Consideration of Summary of Self-Study Reports for
Vocational Nursing Education Programs
For the 2019 NCLEX-PN® Examination Pass Rates

Background:
Four vocational nursing (VN) education programs were required to submit Self-Study Reports (SSRs) to the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) Staff in 2020 after their 2019 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rates fell below 80%. Rule 214.4(c)(2)(B) Ongoing Approval Procedures requires that "When the passing score of first-time NCLEX-PN® candidates is less than 80% on the examination during the examination year, the nursing program shall submit a Self-Study Report that evaluates factors that may have contributed to the graduates' performance on the examination and a description of the corrective measures to be implemented."

At the October 2013 quarterly Board meeting, Staff presented a "Report of Common Findings in Required Self-Study Reports for 2012" for informational purposes. Twelve nursing education programs, including 11 VN programs and one professional or registered nursing (RN) program, were required to submit a SSR based upon their 2012 NCLEX® examination pass rate and this report offered a general summary of information from the 12 reports.

During the 2012 NCLEX-RN® examination year, only one SSR was required; however, during the 2013 NCLEX-RN® examination year, 30 of the 103 Board approved RN programs had pass rates less than 80% thus requiring submission of a SSR. The NCLEX-RN® passing standard was increased in 2013 and over the next two years, the impact of the increased passing standard continued to have an impact as an additional 31 RN Programs were required to submit SSRs. The passing standard for the NCLEX-PN® was not increased during this period, therefore, fewer VN programs had pass rates below 80% and fewer SSRs were required.

The NCLEX-RN® examination year is the period beginning October 1 and ending September 30, whereas the NCLEX-PN® examination year is the period beginning January 1 and ending December 31. The due dates for the SSRs allow the programs two months to conduct a deep dive into all aspects of program operation. Beginning in October 2014, Board Staff has provided an analysis of findings in the SSRs at the October Board meetings for RN education programs and at the January or April Board meetings for the VN education programs.

Considering the large amount of rich data provided by the SSRs, Board Staff conducted an in-depth evaluation of the 88 SSRs submitted by VN and RN programs in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Further, at the end of this three-year period, as part of ongoing program monitoring, Staff surveyed the 88 programs to determine which interventions were deemed most effective. These findings were published in the *Journal of Nursing Regulation* October 2017 issue entitled "How Texas

Nursing Education Programs Increased NCLEX Pass Rates and Improved Programming" (Hooper & Ayars, 2017).

In 2020, a special edition of the *Journal of Nursing Regulation (JNR)* presented outcomes measured in a nationwide research study conducted by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) that focused on quality indicators and warning signs for nursing programs (Spector et al., 2020). The quality indicators were identified through a nationwide NCSBN Delphi study with responses from 174 nursing educators, 71 clinical nurse educators who work with new graduates, and 50 education consultants from boards of nursing. Texas Board of Nursing Lead Education Consultant Dr. Janice Hooper is an author of the JNR article.

An historical review of the past nine years (2012 – 2020) of Texas VN Program SSR summaries and analyses indicated that the commonly-cited areas of concern have essentially remained the same. Although nursing education has significantly evolved over the past nine years due to internal and external factors, the common areas of weakness in VN Programs as well as planned corrective measures continue to be consistent, regardless of program characteristics (i.e., geographic designation, institution type, type of curriculum). Despite distinctions among the programs required to submit a SSR, more similarities than distinctions were identified.

The essential elements identified during the past nine years (2012 – 2020) of VN SSR review, and appearing most frequently are:

- low admission, readmission, and progression criteria;
- shortage of qualified faculty;
- high rate of faculty turnover;
- need for faculty development to ensure competency in test-item writing and item analysis;
- high turnover rate of program director;
- lack of timely identification and remediation for at-risk students;
- need for curriculum revision;
- ineffective clinical evaluation tools; and
- inadequate use of the Total Program Evaluation Plan.

Requiring SSRs can assist nursing education programs to identify issues and develop corrective measures. The Texas Board education rule mandating the SSR with the accompanying guideline mandate that the findings be provided in a categorical analysis, thus ensuring an objective comparison of the same areas of program operation. The current and previous VN Program SSR responses are in alignment with the findings of the overview of the 88 SSRs and, in particular, in concert with the aforementioned quality indicators.

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. Although developing the SSR is an arduous task, it provides an opportunity for the program director and faculty members to reflect on all aspects of program operation as well as determine areas of strength and areas for improvement. Following submission of the SSR, many share the value of self-reflection and confirm the advantages of conducting a critical, objective evaluation of their own program of study. If properly implemented, SSR findings typically lead to more positive student and program outcomes.

2020 NCLEX-PN Data Points:

A review of the four VN program SSRs revealed the following data:

- Pass rates among the four VN programs that submitted SSRs ranged from 64.29% to 75.93%. The largest candidate pool from a single nursing education program was 126 first-time test-takers while the smallest candidate group was 13 first-time test-takers.

- Three of the programs are housed in community colleges and one in a career school/college; all are located in small cities.

- The four programs are well established, as programs were founded in 1970, 1975, 1996, and 1998.

- Three of the four programs require 12 months for completion while one program requires 13 months.

- Each of the four programs utilize a block curriculum.

- Two of the four programs offer nursing courses via online technology. Select nursing courses are offered entirely online and select nursing courses are offered as blended/hybrid nursing courses (courses partially online and partially face-to-face).

- One of the four programs has a well-established high school track, operational since 2010.

- Three of the four programs experienced a change in the Program Director position during the examination year.

- One program is led by a doctoral prepared Program Director, two are overseen by individuals with master's in nursing degrees, and one is led by an associate degree prepared Program Director.

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

- One of the four programs identified test security as an issue.

- A review of the past five years of NCLEX® pass rates of the four VN programs reveals that one program had no history of a pass rate below 80% prior to 2019. No programs fell below the benchmark in 2018, whereas two programs fell below 80% in 2017, 2016, and 2015. These trends indicate ongoing challenges for these programs to achieve the 80% benchmark. Two of the four programs had previously been placed on Conditional Status.

- All of the programs acknowledged faculty issues as significantly contributing to the lowered NCLEX® pass rates, including inexperienced faculty members and a high faculty turnover rate. Further, all four programs indicated the critical need for a more rigorous faculty onboarding process with continuing faculty development. Faculty require further instruction in test blueprinting, item-writing, and item analysis.

Fifty-eight (64%) of the 91 programs on the 2019 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate report achieved a pass rate above 90%. Twenty-five of the 58 programs with pass rates over 90% achieved 100%.

The overall 2019 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate for Texas programs is 89.30% (4,080/4,569) which is above the national average of 85.93% (40,424/47,044). Texas had over 4,000 candidates for the NCLEX-PN® examination for 2019, second only to California with more than 6,000 candidates.

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

References

Hooper, J. I., & Ayars, V. D. (2017). How Texas nursing education programs increased NCLEX pass rates and improved programming. *Journal of Nursing Regulation, 8*(3), 53-58.

Spector, N., Silvestre, J., Alexander, M., Martin, B., Hooper, J. I., Squires, A., & Ojemeni, M. (2020). NCSBN regulatory guidelines and evidence-based quality indicators for nursing education programs. *Journal of Nursing Regulation, 11*(2), S1-S64.