



Steffanic

THE HOSPITAL & HEALTHSYSTEM ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

February 18, 2008

Ann Steffanic, Board Administrator
Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing
Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs
P.O. Box 2649
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2649

RECEIVED

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

RE: 16A-5123 Nursing Education Programs Examination Pass Rates

Dear Ms. Steffanic:

The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP), on behalf of its members, more than 250 acute and specialty hospitals and health systems and their related hospital-based nursing education programs, appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the State Board of Nursing's (Board) proposed rulemaking regarding the examination pass rate requirements for Pennsylvania's nursing education programs.

HAP appreciates the Board's efforts to standardize the requirements for both registered and practical nursing education programs. As employers, hospitals believe that it is essential that nurses are adequately prepared to pass the national licensure exam and safely practice nursing upon graduation. Likewise, hospitals believe that it is critically important to continue to educate greater numbers of qualified individuals as nurses. Therefore, while HAP generally supports raising the bar with respect to holding nursing education programs accountable for achieving pass rate standards for first-time test takers who graduate from their programs, HAP cautions the Board that there may be some unintended consequences that could negatively affect the overall supply of nurses in this state as a result of such action.

§21.33b. Minimum Rate for Graduates of Nursing Education Programs to Pass the National Licensure Exam (NCLEX)

The Board proposes that nursing education programs achieve and maintain a minimum pass rate of 80 percent or more of its first-time examinees during an examination year (October 1—September 30). Under the current proposed rulemaking, beginning one year after final rulemaking is implemented, a nursing education program would be expected to achieve a 70 percent pass rate of first-time examinees that graduated from their nursing education program. And, in the second year following final rulemaking, this standard would be increased to 80 percent. It is not clear in the proposed regulations whether failure to achieve that result in any one year would result in that nursing education program being placed on provisional status; however, that seems to be the implication in the regulations.

Under current standards, a nursing education program maintains full approval status if more than 60 percent of its graduates pass the NCLEX on their first attempt. If one were to apply the 80 percent standard to the most recent year's NCLEX first-time examinees pass rate for each Pennsylvania nurse education program, more than one-third (36%) of the Commonwealth's existing nursing education programs might be placed on provisional status. HAP's analysis indicates that based on the nursing education program statistics posted on the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing website for the time period October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007, 14 of 34 baccalaureate degree programs (41%), 11 of 26 associate degree programs (42%), and 5 of 23 hospital-based education programs (22%) would currently fail to meet this standard. The final proposal represents a considerable jump from the current standard, and while having a certain percent of students fail to pass the exam the first-time might signal that there

may be problems in a particular nursing education program, it generally takes considerable effort—often over several years time—to assess what those issues might be, develop plans for correction, implement changes, and monitor those changes to evaluate their effectiveness. Given the effort associated with trying to examine reasons for poor performance on the NCLEX examination and the increased number of schools that could potentially be placed on provisional status, HAP questions whether the Board would have sufficient resources to monitor and assist these nursing education programs in addressing identified issues that might play a role in why their students did not pass the national licensure examination the first time.

HAP Recommendations

While HAP understands that the Board is attempting to bring Pennsylvania's nursing education program pass rate standards into compliance with the national standards, HAP recommends that more time be provided to the nursing education programs to meet the upgraded standards.

Specifically, HAP recommends the following:

- Beginning one year after final rulemaking is implemented, a nursing education program maintains full approval status if more than 70 percent of its graduates pass the NCLEX on their first attempt. This rating of 70 percent is achieved by averaging the program's pass rate scores over a three-year period.
- Beginning two years after final rulemaking is implemented, a nursing education program maintains full approval status if more than 75 percent of its graduates pass the NCLEX on their first attempt. This rating of 75 percent is achieved by averaging the program's pass rate scores over a three-year period.
- Beginning three years after final rulemaking is implemented, a nursing education program maintains full approval status if more than 80 percent of its graduates pass the NCLEX on their first attempt. This rating of 80 percent is achieved by averaging the program's pass rate scores over a three-year period.

As referenced above, HAP also recommends that the Board consider using a three-year look back and averaging the nursing education program pass rates for first-time examinees before considering placing a program on provisional status. From a quality monitoring standpoint, using data for any one time period may be an aberration and misleading. For instance, most nursing education program's first-time examinee pass rates on the national licensure exam are lower this year. There are a number of factors outside the control of the nursing education program that could account for this, including annual changes in the test plan and increasing the passing standard on the test itself. For instance, the change in the test plan is supposed to be based on National Council of State Board of Nursing (NCSBN) surveys of new nurses in their jobs within the first six months. There is reason to suspect that some of the changes in the test plan resulted from obtaining survey information from nurses in their position between 6 months and one year, in which they would have been exposed to more complex or specialty care. As a consequence, the test questions on the examination may have been developed for a higher level practitioner rather than a new graduate. HAP strongly recommends that several points of data need to be considered before making any determination to place a nursing education program on provisional status, including looking to at least three years of first-time examinee pass rates.

Further, HAP recommends that the Board use the nursing education program's first-time examinee pass rates only as a first-level screening tool to determine whether any nursing education program should be placed on provisional status. In addition, HAP recommends that the Board fully consider other data before making a determination as to whether a nursing education program should be placed on provisional status. Some other pieces of data or information that should be considered by the Board before placing a nursing education program on provisional status include:

- Whether all nursing education programs' graduates' first-time test results have been included in the calculation. Nursing education programs indicate that some of their students may take the NCLEX in another state and those results are not reflected in the calculation of their pass rates and should be before any determination is made around the program's approval status.
- A further breakdown of graduating class test results because there is mixing of cohort groups.
- The diversity of the nursing education program's student population.
- Recalculating the pass-rate experience of schools by taking into consideration second-time pass rate success on the national licensure examination due to issues of generational differences and approach to the exam. A number of nursing education programs report that computer testing may be a factor for some students in how they perform on the test the first time, particularly among older students. And, many nursing education programs report that younger students often see the first test as a practice exam, particularly because they can retest in a relatively short period of time. Further, some nursing education programs have argued that other professional education programs evaluate school's success differently, often taking into consideration the number of students that ultimately pass the professional licensure exam or pass the exam in the first two attempts.
- The number of students that sat for the exam as first-time test takers. Even a small number of failures could pull a school below the 80 percent pass rate standard if only a small number of students sat for the exam.
- The retention rates of the nursing education programs. Some nursing education programs report that certain schools have implemented periodic testing throughout the program in an effort to achieve higher NCLEX pass rates among the program's graduates. As a consequence, these education programs may be experiencing higher attrition rates among students.

Unintended Consequences Related to Raising the Nursing Education Program Pass Rate Standards

HAP respectfully suggests that the Board consider what might be serious unintended consequences associated with raising the nursing education program pass rate standards, including negatively impacting the number of students admitted into Pennsylvania's nursing education programs. These include the following:

- Nursing education programs may be forced to institute more stringent admission criteria to achieve a higher pass rate for each examination year, resulting in the acceptance of less nursing students—and in particular less minority students—into their programs.
- Limiting the pool of applicants for admission to nursing programs by excluding those that don't perform as well as others on standardized tests such as the SAT. Organizations will change

their admissions standards and be more risk adverse in taking individuals who may have done well in high school but performed borderline on standardized tests, such as the SAT.

- Limiting the number of diverse students admitted to Pennsylvania's nursing education programs. This proposal has implications with respect to admitting more diverse students because demographically, certain populations of students don't perform as well on standardized tests.
(http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/highered/ra/sat/SAT_CR_mathematics_writing_percentile_ranks_gender_ethnic_groups.pdf)
- Encouraging schools to weed out students before graduation to ensure that the school attains the NCLEX pass rate standards. In an effort to achieve and/or maintain a higher pass rate, nursing education programs may find it necessary to require that students pass a standardized test as a requirement for graduation, possibly resulting in less students graduating and becoming eligible to take the NCLEX to become licensed nurses.

These unintended consequences would only prove to exacerbate the current nursing shortage.

To reiterate HAP's position with respect to the pass rate standard changes, HAP recommends:

- A longer phase-in period to get to the 80 percent pass-rate standard;
- Calculating an average nursing education pass-rate using at least three year's worth of data;
- Using the three-year average pass rate experience as a high-level screen to determine whether a nursing education program might be a candidate for provisional status;
- Examining other data or information about the nursing education program before formally placing the nursing education program on provisional status; and
- Exploring the implementation of a monitoring program that could be used for what the Board might determine as "at-risk" programs before moving those programs formally into provisional status. For instance, if a pass rate for a particular nursing program declined significantly from the year before and was below the three-year average standard established by the Board, the Board may determine that this nursing education program should be on its "watch list." The Board could issue a letter of concern and offer technical assistance to the program without formally placing them on provisional status.

§21.33. Types of Approval

Under subsection (b) of the proposed rulemaking, the Board indicates that the nursing education program must notify applicants and students whenever the program's approval status changes. HAP believes that this requirement places an operational burden on schools in terms of ensuring that the communication occurs and in making changes to nursing program documents and marketing materials. HAP suggests that the Board post the status of nursing education programs on its website along with the nursing education pass rates for first-time examinees. The Board is already posting nursing education program pass rate information, and the status of each program could be included in this table. HAP recommends that nursing education programs only be required to provide the Board's website information on their program's admissions information and marketing materials, where each individual

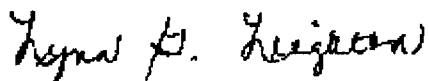
has the opportunity to review the test scores of each nursing education program as well as a list of those programs that have been placed on provisional status.

§21.33a. Failure to Comply with Standards

Under subsection (g), the Board allows a maximum time of two years for the correction of deficiencies resulting in provisional approval status. HAP suggests that the Board consider a maximum time of three years to correct deficiencies because it often takes that long to see evidence that changes implemented by a program are working. For instance, if a program changes its admission criteria, the results of such action would not be evident until perhaps three years later. It is also HAP's understanding that the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) updates the test plan every three years based on information received from a survey of job tasks performed by graduate nurses, resulting in changes within the licensure exam itself. In addition to these changes to the licensure exam, the NCSBN also raises the passing standards. For these reasons, HAP recommends that the maximum time for the correction of deficiencies be extended to three years.

HAP appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on this proposed rulemaking. If you have any questions about HAP's comments, please feel free to contact Mary Marshall, director, workforce and professional services at (717) 561-5312 or by email at mmarshall@haponline.org or me at (717) 561-5308 or by email at lgleighton@haponline.org.

Sincerely,



Lynn G. Leighton
Vice President
Professional & Clinical Services

Registered Nurse Programs	First-time test-takers October 1, 2003 to September 30, 2004			First-time test-takers October 1, 2004 to September 30, 2005			First-time test-takers October 1, 2005 to September 30, 2006			First-time test-takers October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007		
	# Tested	# Passed	Pass Rate	# Tested	# Passed	Pass Rate	# Tested	# Passed	Pass Rate	# Tested	# Passed	Pass Rate
Abington Memorial Hospital DPL	42	40	95.20%	92	88	95.65%	86	82	95.35%	101	93	92.08%
Bloomsburg University BSN	49	43	87.80%	39	35	89.74%	67	59	88.06%	55	44	80.00%
Conowingo Hospital DPL	33	25	75.80%	39	26	66.67%	49	45	91.84%	47	39	82.98%
Delaware County Community College ADN	106	88	83.00%	113	95	84.07%	89	78	87.64%	107	79	73.83%
Delaware County Community College ADN	54	43	79.60%	63	54	85.71%	79	71	89.87%	55	49	89.09%
Carlow College BSN	19	15	79.00%	15	14	93.33%	25	24	96.00%	28	26	92.86%
Cedar Crest College BSN	40	35	87.50%	50	49	98.00%	68	58	85.29%	92	84	91.30%
Citizens School of Nursing DPL	22	22	100.00%	50	41	82.00%	48	42	87.50%	48	40	83.33%
Clarion University of PA ADN	29	26	89.70%	67	61	91.04%	54	41	75.93%	45	37	82.22%
Community College of Beaver County ADN	34	29	85.30%	71	61	85.92%	84	72	85.71%	76	61	80.26%
Community College of Philadelphia ADN	102	82	80.40%	120	106	88.33%	127	104	81.89%	131	93	70.99%
Conemaugh Valley Memorial Hospital DPL	39	35	89.70%	55	53	96.36%	45	41	91.11%	56	48	85.71%
Delaware County Community College ADN	144	123	85.40%	121	100	82.64%	143	130	90.91%	117	98	83.76%
DeSales University BSN	19	13	68.40%	9	7	77.78%	11	10	90.91%	66	61	92.42%
Drexel University BSN	110	108	98.20%	172	170	98.84%	215	214	99.53%	243	233	95.88%
Duquesne University BSN	33	24	72.70%	82	73	89.02%	103	91	88.35%	114	83	72.81%
Eastern University BSN	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	9	8	88.89%
Frankford Hospital DPL	42	36	85.70%	70	66	94.29%	78	74	94.87%	72	66	91.67%
Gannon University BSN	16	15	93.80%	26	26	100.00%	42	40	95.24%	37	34	91.89%
Harrisburg Area Community College ADN	120	113	94.20%	142	137	96.48%	175	167	95.43%	145	138	95.17%
Holy Family University BSN	50	36	72.00%	49	40	81.63%	70	60	85.71%	114	83	72.81%
Jameson Memorial Hospital DPL	51	47	92.20%	47	39	82.98%	45	39	86.67%	52	45	86.54%
Lancaster General College - AND	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2	2	100.00%	55	53	96.36%
Lancaster Institute for Health Education DPL	76	75	98.70%	103	101	98.06%	107	105	98.13%	33	31	93.94%
LaSalle University BSN	47	38	80.90%	71	59	83.10%	168	134	79.76%	202	160	79.21%
Lehigh-Carbon Community College ADN	44	41	93.20%	43	39	90.70%	47	46	97.87%	44	40	90.91%
Lewisstown Hospital School of Nursing DPL*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA			
Lock Haven University ADN	59	50	84.80%	91	69	75.82%	62	56	90.32%	34	27	79.41%
Luzerne County Community College ADN	88	81	92.00%	110	99	90.00%	115	106	92.17%	147	125	85.03%
Mansfield University BSN	24	18	75.00%	31	28	90.32%	30	25	83.33%	30	22	73.33%
Mercy Hospital DPL	22	19	86.40%	33	30	90.91%	48	38	79.17%	54	40	74.07%
Mercyhurst College - North East ADN	40	34	85.00%	55	45	81.82%	61	49	80.33%	65	55	84.62%
Messiah College BSN	31	31	100.00%	45	42	93.33%	39	39	100.00%	46	40	86.96%
Montgomery County Community College ADN	74	57	77.00%	137	111	81.02%	117	109	93.16%	138	116	84.06%
Moravian College (St. Luke Commemorative) BS	10	8	80.00%	16	15	93.75%	16	12	75.00%	31	24	77.42%
Neumann College BSN	46	34	73.90%	60	50	83.33%	49	40	81.63%	54	47	87.04%
New Hampton Community College ADN	66	63	95.50%	58	50	86.21%	87	82	94.25%	73	63	86.30%
Northampton Valley General Hospital DPL	16	16	100.00%	21	19	90.48%	22	19	86.36%	26	23	88.46%
PA College of Technology ADN	63	59	93.70%	80	72	90.00%	78	66	84.62%	86	64	74.42%
PA State University ADN	171	140	81.90%	181	155	85.64%	149	131	87.92%	165	129	78.18%
PA State University BSN	98	78	79.60%	122	106	86.89%	121	103	85.12%	112	95	84.82%
Pottsville Hospital DPL	3	2	66.70%	44	40	90.91%	3	3	100.00%	15	13	86.67%
Reading Area Community College ADN	58	53	91.40%	73	67	91.78%	69	65	94.20%	43	40	93.02%
Reading Hospital DPL	58	51	87.90%	89	80	89.89%	166	146	87.95%	121	99	81.82%
Robert Morris University BSN	0	0	NA	0	0	NA	16	16	100.00%	27	18	66.67%
Roxborough Hospital DPL	42	37	88.10%	58	54	93.10%	64	55	85.94%	57	48	84.21%
Sewickley Valley Hospital DPL	24	20	83.30%	44	41	93.18%	47	43	91.49%	35	27	77.14%
Sharon Regional Health System DPL	19	18	94.70%	25	21	84.00%	33	31	93.94%	23	18	78.26%
St Joseph's Hospital DPL*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA			
St Luke's Hospital DPL	26	18	69.23%	56	42	75.00%	78	60	76.92%	53	48	90.57%
St. Margaret Memorial Hospital DPL	41	38	92.70%	51	48	94.12%	38	36	94.74%	56	50	89.29%
Temple University BSN	56	49	87.50%	77	58	75.32%	83	72	86.75%	92	76	82.61%
Thomas Jefferson University ADN	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	63	54	85.71%	71	57	80.28%
Thomas Jefferson University BSN	101	85	84.20%	136	127	93.38%	151	145	96.03%	171	164	95.91%
University of Pennsylvania BSN	110	102	92.70%	118	102	86.44%	121	109	90.08%	139	126	90.65%
University of Pittsburgh @ Titusville ADN	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	18	16	88.89%
University of Pittsburgh BSN	87	71	81.61%	114	96	84.21%	136	133	97.79%	126	116	92.06%
UPMC Shadyside Hospital DPL	58	57	98.30%	93	89	95.70%	119	112	94.12%	142	135	95.07%

Registered Nurse Programs	First-time test-takers October 1, 2003 to September 30, 2004			First-time test-takers October 1, 2004 to September 30, 2005			First-time test-takers October 1, 2005 to September 30, 2006			First-time test-takers October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007		
	# Tested	# Passed	Pass Rate	# Tested	# Passed	Pass Rate	# Tested	# Passed	Pass Rate	# Tested	# Passed	Pass Rate
Villanova University BSN	77	66	85.71%	131	106	80.92%	177	162	91.53%	132	112	84.85%
Washington Hospital DPL	23	21	91.30%	37	31	83.78%	52	44	84.62%	45	37	82.22%
York University BSN	34	27	79.40%	28	27	96.43%	32	30	93.75%	38	29	76.32%
West Chester University BSN	58	50	86.20%	68	59	86.76%	64	54	84.38%	67	52	77.61%
Western Pennsylvania Hospital DPL	26	20	76.90%	41	35	85.37%	56	47	83.93%	49	44	89.80%
Westmoreland Co Community College ADN	99	81	81.80%	107	92	85.98%	106	92	86.79%	98	82	83.67%
Widener University BSN	37	28	75.70%	45	40	88.89%	87	76	87.36%	102	69	67.65%
York College of PA BSN	63	57	90.50%	92	79	85.87%	123	112	91.06%	100	94	94.00%
Alvernia College BSN	7	6	85.70%	21	17	80.95%	28	25	89.29%	39	27	69.23%
College Misericordia BSN	15	9	60.00%	43	32	74.42%	66	49	74.24%	59	44	74.58%
Community College of Allegheny County ADN	265	193	72.80%	401	315	78.55%	481	395	82.12%	404	313	77.48%
East Stroudsburg University BSN	37	23	62.20%	41	32	78.05%	31	28	90.32%	32	22	68.75%
Edinboro University BSN	53	36	67.90%	63	51	80.95%	69	50	72.46%	50	41	82.00%
Gwynedd-Mercy College ADN	103	82	79.60%	138	113	81.88%	143	113	79.02%	151	112	74.17%
Harcum College ADN	0	0	NA	42	33	78.57%	65	44	67.69%	78	43	55.13%
Indiana University of Pennsylvania BSN	41	35	85.40%	55	45	81.82%	73	53	72.60%	102	82	80.39%
LaRoche College ADN	0	0	NA	1	1	100.00%	18	14	77.78%	17	9	52.94%
Marywood University BSN	8	4	50.00%	13	10	76.92%	19	9	47.37%	21	10	47.62%
Mount Aloysius College ADN	101	81	80.20%	118	90	76.27%	120	81	67.50%	103	79	76.70%
Northeastern Hospital DPL	38	23	60.50%	36	30	83.33%	41	26	63.41%	34	26	76.47%
St. Francis University BSN	4	3	75.00%	9	6	66.67%	14	12	85.71%	12	10	83.33%
TUH Episcopal Hospital DPL	24	18	75.00%	14	9	64.29%	25	16	64.00%	38	24	63.16%
University of Pittsburgh @ Bradford ADN	29	21	72.40%	35	23	65.71%	34	29	85.29%	32	22	68.75%
University of Scranton BSN	36	30	83.30%	38	25	65.79%	64	54	84.38%	60	48	80.00%
Wilkes University BSN	18	14	77.80%	25	21	84.00%	40	28	70.00%	57	34	59.65%
<i>NCLEX results are reviewed at the end of each examination year. An examination year extends from October 1 of one year to September 30 of the subsequent year.</i>												
PA Total	4,064	3,419	84.10%	5,426	4,667	86.01%	6,329	5,506	87.00%	6,326	5,221	82.53%
<i>PA totals are greater than the sum of the columns; totals include graduates of closed programs and re-entry applicants.</i>												
US Total	85,532	73,057	85.40%	98,047	85,480	87.18%	109,839	96,776	88.11%	118,699	101,769	85.74%
* Results Pending												

These statistics have been provided to the Pennsylvania Board of Nursing by Pearson Vue

	Current 1-Year Analysis	% of 1-Year Analysis	3-Year Analysis	% of 3-Year Analysis
Number of programs less than 70%	10	12.0%	3	3.6%
Number of programs less than 75%	19	22.9%	8	9.6%
Number of programs less than 80%	30	36.1%	17	20.5%