

**Report of Findings from a Virtual Survey Visit  
Texas State Technical College in Harlingen, Texas  
Vocational Nursing Education Program**

**Summary of Request:**

Consider the report of the virtual survey review of the Texas State Technical College (TSTC) Vocational Nursing Education (VN) Program in Harlingen, Texas. A virtual survey visit was conducted based upon the extensive program documents submitted to Board staff and meetings with the program director, administration, nursing faculty, and nursing students through online video conferencing December 7 – 9, 2021.

The survey was conducted as a routine visit and followed the new Education Guideline 3.2.3.b. Conducting Survey Visits during COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Historical Perspective:**

- TSTC was created in 1965 as the James Connally Technical Institute (JCTI) of Texas A&M and in 1969, it became an independent state system with a new name, Texas State Technical Institute (TSTI), and its own Board of Regents.
- In 1967, JCTI expanded to include a South Texas campus in Harlingen.
- Beginning in 1970 as the demand for technical education continued, campuses have been established in Abilene, Breckenridge, Brownwood, Fort Bend County, Hutto, Marshall, Red Oak, Sweetwater, and Waco.
- TSTC is the only college in Texas to adopt a funding model based entirely on student employment outcomes – aligning with its purpose of strengthening Texas with a highly skilled, technically-competent workforce.
- In 2016, the decision was made to integrate all 10 TSTC campuses in order to standardize operations and programs to better serve the state.
- TSTC is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).
- TSTC VN program in Harlingen was established in 2009 as a face-to-face program with clinical experiences and skills/simulation laboratories having direct faculty supervision.
- Other nursing programs on TSTC campus sites are in Sweetwater and Breckenridge. These are independent programs from TSTC in Harlingen.
- TSTC Harlingen offers four Allied Health programs, Associate of Applied Science degrees and certificates, including a Licensed Vocational Nursing to Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) Transition program.
- Heather Saucedo, RN, has served as the Board approved program director since September 2017. Ms. Saucedo has over 15 years of nursing experience with a total of four years in vocational nursing education.
- The last routine VN program survey visit was conducted in May 2015.

- The NCLEX-PN® examination pass rates for the past five years are provided below:

<b>NCLEX Examination Year</b>	<b>BON Approval Status</b>	<b>Pass Rates</b>	<b>Number of First Time Candidates (Passed/Total)</b>
2020	Full	90.20%	46/51
2019	Full	93.55%	29/31
2018	Full	96.97%	32/33
2017	Full	87.50%	28/32
2016	Full	91.43%	32/35

### **Summary of Survey Visit**

#### **Education Consultant Reviewed Documents/Videos Provided Prior to Visit:**

- Curriculum Plan, Philosophy/Mission, Objectives/Goals, Conceptual Framework;
- Faculty & Program Director Job Descriptions;
- Faculty & Student Handbooks;
- Syllabi for all courses;
- Clinical evaluation tools;
- Clinical Affiliation Agreements;
- Total Program Evaluation Plan (TPE) and data;
- Faculty meeting minutes.
- Faculty & Student Files
- Video tour of campus facilities

#### **Education Consultant Reviewed:**

- 2020 Nursing Education Program Information Surveys (NEPIS)

#### **Education Consultant:**

- held initial conference with administrators; and
- conducted an exit interview with administrators.

#### **Individuals Participating in the Virtual Survey Visit:**

- Administrators:
  - Amanda Posada, Statewide Executive Director for Dual Enrollment, Interim Provost
  - Hector Yanez, Statewide Sr. VP of Student Learning for Academics/Allied Health
  - Andy Weaver, BSHS, AAS EMS, LP, Statewide Director of Decision Support for Allied Health, Interim Provost West Texas, & EMS Program Director Abilene/Brownwood
  - Jean Lashbrook, RN, Associate Provost
  - Heather Saucedo, RN, Program Director

- VN Faculty
  - Odelia Garcia, MSN, RN, Full-time Instructor
  - Michelle Gonzales, RN, Full-time Instructor
  - Robert Morman, RN, Full-time Instructor
  - Daniel Martin, RN, Full-time Instructor
  - Veronica Guerrero, LVN, Full-time Instructor
- Assistants
  - Tanya Villarreal, Administrative Assistant
  - Rosa Gonzales, Laboratory Assistant
- Four VN Students

Process for the Survey Visit:

Ms. Saucedo scheduled online meetings via Google Meet between Board Staff and TSTC representatives and hosted the following meetings:

- December 7, 2021 10:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. - B. Skloss and H. Saucedo
- December 7, 2021, 11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - B. Skloss and Administrators
- December 8, 2021, 2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. - B. Skloss and Students
- December 8, 2021, 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. - B. Skloss and Faculty
- December 9, 2021, 1:15 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. - B. Skloss and H. Saucedo
- December 9, 2021, 2:30 – 3:15 p.m. - Exit Report with Administrators

Administration:

- Administration is extremely supportive of all the nursing programs at TSTC Harlingen and throughout the state.
- Administrators indicated they attend regular meetings with healthcare facilities in the Rio Grande Valley where discussions are held about the critical need for RNs and LVNs and how TSTC Harlingen can assist with this need.
- Heather Saucedo, RN, has served as the Board approved program director since September 2017. Ms. Saucedo has over 15 years of nursing experience with four years in vocational nursing education.
- Ms. Saucedo indicated she is fully supported by administration and has the required authority to direct the VN program in all phases. Though her teaching workload varies each semester, she taught three semester credit hours in Fall 2021.
- Ms. Saucedo reports directly to Jean Lashbrook, RN, Associate Provost. Both indicated they typically communicate on a daily basis with scheduled meetings held weekly. All administrators are actively involved in regular updates about the VN program.
- Administrators identified challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, including moving all didactic content to online, loss of faculty and students, the NCLEX-PN pass rate decrease, decline in student study habits, and clinical sites closed that limited student ability to connect with patients.
- TSTC has provided scholarships for students to pay for the nursing licensure examination, the licensure application fee and the use of software for licensure examination study questions.

- Administrators discussed the new knowledge and resources they have adopted that are currently available to advance online learning.
- Future plans for the college include the building of a mock hospital on campus that can be utilized for interdisciplinary simulation to include nursing and other allied health programs.
- Board Staff discussed the positive aspects of the recognized Regulatory Quality Indicators for nursing education programs.

Faculty:

- The VN program instruction is provided out by five full-time faculty. At the time of the survey visit, there was one open position for a full-time faculty. This position is on hold due to the decrease in enrollment.
- Faculty members offer a rich diversity in their experiential backgrounds. Faculty experience in nursing education varies from two years to seven years. Nursing experience varies from 11 years to 48 years.
- All faculty and the program chair are responsible for evaluating clinical agencies at the end of each semester. The program director plans the schedules for clinical learning experiences and maintains a collaborative relationship with clinical sites.
- New faculty orientation involves a college-wide orientation as well as a nursing department orientation that is structured and individualized with experienced faculty and the director serving as mentors. The newest faculty member indicated the orientation is comprehensive. The Nursing Faculty Handbook contains detailed information regarding the orientation.
- Faculty members are typically engaged in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation. Faculty indicated they are continuously evaluating the curriculum changes that were implemented in Fall 2021. Discussion was held with the director and faculty regarding student feedback that the learning experience is better in a face-to-face environment.
- Faculty meetings are held at least monthly and more often if needed. Meeting minutes are maintained and reflect that faculty members are involved in planning and decision-making.
- Full-time faculty workload is 40 hours per week on a 12-month contract. Load hours include a combination of classroom/clinical teaching, student tutoring/remediation, preparation time, committee/curriculum work, evaluation of student performance, and office hours. Faculty indicated they have adequate time to participate in activities required of them.
- Faculty Development includes institution-wide professional development and funding allocated for faculty members to attend the Texas Association of Vocational Nurse Educators Annual Conference. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, funds were available for faculty to participate in nursing professional development online including webinars on the Next Generation NCLEX-PN examination.
- The Nursing Faculty handbook is well-written, committees are defined, and all required policies specified in Board Rule 214.7. are included.

- Faculty indicated the administrative assistant and laboratory assistant are extremely helpful which makes it easier to focus on the teaching/learning process and curriculum development.

#### Students:

- At the time of the survey visit, there were 13 students expected to graduate on December 8, 2021 out of 16 students that were admitted in Fall 2021. Fifteen students were expected to begin the program in January 2022.
- The VN program admits two cohorts per year, up to 30 students per cohort, every fall and spring. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the number of students accepted per cohort has decreased to 20 due to a decrease in the number of qualified applicants.
- Student policies are written, well-defined and provided to all students during orientation and include all Board required content.
- Students stated they enrolled in the VN program because of the reasonable cost, the proximity of the school to home, prior attendance at TSTC, and completion of the Nursing Assistant program at TSTC. All reported they plan to attend the LVN-to-ADN program.
- Students stated that faculty are student friendly and extremely accommodating based on student needs. Students indicated they appreciate the weekly tutorials held by faculty because they learn more during this time. Another positive aspect indicated was counseling services that are readily available.
- Students cited challenges imposed by the pandemic that included using an online model of didactic delivery and the low number of exams in a course. Students indicated the desire for face-to-face classes because they feel they learn better and would like more exams in each course to better their chances of passing.
- Students have input into faculty evaluations, the curriculum, and clinical agencies by completing evaluations at the end of each course and participation in the Student Advisory Council. Up to three students per cohort are chosen by peers to serve on the council that meets three times per year.
- Students cited experiencing a wide variety of clinical situations and found all clinical rotations to be valuable. The graduating students indicated a feeling of being prepared for practice.

#### Program of Study:

- The full-time 12-month VN program consists of three semesters with a total of 40 semester credit hours (SCH). There are 10 SCH of prerequisites that must be completed prior to applying to the program.
- Based on the evaluation of program changes implemented during the first year of the COVID-19 Pandemic, TSTC VN programs throughout Texas aligned curriculum content and delivery. The Harlingen VN Program obtained Board approval for a major curriculum change in May 2021 and implemented the change with the Fall 2021 cohort.
- The major curriculum change included moving all didactic delivery to online, decreasing prerequisites from 14 SCH to 10 SCH, and decreasing the number of clinical hours.
- Content is delivered online via the TSTC Learning Management System. Skills laboratories, simulation laboratories, and clinical learning experiences are delivered face-

to-face. Online course delivery uses a combination of asynchronous and synchronous formats to assure students have a question and answer time with the instructors.

- There is one clinical course each semester with more than 50% of clinical experience hours being hands-on patient care at affiliating agencies. The remainder of clinical experience hours consist of simulation laboratory, computer activities, and nursing skills laboratories.
- Exams are currently administered on campus via computer and proctored by faculty. When the curriculum method of delivery changed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the director and faculty had concerns related to online testing and the possibility that students were using resources that were not allowed.
- The concept based curriculum for the VN program indicates leveling of nursing content, advancing in difficulty from simple to complex.
- The *Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECS)(2010)* are incorporated into the curriculum as evidenced in the syllabi and crosswalk document received by Board staff. The director, faculty and program chair have met and incorporated the updated *DECS (2021)* into the curriculum that will be implemented in Spring 2022.
- Standardized testing is utilized throughout the curriculum to assess student progression and the need for remediation. Students with a class average below 80 are required to attend weekly tutoring and remediation is implemented.
- Testing policies are in place that specify the process for inter-rater reliability on clinical evaluations, test blueprints, and the testing item analysis.
- The VN Program has a Community Advisory Committee that meets one time per year to provide input into the program and evaluate the previous year.

#### Clinical Learning Experiences:

- TSTC has 18 clinical contracts that include nursing care experiences in medical-surgical, gerontology, rehabilitation, skilled nursing, maternal-child, mental health, and pediatrics areas. The clinical facilities are located in Harlingen, Brownsville, Raymondville, and San Benito. All are less than 30 miles from the campus.
- Students practice in the skills lab and demonstrate basic competency prior to providing hands-on care in the clinical setting. The cohort that graduated in December 2020 had less hands-on patient care experiences than usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic and clinical facilities not allowing students.
- The clinical evaluation tools include formative and summative evaluations throughout the program. These are progressive, based upon course content, and incorporate the DECs. Students receive weekly feedback on their clinical performance.
- Faculty provide supervision during the majority of clinical learning experiences. BON required faculty-to-student ratios are maintained throughout the program. Preceptors are utilized in the last semester and all policies required by Rule 214.10 are in place.
- At the time of the survey visit, long term care facilities were not open to students.

#### Facilities, Resources, and Services:

- The VN program is housed in the Nursing Education Building (NEB) along with the LVN-to-ADN Transition Program. Additionally, the VN program utilizes the Senator

Eddie Lucio, Jr., Health Science and Technology Building (SEL-HSTB) across the street from the NEB.

- The VN director has a large private office located in the NEB office suite along with the ADN director and all program faculty. Full-time faculty have fully furnished private offices in close proximity to the director.
- The VN and ADN program directors and faculty share one full-time administrative assistant. Ms. Saucedo and faculty indicated this support is adequate since the assistant is extremely efficient. One full-time laboratory assistant is also shared by the VN and ADN programs.
- Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the student break areas are closed with vending machines and a hands free water dispenser available.
- The NEB houses a computer laboratory with 31 computers, a large skills laboratory, a high fidelity simulation laboratory and two spacious classrooms. Two additional skills laboratories are housed in the SEL-HSTB.
- All skills laboratories contain high, mid, and low fidelity manikins, sinks with hot and cold running water, hospital beds/hospital type equipment, and tables/chairs for students. There is a large storage room with ample shelving space.
- The Simulation Lab contains two private patient rooms, each with a high fidelity simulation manikin, wall mounted hospital equipment, bedside tables and a control/observation room. There is a large laundry room with a washer and dryer and storage space,
- There are three classrooms that are modern, spacious, well-lighted and equipped with up-to-date audio visual equipment (AV).
- TSTC offers free tutoring and academic support services to all enrolled students. A wide variety of counseling services are available to students.
- TSTC has a Learning Resource Center that includes a 24 hours per day online library of resources, databases, services and computers that may be utilized for testing purposes. Library holdings include current nursing books, journals, and national nursing databases such as EBSCO and MEDLINE.
- The facilities are appropriately equipped and offer a rich learning environment. At the time of the survey visit, the Center for Disease Control recommendations for social distancing and sanitation were being utilized.
- A video tour of the facilities was guided by school staff. The main areas seen by Board Staff included:
  - Program Director's and faculty private offices;
  - Large faculty workroom with necessary resources;
  - Faculty breakroom/conference room with kitchen equipment and technology for conducting virtual meetings;
  - Classrooms and computer laboratory
  - Large, fully equipped skills and simulation laboratories with abundant storage;
  - Student lounge areas (not utilized at this time); and
  - ADA restrooms.

Records and Reports:

- Official student academic records are maintained on campus in the office of the Registrar according to college policy.
- Minutes of faculty meetings are maintained in the director’s office in a locked cabinet.
- All faculty and student records and storage of records meet the requirements of Rule 214.12 and were available to Board staff.
- Clinical affiliation agreements are current.
- The Total Program Evaluation Plan (TPE) is used for decision-making as evidenced in faculty meeting minutes and documentation on the TPE.

**Strengths and Concerns of Program Review:**

Strengths:

- Texas State Technical College provides resources, facilities, and an organizational structure that facilitate success in the nursing programs.
- Quality Indicators (Spector et. al., 2020) were identified during the review of documents and virtual visit interview as indicated below:

<b>Quality Indicator</b>	<b>Findings from Survey Visit</b>
Institutional administrative support of the nursing program	Administration indicated there is a critical need for RNs and LVNs in the Rio Grande Valley and the desire to be part of the solution for filling this need. Ms. Lashbrook verbalized strong support for Ms. Saucedo and the VN program.
Consistent leadership in the nursing program.	Ms. Saucedo has been at the college and in the director role since September 2017.
Consistent full-time faculty as opposed to reliance on adjunct faculty.	Faculty members offer a rich diversity of practice experience with 11 – 48 years. Faculty are committed to student success. All faculty are full-time at TSTC.
Faculty with current clinical competence	Faculty have years of nursing practice in various specialties. All work with students in the clinical setting as well as in the skills and simulation laboratory. Clinical competence is ongoing.
Clinical experiences with actual patients that prepare students for the reality of clinical practice.	VN students were extremely positive about clinical experiences and indicated they experienced a variety of hands-on patient care in a variety of settings.
Administrative support for ongoing faculty development.	Faculty Development consists of institution wide workshops. Funds are available for several faculty to attend the annual conference of the Texas Association of Vocational Nurse Educators as well as and continuing education for faculty such as online webinars.



Evidence-based curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills	The incorporation of the updated <i>Differentiated Essential Competencies (2021)</i> into the curriculum is in progress and will be implemented in Spring 2022.
Opportunities for a variety of clinical experiences with diverse populations	TSTC has a variety of clinical contracts including acute care settings and has strong relationships with clinical facilities in the surrounding community.
Comprehensive student support services especially services to assist at-risk students	In addition to tutoring and remediation by faculty, a wide variety of student services are offered on the college campus.
Ongoing systematic evaluation of the nursing program	The Total Program Evaluation Plan (TPE) is used for decision-making as evidenced in faculty meeting minutes and documentation on the TPE. Faculty were able to articulate their participation in the evaluation process.
Faculty are able to role model professional behaviors	Students indicated that faculty are patient, always supportive, caring, and accommodating. This behavior was evident during the student interview with Board staff.

**Concerns:**

- The concerns are the same ones common to most VN programs: maintaining hands-on clinical practice in health care settings and managing program outcomes related to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Move to accept the report of the findings from the virtual survey visit to Texas State Technical College VN Program in Harlingen, Texas, as indicated in the attached letter (Attachment #1)

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.

DRAFT LETTER

January 20, 2022

Heather Saucedo, RN, Program Director  
Texas State Technical College, Vocational Nursing  
1902 North Loop 499  
Harlingen, Texas 78550

Dear Ms. Saucedo:

At the January 20, 2022 meeting, the members of the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) considered the report of the virtual survey visit to the Texas State Technical College Vocational Nursing Education Program in Harlingen, Texas. It was the decision of the Board to accept the report of the virtual survey visit conducted December 7 – 9, 2021 and to thank Texas State Technical College for assisting and participating in the virtual survey visit.

If you have any questions, or if we may be of any assistance, please contact Board Staff at [beverly.skloss@bon.texas.gov](mailto:beverly.skloss@bon.texas.gov) or 512-318-3219.

Sincerely,

Katherine A. Thomas, MN, RN, FAAN  
Executive Director

Copy: Amanda Posada, Statewide Executive Director for Dual Enrollment, Interim Provost  
Hector Yanez, Statewide Sr. VP of Student Learning for Academics/Allied Health  
Andy Weaver, BSHS, AAS EMS, LP, Statewide Director of Decision Support for Allied  
Health, Interim Provost West Texas, & EMS Program Director Abilene/ Brownwood  
Jean Lashbrook, RN, Associate Provost