

NCLEX-RN® FIRST-TIME PASS RATES AND NURSING PROGRAM QUALITY

THE CASE FOR DIVERSIFYING EVALUATION OF NURSING EDUCATION

NCLEX-RN® - A MEASURE OF PROGRAM QUALITY?

Registered Nurses (RNs) must pass the National Council Licensure Examination –Registered Nurse (NCLEX-RN®) in order to practice.

State Boards of Nursing evaluate and sanction nursing programs whose annual first-time pass rates fall below statewide thresholds.

Experts find “no evidence...that students who failed the NCLEX-RN® the first-time but passed on a subsequent attempt are less safe in practice than those who passed the first time.”²

The 2019 average first-time pass rate was 72.8%, but the overall rate was 83.5%. Nearly 40% of repeat test takers ultimately pass the exam.¹

EMPHASIS ON NCLEX-RN® FIRST-TIME PASS RATES DEGRADES NURSING EDUCATION



Faculty and accretior focus on first-time pass rates has stifled innovation in teaching and curriculum design by over-emphasizing test preparation.³



Programs are incentivized to reduce cohort sizes and limit admissions, restricting opportunities for underrepresented student populations and amplifying RN shortages.⁴



Target pass rates vary by state and do not account for year-to-year variations in students' scores, unduly burdening successful programs.⁵



ALTERNATIVE MEASURES OF PROGRAM QUALITY

Reformers argue that NCLEX-RN® first-time pass rates should be supplemented by other measures of program quality for a nuanced view of programs' educational quality. Examples of additional metrics could include:⁶

- 1 Share of graduates who pass the NCLEX within two attempts following graduation.
- 2 Share of graduates who pass the NCLEX within one year of graduation, regardless of the number of attempts.
- 3 Percentage of admitted students who pass the NCLEX within two attempts following graduation.
- 4 Creation of a new metric that correlates graduation rates with pass rates.



Focusing primarily on first-time pass rates diminishes the fact there are other factors besides nursing content that can prevent [nursing students] from being successful on the NCLEX-RN®. Based on this finding, a recommendation could be made...to report both first and second-time pass rates for schools of nursing to better inform the public without losing confidentiality for those who have taken the licensure examination.⁷



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THE CASE FOR DIVERSIFYING HOW WE EVALUATE NURSING EDUCATION

NOTES

1. "2019 NCLEX Examination Statistics," NCSBN, July 2020.
2. Taylor, Heidi, Collette Loftin, and Helen Reyes, "First-Time NCLEX-RN Pass Rate: Measure of Program Quality or Something Else?" *Journal of Nursing Education*, 53.6 (2014)
3. Taylor, Loftin, and Reyes.
4. Giddens, Jean Foret, "Changing Paradigms and Challenging Assumptions: Redefining Quality and NCLEX-RN Pass Rates," *Journal of Nursing Education*, 48.3 (2009)
5. Foreman, Stephen, "The Accuracy of State NCLEX-RN Passing Standards for Nursing Programs," *Nurse Education Today*, 52 (2017)
6. Recommendations derive from: Taylor, Loftin, and Reyes.
7. Kasprovich, Tammy L., "Experiences of Registered Nurses Who Were Not Initially Successful on the NCLEX-RN, Then Subsequently Passed," Doctoral Dissertation – Marquette University, 2016.

