

**Consideration of Summary of Self-Study Reports for  
Vocational Nursing Education Programs  
For the 2016 NCLEX-PN® Examination Pass Rates**

**Background:**

Rule 214.4(c)(2)(B) requires nursing programs to submit a Self-Study Report (SSR) when their NCLEX® examination pass rate is below the benchmark of 80%. Ten vocational nursing programs were required to develop a SSR based upon the 2016 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rates. One of the 10 programs did not submit their SSR, so the information in this report is based upon self-analysis from nine programs. The implementation of corrective strategies has usually resulted in programs adjusting their curricula for more rigor; revising their admission, readmission, and progression criteria; and providing more effective faculty development and faculty mentoring programs.

The NCLEX® examination pass rate is not the only indicator of the quality of the educational preparation in the nursing program but usually provides a “red flag” that improvements need to be made. The passing rate of first-time candidates provides the best measure of the effectiveness of the program of study in preparing graduates for entry-level practice. Many graduates succeed on second or third attempts on the NCLEX® and become licensed nurses, but other factors (such as further study and review courses) contribute to the pass rate of repeaters, not just the education provided in the program.

The majority of programs improve their pass rates through successful implementation of corrective measures. The SSR represents a focused self-evaluation by the director and nursing faculty, and most programs testify that it is a valuable insight into their total program.

The 10 programs required to submit SSRs for the 2016 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rates included:

- nine VN programs in public community colleges, and
- one VN program in a career school; however, the SSR was not submitted.

None of the 10 programs are accredited by a national nursing accreditation agency.

This report captures information from all of the provided Self-Study Reports and focuses on common factors that may have contributed to the lowered pass rates for 2016. Pass rates among the 10 programs ranged from 40% to 79.41%, with eight programs experiencing pass rates between 64.29% and 79.17%. The largest candidate pool from a single nursing education program was 68 first-time test-takers while the smallest candidate group was 10 first-time test-takers.

Of the 94 Board approved vocational nursing education programs, 84 programs had acceptable pass rates during the 2016 NCLEX-PN® examination year, January 1 through December 31. Further, 26 of the 94 programs achieved an NCLEX-PN® pass rate of 100% for the 2016 examination year.

Board Staff have identified major trends of problem areas that have been common to the SSRs reviewed during the past four years:

- low admission and readmission criteria;
- need for faculty development;
- lack of remediation for at-risk students;
- shortage of qualified faculty;
- need for curriculum revision; and
- ineffective clinical evaluation tools.

Other factors that have surfaced that impact the success of nursing programs are:

- pressure from the institution to increase student enrollments;
- lack of director authority to lead the program;
- challenges faced by faculty to change teaching strategies;
- differences in student learning styles; and
- rapid turnover of directors and faculty.

Findings from these nine SSRs are similar to ones in previous years, so this report will focus on currently reported major issues and suggestions for handling them.

### **Suggestions for Handling Current Issues Identified in the SSRs from Vocational Nursing Education Programs Related to the Pass Rates for 2016, in rank order:**

- 1. In order for at-risk students to be successful in the program, effective remediation must be provided.** As set forth in the analysis of the 2016 SSRs submitted by professional nursing education programs, many vocational nursing programs have a mission to help disadvantaged students to receive an education and enter the workforce. It is of particular importance to recognize at-risk students early and timely offer assistance. Interventions include remediation, tutoring, childcare, financial aid, and one-on-one support. One program is implementing a learning contract for those students who made less than 80% in previous courses whereas another plans to meet with the admissions committee to better identify at-risk students for earlier interventions. Programs have remediation policies in place, however the policies are not always individualized or enforced. The SSRs acknowledged the importance of following established remediation policies.
- 2. Ongoing faculty development should be a regular part of every nursing education program.** Throughout the State of Texas, faculty salaries are considered to be non-competitive and VN programs are challenged to recruit veteran nursing faculty. Additional barriers to recruiting qualified faculty include geographic locations and limited qualified

applicants. Resultantly, nursing faculty members may be inexperienced and need an extensive orientation as well as ongoing faculty development. Many programs identify a need for test-writing and item analysis skills among the nursing faculty. New faculty also benefit greatly from a planned orientation to their teaching role in the nursing program and the assignment of a mentor has been instrumental in retaining faculty. One program identified the value of “growing your own” through adjunct faculty members or waived faculty. Another recommendation is to survey faculty annually and further involve faculty in decision-making processes to increase retention.

**3. Admission criteria should be periodically and critically examined to determine effectiveness.** Many programs noted their first action to improve performance is to raise admission criteria for student selection, including higher GPAs on high school transcripts and higher scores on standardized preadmission examinations. One program plans to develop and implement an admission rubric while another is replacing the current preadmission test with a product from another vendor. Scores from the following content areas will be evaluated: math, reading, comprehension, and vocabulary.

**4. Progression and readmission criteria should also undergo continual evaluation to ensure effectiveness.**

In the identified SSR corrective measures, one program described the creation of a formal committee comprised of nursing faculty to evaluate and establish progression and readmission standards. Programs discuss the importance of removing easy, heavily weighted assignments from grade calculations in an effort to decrease grade inflation.

**5. Clearly-written policies must be available and enforced to ensure they are used to guide all aspects of the program.** Policies impact each essential element of the program, to include admission, progression, dismissal, graduation, faculty, curriculum, clinical learning experiences, as well as the use of standardized examinations. If policies are not current and targeted, program outcomes will be deficient. Programs articulate the critical need to enforce policies, as this flaw can produce negative student and program outcomes.

This report is for information only. No action is required.