college in the summer or fall 2004 terms had no prior college credits other than those earned through high school dual enrollment programs. Cohort includes students in transfer and career tech programs as well as those concurrently enrolled in high school. These students were followed for four years, through the 2008 summer term. Placement recommendations were based on students’ placement test scores, but 37 percent of the students in this group were missing a placement recommendation in writing and were excluded from this calculation.

DATA SOURCE