



Strategy 4

Improve retention and graduation rates of nursing students by supporting economic and material needs and enhancing academic supports

Strategy 4.3 The North Carolina General Assembly should allocate resources for university and community college nursing programs to “provide nursing students with better access to counseling and tutoring, additional faculty to provide remediation services and sessions, and academic services to develop math, writing skills, and test taking skills would likely lead to increase retention”.*

*University of North Carolina System and North Carolina Community College System. *Recommendations on Increasing Nursing Graduates: In Response to SL 2022-74 (HB 103), Section 8.3.* <https://nciom.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/UNC-System-Nursing-Report-Section.pdf>

Desired Result

Graduation rates for nursing students will improve as a result of more students having access to academic support services.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

The second most common reason for nursing program attrition in North Carolina is “academic issues/nursing course failure.”²³ Access to services that focus on developing academic skills is crucial to helping more students be successful in their program of study and to increase the number of nurses practicing in North Carolina. Services targeting pre-nursing students may also be beneficial, as “pre-nursing students must successfully complete a series of prerequisite science courses before gaining admission into a nursing program.... [and] Students must pass these courses in the first attempt to increase their chances of admission to a nursing program and to avoid additional tuition costs because they must retake the course”.²³ Test-taking skills are fundamental to successfully navigating licensing examinations, such as the NCLEX-RN, which is known for its challenging and comprehensive format. Enhancing these skills not only improves students’ academic performance but also prepares them for the rigors of professional practice, ensuring they are competent, confident, and capable of delivering high-quality health care services.

Related Recommendations from Other Groups

North Carolina Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council Initiative #1: Establish academic coaches for community college students. The Departments [of Commerce and Health and Human Services] can create a network of North Carolina nurses to serve as coaches to mentor community college students over the course of one to two years, providing needed academic support and mentoring. Community colleges will identify at-risk students early on and employ support strategies including tutoring, instruction on study and test taking skills, time management, and work/life balance. Coaches will serve as a resource and tailor support strategies specific to their student. Coaches will guide nursing students throughout their journey to graduation as well as act as a collaborator with faculty on academic performance.

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/investing-north-carolinas-caregiving-workforce-recommendations-strengthen-north-carolinas-nursing/download?attachment>

Context

A key strategy of a report commissioned by the North Carolina General Assembly to understand how the state can graduate more nurses focuses on the retention of students across nursing education programs. Efforts to improve retention include increased access to counseling services and tutoring as well as academic services to support math and writing skills and test-taking abilities.²³

Contributing factors that have improved student success and retention include academic mentoring and support and student success programs.⁴⁴ Mentorship can be a critical component to success in nursing education and comes in many forms.

North Carolina Spotlight – Nursing Student Retention

“**Six rural nursing programs** initiated a pilot program to improve student retention and student outcomes. The program identifies at-risk students early in their program of study and implements strategies to support the student including individual and group tutoring, instruction on study and test taking skills, time management, and work/life balance. A success coach mentors students throughout their program of study, tailoring services to meet the student needs. The coach collaborates with faculty and acts as the first point of contact for concerns about student performance issues. The success coach serves as a subject matter expert in program curriculum process and tracks metrics relevant to student progression. This coaching process provides a trusting environment where students can share their thoughts, aspirations, concerns, and interests. In preliminary reports, success coaching dedicated to nursing programs increased retention. Similar programs scaled throughout the Systems would also have a likelihood of success.”

-The University of North Carolina System and North Carolina Community College System. *Recommendations on Increasing Nursing Graduates: In Response to SL 2022-74 (HB 103), Section 8.3.* January 19, 2023. <https://nciom.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/UNC-System-Nursing-Report-Section.pdf>

The **UNC-Chapel Hill School of Nursing** has provided academic coaches for all pre-licensure students. This involves devoting a portion of workload for three faculty to academic coaching. This has led to higher graduation rates and NCLEX pass rates.

Student success programs have also been implemented to improve academic success. One example is the individualized pathway programs that target students at higher risk for attrition.⁴⁴ Success coaches and/or academic coaches have also been noted as improving outcomes. Coaches mentor and support students throughout their program of study, tailoring services to meet academic needs, such as remediation and skill-building, for example having course-specific success coaches for more difficult courses with higher rates of attrition.⁴⁵ Coaches work in collaboration with faculty and serve as the initial contact person for concerns about student performance issues.

Similar to success coaches, **retention coaches** are responsible for supporting students by helping with building a network, strengthening test-taking skills, and providing remediation. At the **University of Texas at El Paso**, four coaches were hired to provide both group and one-on-one academic counseling.⁴⁵ Other nursing education programs have focused on providing tutoring services to improve study skills and academic outcomes. One example of this is hiring practicing nurse experts to tutor students in specialty-area nursing courses, such as maternal-child health, medical-surgical nursing, and psychiatric and mental health.⁴⁶