COLLEGE MILESTONES
COMPLETION OF GATEKEEPER WRITING: VIRGINIA

Percentage of first-time community college students who completed a gatekeeper writing course, by level of developmental writing referral

What Is Measured?
Percentage of students who completed a gatekeeper writing course within four years of initial enrollment

Who Is Counted?
First-time students who initially enrolled in a transfer program in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) in summer or fall 2004 and were enrolled in a developmental writing course

What It Tells Us
Overall, 44 percent of students who enrolled in a developmental writing course completed a gatekeeper writing course within four years, while 14 percent did not pass the course and 42 percent did not enroll in one. Students referred to developmental writing one level below the college level completed a gatekeeper writing course at a higher rate than students who were referred to a course two levels below the college level (48 percent vs. 39 percent).

Why It’s Important
There is general consensus that timely completion of gatekeeper courses, the lowest-level college-level courses in the core subjects of mathematics, reading, and writing, positively affects student outcomes such as attainment of certificates and degrees and transfer to a four-year institution (Roksa & Calcagno, 2008, table 4; Horn & Lew, 2007; Offenstein, Moore, & Shulock, 2010, figure 8). Completion of gatekeeper courses fulfills requirements for graduation and transfer as well as prerequisites for more advanced courses in various fields.

ABOUT THE DATA
Gatekeeper writing completion: defined as earning a grade C or better.
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. Sample 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. Percentages do not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

DATA SOURCE