Community colleges play a key role in strengthening the nursing workforce, especially by providing an entry point for students from traditionally underrepresented groups into programs for associate degree (ADN) prepared nurses to achieve a bachelor’s of science in nursing (BSN) degrees. Texas Nurses Association (TNA) believes community colleges offering ADN and BSN degrees should continue to be required to meet existing requirements, which are designed to support program quality comparable to university BSN programs.

**NURSING EDUCATION**

Graduates of ADN, diploma, and BSN programs are eligible to sit for the same professional nursing licensure exam (NCLEX-RN), which is designed to test the knowledge, skills, and abilities essential for the safe and effective practice newly licensed registered nurses (RNs). However, research over 20 years demonstrates nurses prepared at the BSN level achieve better patient outcomes than those prepared with an ADN or diploma.¹ In the Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health report, the Institutes of Medicine recommended that 80% of RNs have a BSN by 2020.² This is no small goal — in 2007 only 45.6% of Texas RNs were BSN prepared.

Currently, affiliation agreements between community colleges and universities enable seamless transitions for ADN students to complete their BSNs. In 2019, 41 Texas professional nursing programs offered a RN-to-BSN program track.³ Less than 2% of qualified applicants are not offered admission to RN-to-BSN programs.² In 2017, Texas joined 23 other states in allowing community colleges to offer BSN programs.

**NURSING WORKFORCE**

The BSN preparation of the Texas RN workforce increased from 45.6% in 2007 to 66% in 2019.⁴ This is striking when one considers that the number of Texas RNs increased from 153,858 to 251,253 during this same period. There are currently eight community colleges approved to offer RN-to-BSN programs. All were required to meet criteria intended to demonstrate program need and support program quality. The college must demonstrate:

- Workforce need for the program in the region the college serves
- How the BSN program would complement other programs and course offerings at the college
- Whether the nursing associate degree program offered by the college has been successful
• Whether those degree programs would unnecessarily duplicate the degree programs offered at other institutions of higher education
• The ability of the college to support the degree programs with student enrollments
• A long-term financial plan for achieving and maintaining accreditation by a national nursing accreditation body
• A long-term plan for faculty recruitment that, in part, assures that the program would not draw faculty employed by a neighboring institution offering a similar program
• Detailed information regarding existing articulation and dual enrollment agreements
• That it meets the pre-licensure degree standards and criteria of the Texas Board of Nursing; and that it meet or exceed the enrollment available to nursing students enrolled in its ADN program

These requirements ensure the graduate of a BSN program offered by a community college receives an education of comparable quality to traditional BSN programs. This rigor will support community college BSN graduates who wish to pursue graduate nursing education in the future.

**LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

In 2019, several bills attempted to lessen requirements for community college RN-to-BSN programs; these bills did not pass. To date, little is known about the challenges, performance, and student outcomes of these programs. Changes to the existing criteria should be based on an objective evaluation of program outcome measures, including graduate competencies.

SB 2118 (2017) authorized the THECB to allow community colleges with a large enough tax base to offer bachelor’s degrees in nursing and other fields. Community colleges are only allowed to offer bachelor’s degrees in the following disciplines: applied science with emphasis on early childhood education, applied technology, and nursing. Community colleges may not have more than three bachelor programs at any given time and must demonstrate a workforce need.

- Only community colleges in districts with a taxable property valuation of $6 billion or more may apply.
- Once approved, the community college must report certain information to the THECB.
- There may not be additional legislative appropriations to fund the BSN program and students may not be charged more for BSN tuition than ADN tuition.
- Current ADN enrollment must remain the same until the 2021-2022 academic year — cannot replace enrollment in favor of the BSN program.

HB 1384 (2015 – Left pending in Calendars Committee) would have authorized the THECB to allow certain community colleges to offer bachelor’s degrees. SB 414 (2013) mandated a study to consider giving community colleges the authority to grant bachelor’s degrees in the fields of applied science and nursing.