

Pre-Licensure Registered Nurse Education in South Carolina | 2020-2024

May 2026



www.scahec.net/scohw

Report Preparation

This document was produced by the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce (SCOHW) – a part of the South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium (SC AHEC) in Charleston, South Carolina. It contains information about pre-licensure RN education programs operating in South Carolina between 2020 and 2024, as reported by the programs on the South Carolina Annual Pre-Licensure Nursing Program Survey.

For additional information about nurses and many other health professionals in South Carolina, please contact us at scohw@scahec.net or visit our website: www.scahec.net/scohw.

Suggested Citation

Campbell C, Fluharty M, Palmer C. Pre-Licensure Registered Nurse Education in South Carolina, 2020-2024. Charleston: South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce, South Carolina AHEC. May 2026. Retrieved from <https://www.scahec.net/scohw/reports/151>

Acknowledgments

The SCOHW team would like to thank the following offices for their role in making this report possible:

- The National Council of State Boards of Nursing for developing and organizing the Core Annual Report Program
- The South Carolina Board of Nursing for adding additional questions and administering the South Carolina Annual Pre-Licensure Nursing Program Survey

About the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce

SCOHW, a division of South Carolina AHEC, studies issues that affect the balance of supply and demand for different types of healthcare professionals across South Carolina. Its primary mission is to develop accurate, reliable information about the healthcare workforce in South Carolina and to make that information widely available to support planning and policy decisions.



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
RN Education Overview	1
Introduction to Pre-Licensure RN Education	1
Programs in South Carolina	2
Geographic Distribution	2
Program Characteristics	3
Program Styles	3
Exam Pass Rates	5
Student Characteristics	6
Enrollment and Graduation	6
Applications and Admissions	7
Student Demographics	8
Faculty Characteristics	10
Faculty Numbers	10
Faculty Vacancy Rates	11
Faculty Degrees	12
Faculty Orientation and Support	12
Program Directors Characteristics	13
COVID-19 Impact	14
Conclusions	16

Table of Contents (continued)

Data Sources and Limitations	17
References	18
Appendix A	19
Acronyms and Definitions	19
Appendix B	20
List of Pre-licensure RN Programs Responding to the Survey in 2024	20

Executive Summary

Nursing is the largest healthcare profession in the United States and in South Carolina (SC). Registered nurses (RNs) play a critical role in providing patient care across hospitals, long-term care facilities, primary care practices, and community health settings. Pre-licensure RN programs prepare individuals who do not yet hold a registered nursing license to take the licensure examination that qualifies them to enter the workforce. This report includes information on programs responding to the South Carolina Annual Pre-Licensure Nursing Program Survey for the years 2020-2024.

Data Highlights

Program Characteristics

- 44% offered hybrid learning in 2024
- Most admit 1-2 cohorts per year
- Clinical simulation widely used
- NCLEX-RN pass rates ↓ 2020–2022, ↑ 2023–2024

Student Characteristics

- 8,002 total enrolled in 2024 (+18% since 2021)
- 2,758 graduates in 2024 (+9% since 2021)
- 6,371 qualified applicants in 2024
- 23% not admitted (↓ from 43% in 2022)
- Predominantly female, white, average age: 27

Faculty Characteristics

- 1,318 total faculty in 2024
- Full-time faculty: 38% (↓ from 51% in 2020)
- Faculty vacancy rate: 9% (↓ from 11% in 2021)

Program Directors Characteristics

- Most hold MSN or higher
- 74% of programs had ≤2 directors in past 5 years
- 10.3% had 4+ directors

Key Takeaways

South Carolina’s pre-licensure RN education programs continue to make meaningful contributions to the state’s nursing workforce, expanding enrollment and graduation numbers while adapting to changing student demographics and evolving instructional needs. At the same time, trends in admissions, graduation output, and faculty composition demonstrate the importance of continued investment in nursing education infrastructure. Strengthening faculty recruitment and retention, expanding clinical training capacity, and supporting student success will be essential to sustaining growth and meeting South Carolina’s ongoing demand for RNs.

Introduction

Nursing is the largest healthcare profession in the United States and in South Carolina.¹ There are multiple educational pathways that prepare individuals to practice nursing, including pre-licensure programs for practical nursing (PN) and registered nursing, and post-licensure programs that include options for RNs to complete baccalaureate education and enter advanced nursing practice through graduate-level nursing programs. Understanding the capacity, distribution, and characteristics of these programs is critical for workforce planning, policy development, and ensuring that South Carolina has a sufficient and well-prepared supply of nurses to meet the state's healthcare needs.

This report describes trends in South Carolina's pre-licensure RN education between 2020 and 2024, using data from the South Carolina Board of Nursing (SC BON) and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). The report highlights the number and type of programs, student enrollment and graduation trends, faculty and leadership characteristics, and licensure exam outcomes.

The data presented here reflect the challenges of nursing education during a period that includes the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly disrupted higher education and healthcare services. As a result, caution should be used when interpreting trends, particularly in relation to current workforce conditions. Despite these challenges, nursing education programs across South Carolina have continued to expand access, maintain high standards, and contribute significantly to the state's nursing workforce pipeline.

RN Education Overview

Introduction to Pre-Licensure RN Education

RNs are the largest group within South Carolina's nursing workforce.² They play a critical role in providing patient care across hospitals, long-term care facilities, primary care practices, and community health settings. Pre-licensure RN programs prepare individuals who do not yet hold a registered nursing license for their licensure examination. Graduates of these programs apply to the SC BON for authorization to take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) to qualify for licensure.³

In South Carolina, pre-licensure RN education is currently offered in 3 formats: Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN), Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing (BSN), and Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) entry programs. ADN and BSN programs are the most common pathways. Both prepare students for entry into RN practice, though BSN programs also emphasize leadership, research, and community health. Master's entry programs provide an accelerated route into nursing for individuals who already hold a non-nursing bachelor's degree. This variety of pathways reflects national trends and offers students multiple entry points into the nursing profession.

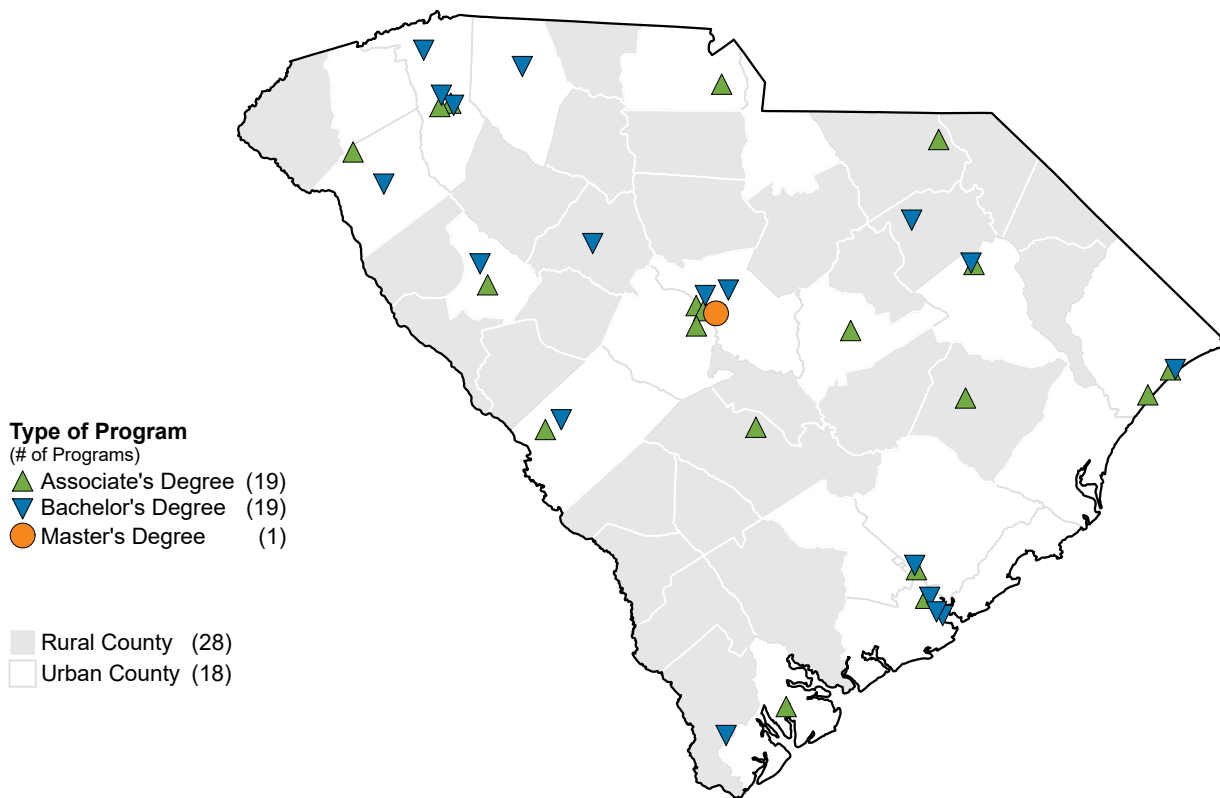
Programs in South Carolina

In fall 2024, 19 ADN programs, 19 BSN programs, and 1 MSN entry program responded to the South Carolina Annual Pre-Licensure Nursing Program Survey. Of the pre-licensure RN education programs that had students during the survey period, all but one responded. This report includes information on these programs. ADN programs are primarily offered through the state's technical college system, which increases geographic access and affordability. BSN programs are concentrated within public and private universities, many of which have expanded capacity in recent years to respond to workforce needs. Together, these programs supply many of the new RNs licensed in the state each year. For a list of the pre-licensure RN education programs in South Carolina that responded to the survey in 2024, see Appendix B. A complete list of pre-licensure RN education programs approved by the SC BON is available at <https://llr.sc.gov/nurse/nurprograms.aspx>.

Geographic Distribution

Pre-licensure RN programs are distributed across South Carolina, though availability varies by program type (Figure 1). ADN programs are broadly accessible across the state through technical colleges, while BSN programs are located primarily in metropolitan areas and university centers. This geographic distribution helps ensure a steady pipeline of graduates in both rural and urban areas, though regional variation in enrollment and graduation rates continues to influence the supply of RNs.

Figure 1. Pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2024.



Program locations: 2024 South Carolina Annual Pre-Licensure Nursing Program Survey, South Carolina Board of Nursing, National Council of State Boards of Nursing. Rural definition: U.S. Census Bureau, Geography Division, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>. Rural counties are those counties where 50% or more of the population lives outside an urban area, based on the 2020 Census counts (updated September 2023). Produced by: South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce, a division of South Carolina AHEC.

Program Characteristics

Program Styles

Pre-licensure RN programs in South Carolina vary in length, format, and structure, offering students multiple options for completing their nursing education.

Length of Program

The length of time needed to complete a pre-licensure RN program varies by program type.

- ADN programs typically take 2 years to complete.
- BSN programs typically take 4 years to complete.
- Master’s entry programs are accelerated pathways that can be completed in 18–24 months for individuals already holding a bachelor’s degree and required prerequisite courses. The Master’s Entry to Practice Nursing (MEPN) program at the University of South Carolina requires 5 semesters.

Academic Schedule

Most pre-licensure RN education programs followed a semester-based calendar, admitting new cohorts once or twice per year. Some programs used trimesters or quarters, and 1 program used 7-week sessions for coursework (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Academic schedule in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2024.

Course Length	ADN	BSN	Master’s Entry	Total
Semesters	1	14	17	32
Trimesters	0	2	0	2
Quarters	0	2	2	4
Other	0	1	0	1
Total	1	19	19	39

Table 2. Learning modalities in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2024.

Learning Modality	ADN	BSN	Master’s Entry	Total
Hybrid	9	7	1	17
In-Person Only	10	12	0	22
Total	19	19	1	39

Instructional Format and Clinical Hours

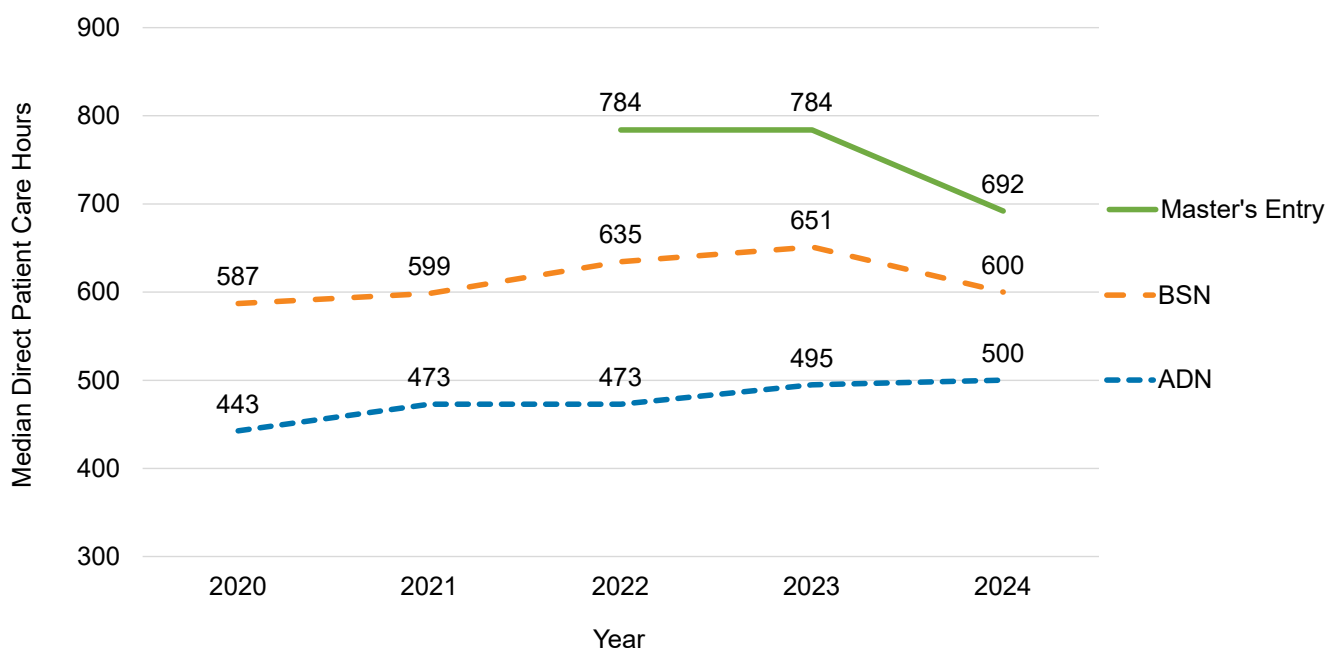
Programs use a mix of classroom, laboratory, simulation, and clinical instruction (**Table 2**). Nearly half of programs (43.6%) offered hybrid learning for didactic courses, while clinical hours must be completed in healthcare settings. Clinical placements are secured through partnerships with hospitals, long-term care facilities, and community health organizations across the state. Programs offered a median of 20% of their hours online, with the master’s entry program offering more than ADN or BSN programs.

The median number of program hours that students spend in different types of instruction generally increased between 2020 and 2024 (Table 3). Hours spent in simulation increased the most, by 20% in all programs during that time. Hours spent in direct patient care increased by 10.4% between 2020 and 2024, although they decreased in BSN and master’s entry programs from 2023 to 2024 (Figure 2). Because this timeframe includes the COVID-19 pandemic, when many programs temporarily reduced in-person clinical experiences and expanded simulation, some of these changes may reflect adjustments to pandemic-related restrictions as well as ongoing shifts in instructional practices.

Table 3. Program hours in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2020-2024.

		Median Hours				
		2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
ADN	Direct Patient Care	442.5	472.8	472.8	494.8	500.0
	Simulation	46.5	32.3	45.0	42.0	59.0
	Skills Lab	93.5	90.0	106.0	117.5	118.0
BSN	Direct Patient Care	587.0	598.5	634.5	651.0	600.0
	Simulation	48.0	69.0	58.0	76.0	80.0
	Skills Lab	117.0	95.0	108.0	109.0	110.5
Master's Entry	Direct Patient Care	-	-	784.0	784.0	692.0
	Simulation	-	-	60.0	70.0	70.0
	Skills Lab	-	-	42.0	56.0	64.0
All Programs	Direct Patient Care	522.0	534.5	540.0	585.0	558.0
	Simulation	48.0	44.0	50.0	65.0	60.0
	Skills Lab	100.0	90.0	106.0	110.0	117.0

Figure 2. Median program hours in direct patient care in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2020-2024.*



* There were no master’s entry programs prior to 2022.

Simulation places students in controlled experiences where they can practice nursing care. This allows for real-time feedback, skill demonstration, and practice of complex care situations (e.g., performing resuscitation, de-escalating heightened anxiety situations), decreasing the risk of harm to all present.⁴ It is increasingly used to supplement required clinical experiences. Most programs report substituting some clinical hours with simulation, but only 1 ADN and 4 BSN programs reported using 26-50% substitution due to lack of clinical site availability (Table 4). Of the programs that reported substituting simulation for clinical time, more than half (62.5%) substituted 1 hour of simulation for 2 hours of clinical time.

Table 4. Substitution of clinical hours with simulation in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2024.

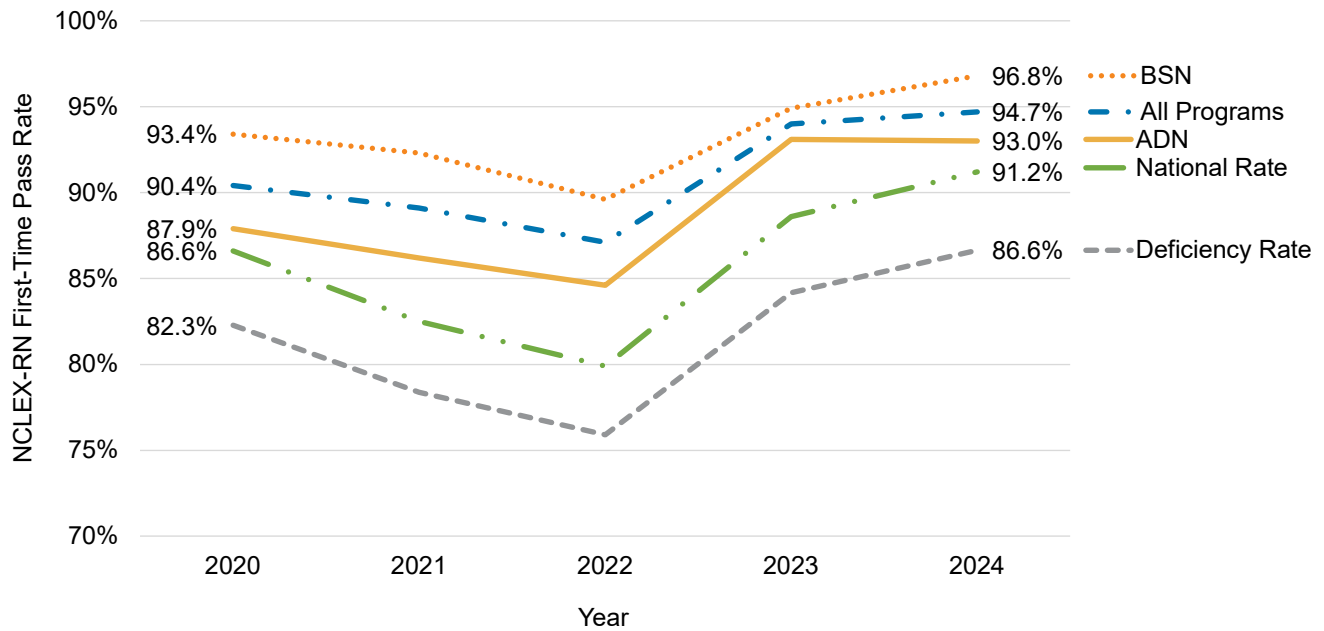
Percent Substituted	ADN		BSN	
	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs
0%	4	10.3%	0	0%
Up to 10%	9	23.1%	6	15.4%
11-25%	5	12.8%	9	23.1%
26-50%	1	2.6%	4	10.3%
N/A	20	51.3%	20	51.3%

Exam Pass Rates

Graduates of all pre-licensure RN programs must pass the NCLEX-RN to practice. Exam pass rates are an important indicator of program quality and are monitored annually by the SC BON as part of ongoing program approval and oversight. Programs with consistently low pass rates may be subject to review and corrective action. In South Carolina, a program is classified as deficient if its annual NCLEX pass rate is more than 5% below the national average.⁵ NCLEX-RN pass rate data were obtained directly from the NCSBN, which compiles official licensure examination outcomes for all U.S. nursing education programs.

Figure 3 shows that NCLEX-RN first-time pass rates decreased across all program types from 2020 to 2022, from 90.4% to 87.1%.⁶ This period includes significant disruptions to nursing education related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including changes in instructional delivery, clinical placement availability, and student progression. In addition, the NCSBN implemented the Next Generation NCLEX (NGN), a revised licensure examination format designed to better assess clinical judgment, beginning April 1, 2023.⁷ Pass rates increased in 2023 and 2024, suggesting that programs are adapting to post-pandemic instruction and the updated NCLEX exam format. In 2024, South Carolina's NCLEX-RN pass rate was 94.7%, ranking 6th nationally and surpassing the U.S. average of 91.2%.

Figure 3. NCLEX-RN first-time pass rates by program type, SC, 2020-2024.



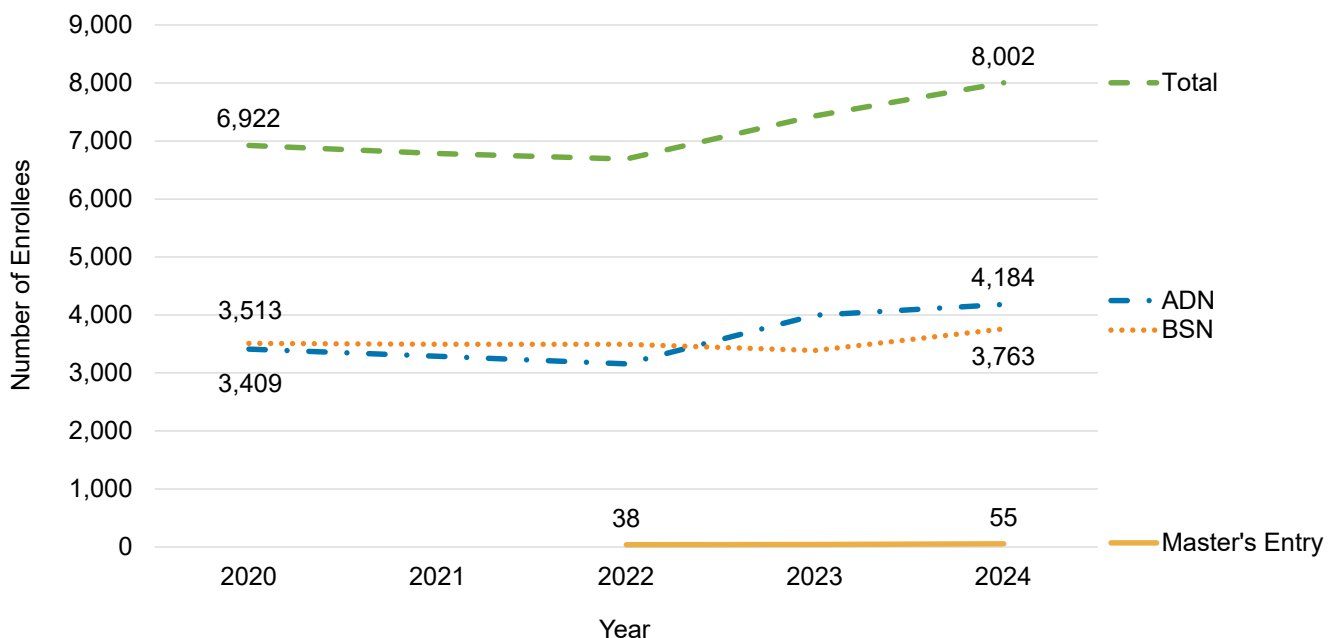
Source: 2020–2024 NCLEX-RN Examination Statistics, National Council of State Boards of Nursing. <https://www.ncsbn.org/exams/exam-statistics-and-publications/nurse-licensure-and-nclex-exam-statistics.page>.

Student Characteristics

Enrollment and Graduation

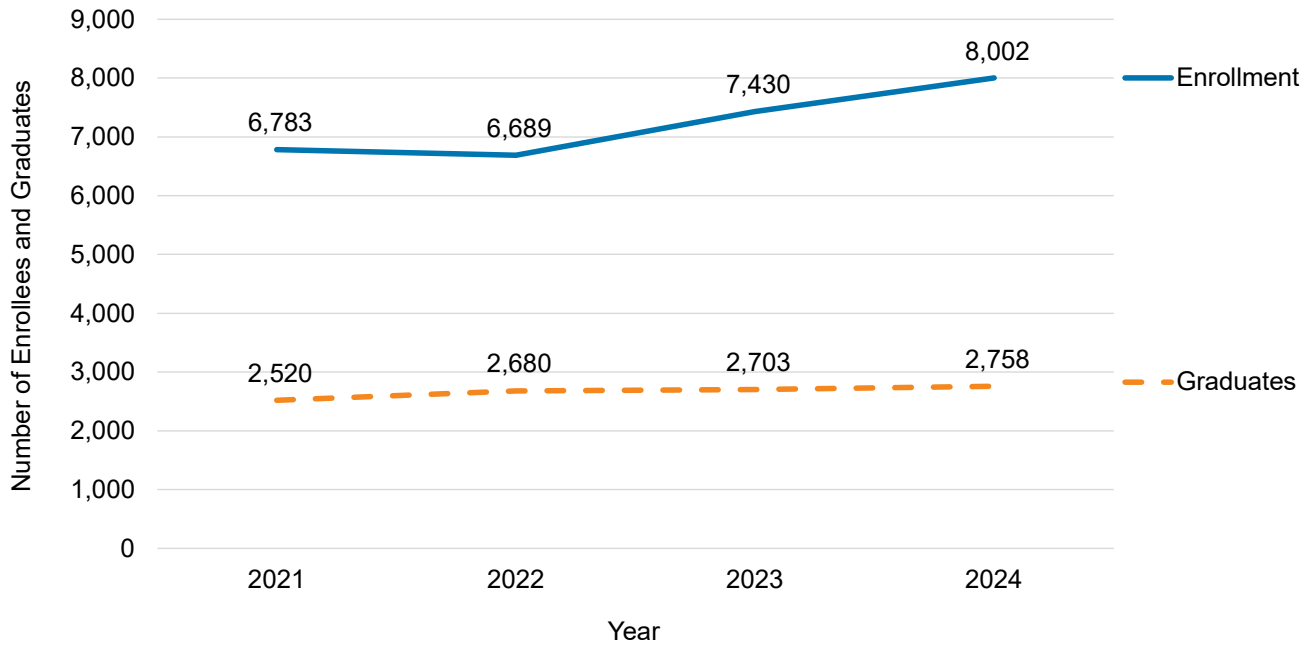
Enrollment across all pre-licensure RN programs totaled 8,002 students in 2024 (**Figure 4**). In 2023, enrollment in ADN programs surpassed enrollment in BSN programs.

Figure 4. Enrollment in pre-licensure RN education programs by program type, SC, 2020-2024.



While the number of enrollees increased by 18.0% from 2021 to 2024, the number of graduates increased by 9.4%, from 2,520 to 2,758 (**Figure 5**). Because pre-licensure nursing programs typically require 2 to 4 years to complete, enrollment and graduation counts represent different student cohorts and should not be interpreted as a direct progression from enrollment to graduation within the same year. However, sustained increases in enrollment may lead to additional graduates in future years as those students progress through their programs. As a result, recent growth in enrollment may indicate continued expansion in the supply of newly trained RNs in SC. Of the 2,758 reported graduates in 2024, 91.3% were hired in SC post-graduation.

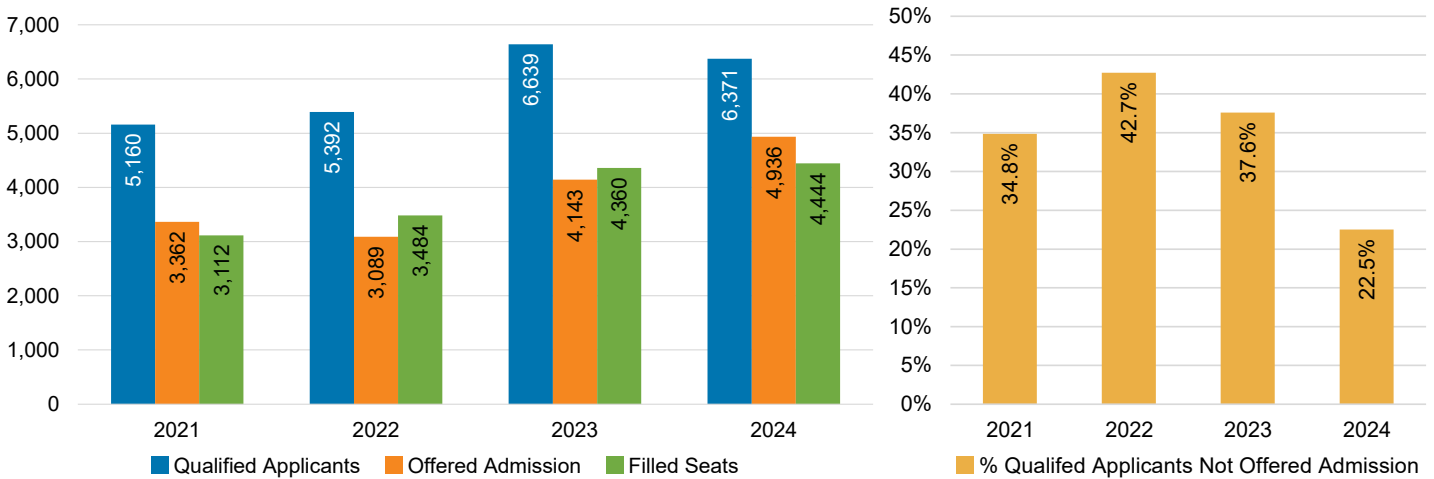
Figure 5. Enrollment and graduates in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2021-2024.



Applications and Admissions

There were 6,371 qualified applicants (applicants who met admission requirements) to pre-licensure RN education programs in 2024, an increase of approximately 1,000 since 2021 (**Figure 6**). The percentage of qualified applicants who were not offered admission has fluctuated from a high of 42.7% in 2022 to a low of 22.5% in 2024.

Figure 6. Qualified applicants, applicants offered admission, filled seats, and qualified applicants not offered admission in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2021-2024.



Programs were asked to report why qualified applicants were not admitted (Table 5). The most commonly reported reason was limited clinical sites (10 programs).

Table 5. Reasons why qualified applicants were not admitted to pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2024.

Reason	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs
Limited clinical sites	10	25.6%
Lack of classroom space	7	17.9%
Lack of approved seats/positions	5	12.8%
Inability to fill faculty vacancies	3	7.7%
Insufficient funds to hire faculty	1	2.6%

Student Demographics

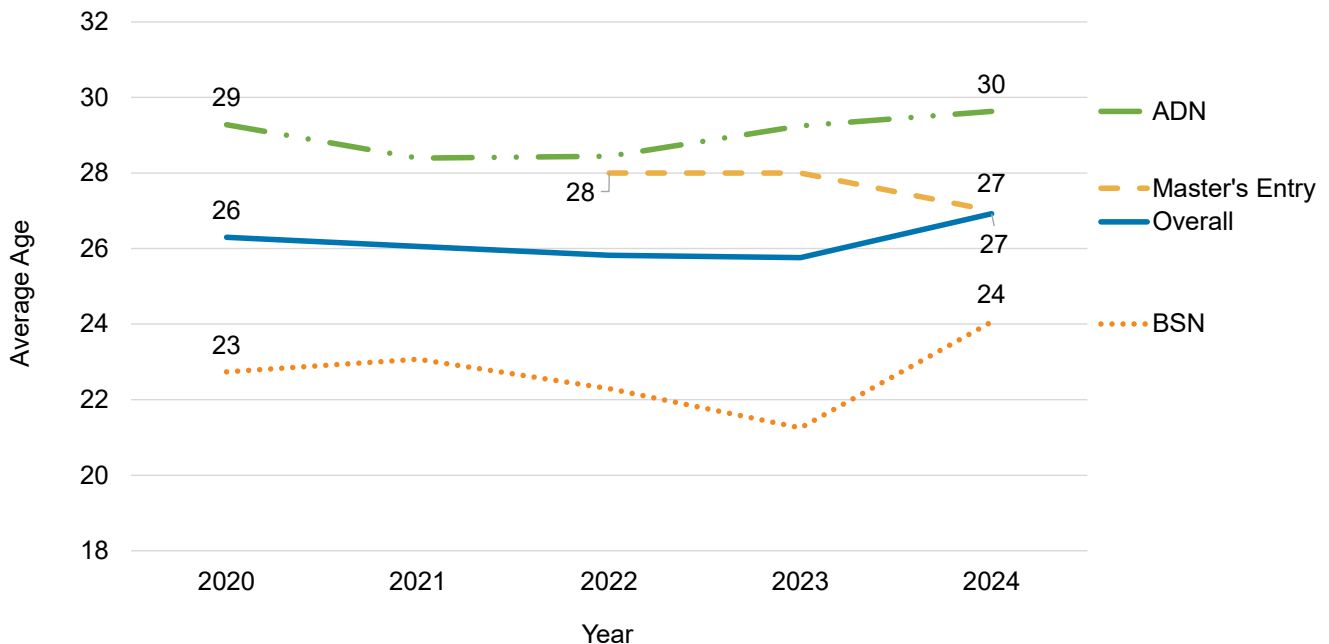
Table 6 shows the demographics of students enrolled in pre-licensure RN education programs as of the beginning of the academic year. Pre-licensure RN students have remained predominantly female since 2020. In 2024, 88.9% of students were female, 10.9% were male, and 0.2% were other, based on data reported in the NCSBN survey. The majority (63.5%) of students in 2024 were white, a decrease from 71.5% in 2020.

Programs reported the average age of enrolled students as of the beginning of the academic year. The average age of pre-licensure RN students has increased over the past 5 years, from 26 to 27. Figure 7 shows that ADN students are older, on average, than BSN and master’s students.

Table 6. Demographic characteristics of students in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2020 and 2024.

	2020	2024
	Percent	Percent
Sex		
Female	90.0%	88.9%
Male	10.0%	10.9%
Other	0.0%	0.2%
Race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%	0.4%
Asian	2.3%	1.6%
Black or African American	19.6%	23.2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.4%	0.4%
White	71.5%	63.5%
Multi-Racial	2.5%	5.0%
Other	3.2%	5.9%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	5.0%	6.3%
Non-Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	95.0%	93.7%
Age		
Average Age	26 years	27 years

Figure 7. Average age of students enrolled in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2020-2024.

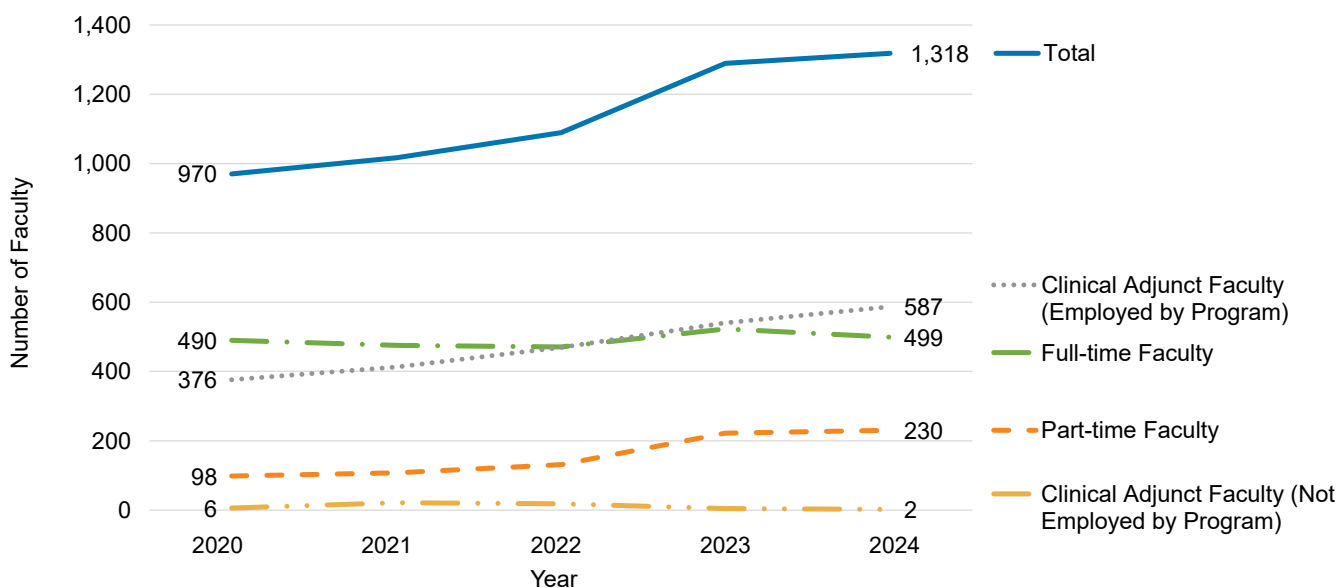


Faculty Characteristics

Faculty Numbers

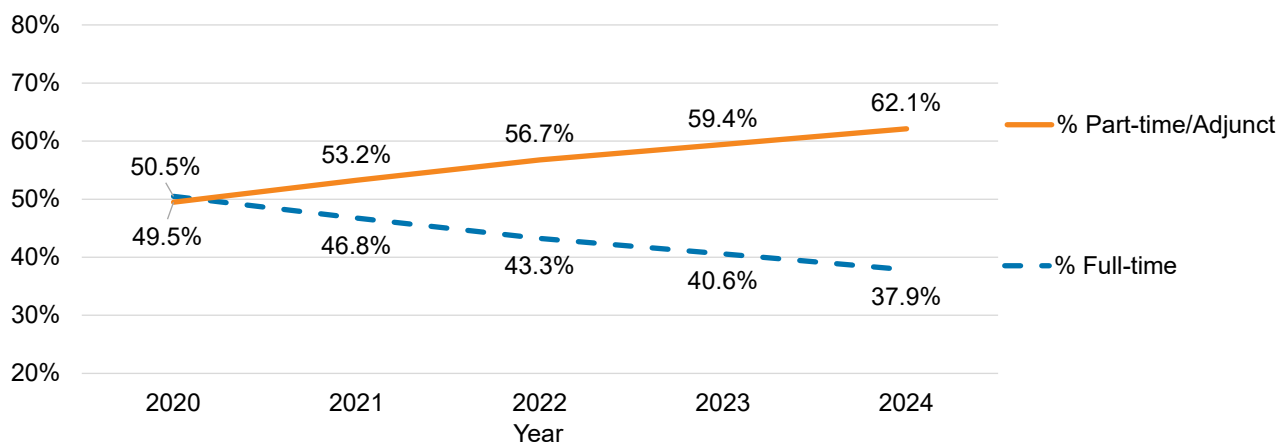
In 2024, 1,318 faculty members were employed by pre-licensure RN education programs. This number has increased steadily since 2020, with part-time faculty seeing the largest percentage growth (Figure 8). Part-time faculty work less than 37.5 hours per week and are responsible for assuming teaching responsibilities, usually collaborating with full-time faculty. The number of clinical adjunct faculty employed by programs has increased, while the number employed by external organizations, such as clinical practice sites, decreased.

Figure 8. Number of faculty in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2020-2024.



The percentage of faculty who are full-time has decreased steadily since 2020, from 50.5% to 37.9% (Figure 9). Sixteen programs (41.0%) had less than 35% full-time faculty, which is higher than the national rate of 31.1% in 2024.⁸

Figure 9. Percent of full-time and part-time/adjunct faculty in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2020-2024.



Faculty Vacancy Rates

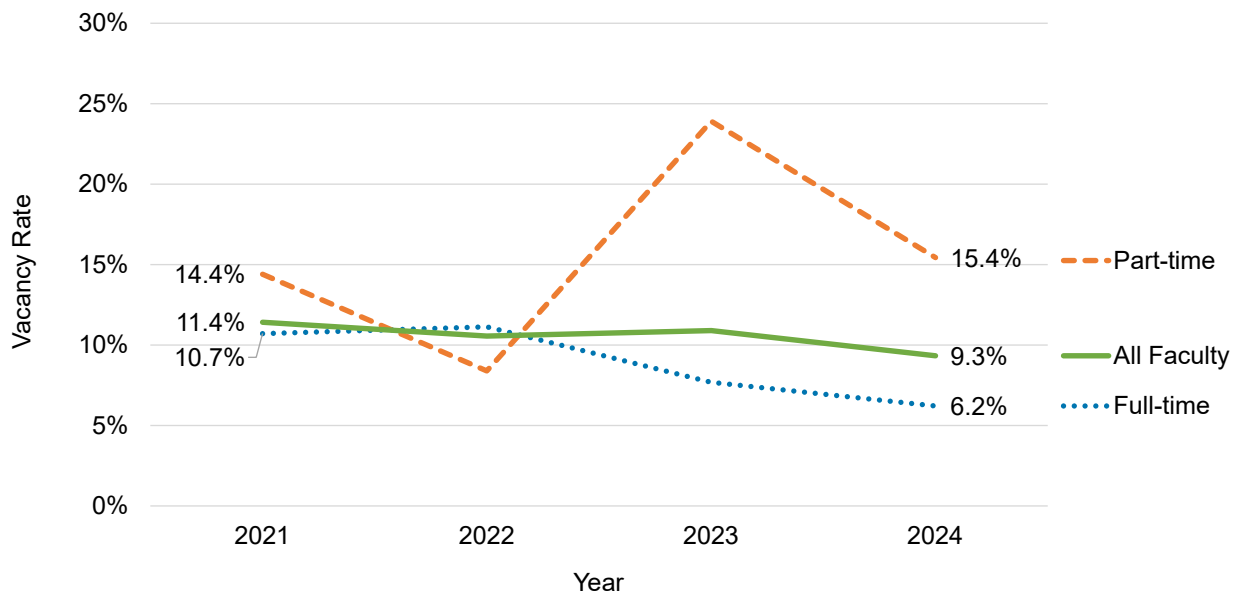
For both part-time and full-time faculty, programs reported the number of filled positions and the number of positions vacant and being recruited. These were used to calculate vacancy rates (Table 7). The vacancy rate for all faculty positions was 9.3% in 2024, ranging from a low of 0% in 14 programs to a high of 58.3% in 1 program. Since 2021, the overall faculty vacancy rate has fallen from 11.4% to 9.3% (Figure 10).

Table 7. Full-time and part-time faculty vacancy rates in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2024.

	Full-time	Part-time	All faculty
Overall	6.2%	15.4%	9.3%
Minimum	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Maximum	50.0%	100.0%*	58.3%
Number of programs with 0% vacancy rate	18	20	14

* Two programs reported a part-time faculty vacancy rate of 100%. One program had one part-time faculty vacancy, and the other had 5 vacancies.

Figure 10. Faculty vacancy rates in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2021-2024.



Faculty Degrees

For program approval by the SC BON, nursing faculty and administrators must hold an active RN license, possess a minimum of an MSN for teaching faculty or BSN for clinical instructors (unless they were appointed faculty members prior to June 30, 1992), and have at least 2 years of clinical experience related to their area of instruction.⁹ Overall, 91.5% of faculty in pre-licensure RN education programs held a master’s degree or higher (**Table 8**). This varied between full-time and part-time faculty, with a larger percentage of part-time faculty holding a BSN, and a lower percentage holding a doctoral degree.

Table 8. Full- and part-time faculty highest degrees, SC, 2024.

Degree	Full-time	Part-time	All Faculty
BSN	2.7%	21.0%	8.5%
MSN	53.3%	62.1%	56.1%
Other master's degree	4.6%	1.2%	3.5%
DNP	21.5%	11.9%	18.5%
PhD	15.2%	2.5%	11.1%
Other doctoral degree	2.7%	1.2%	2.2%

Faculty Orientation and Support

Programs were asked about the kinds of orientation and support they offer for faculty development. **Table 9** shows that most programs offer formal orientation for new faculty, whether they are full-time, part-time, or adjunct. Most programs also offer monetary support and substantive periodic workshops. Other types of reported support include lunch-and-learn sessions, faculty retreats, and access to NurseTim[®] webinars.

Table 9. Services and support offered to faculty in pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2024.

Degree	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs
Formal orientation for new full-time faculty	39	100.0%
Formal orientation for new part-time faculty	33	84.6%
Formal orientation for new clinical adjunct faculty	38	97.4%
Formal mentoring for new full-time faculty	38	97.4%
Monetary support	28	77.8%
Substantive periodic workshops	27	75.0%
Other	13	36.1%

Program Directors Characteristics

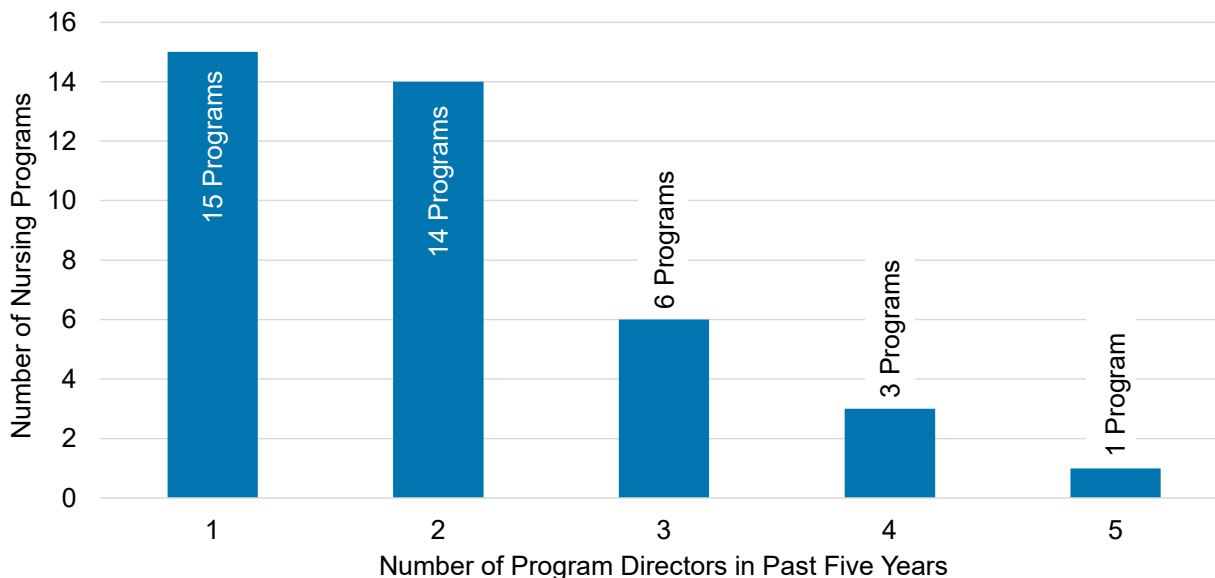
All pre-licensure RN education programs in 2024 reported that their program director was a nurse, as required by the SC BON.⁹ **Table 10** shows the breakdown of highest nursing degrees among program directors. Almost all directors held a master’s degree or higher in nursing.

Most programs reported having only 1 or 2 directors in the past 5 years, although 4 programs (10.3%) had 4 or more (**Figure 11**). This is similar to the national rate of 10.4% in 2024.⁸ In the past year, 6 programs reported having a new program director, and 2 programs had a new assistant/associate director.

Table 10. Pre-licensure RN program directors’ highest degrees, SC, 2024.

Degree	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs
Associate Degree in Nursing	1	2.6%
Bachelor of Science in Nursing	1	2.6%
Master of Science in Nursing	14	35.9%
Doctor of Nursing Practice	15	38.5%
Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing	7	17.9%
Other	1	2.6%

Figure 11. Number of directors in the past five years, SC, 2024.



COVID-19 Impact

In 2020 and 2021, the South Carolina Annual Pre-Licensure Nursing Program Survey included several questions about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing education programs (**Table 11**). All programs responded to these questions.

- Over half of RN education programs reported experiencing a major disruption in 2020, falling to about one-third of programs in 2021.
- Clinical experience and didactic education were the most affected parts of programs.
- In 2020, most programs moved their didactic education totally online (84.8%), while in 2021, programs adapted more by shifting to partial online education (59.4%) and smaller class sizes (50.0%).
- Two-thirds of programs reported that all clinical experiences with patients were canceled at their sites in 2020, and this fell to 31.3% in 2021. The most common way programs dealt with this was through virtual simulation.
- A total of 20 programs reported that they experienced student attrition of up to 28% because of COVID-19, for reasons such as personal issues (5 programs), disliking virtual learning (5 programs), and opting out of clinical experiences (2 programs). Eight programs also reported experiencing faculty attrition. Despite these issues, most programs evaluated the quality of education at their schools as about the same or higher than in the previous academic year.

Table 11. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2020 and 2021

	2020	2021
	Percent of Programs	Percent of Programs
How seriously was your nursing program affected by COVID-19?		
Major disruption	54.5%	31.3%
Quite a bit	24.2%	37.5%
Somewhat	21.2%	28.1%
A little	0.0%	3.1%
Which part of the program was affected?		
Didactic education	97.0%	93.8%
Clinical experiences with patients in clinical sites	100.0%	93.8%
Simulation in the simulation lab	90.9%	81.3%
Skills lab	90.9%	78.1%
What changes, if any, were made to didactic education because of COVID-19?		
Went to 100% online education	84.8%	46.9%
Went to partial online education	18.2%	59.4%
Smaller class sizes	27.3%	50.0%
No changes	0.0%	0.0%

Continued on next page.

Table 11 (continued). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on pre-licensure RN education programs, SC, 2020 and 2021

	2020	2021
	Percent of Programs	Percent of Programs
Were face-to-face clinical experiences with patients canceled in your sites due to COVID-19?		
All sites	66.7%	31.3%
Approximately 25% or less	9.1%	21.9%
Approximately 26-50%	0.0%	15.6%
Approximately 51-75%	3.0%	9.4%
Approximately 76-90%	9.1%	3.1%
None of the sites	0.0%	3.1%
If all your clinical sites were canceled due to COVID-19, what did you do for clinical experiences?		
Simulation in the lab with manikins, faculty and students present	21.0%	22.0%
Simulation in the lab with manikins, faculty and students, though with mandated social distancing	30.0%	28.0%
Virtual simulation	73.0%	41.0%
Decreased number of clinical hours needed for graduation	0.0%	0.0%
Compared to spring/summer 2020, how would you evaluate the quality of the education at your school during the previous academic year?		
Much higher	0.0%	6.0%
Higher	6.0%	38.0%
About the same	58.0%	44.0%
Lower	36.0%	9.0%
Much lower	0.0%	3.0%

Conclusions

Nursing education programs must be approved by the BON in the state in which they operate by meeting established standards set by the BON. Students are only allowed to take the NCLEX-RN if they have graduated from a BON-approved program. In 2020, the NCSBN performed a retrospective cohort study of 11,378 annual reports collected by 43 state boards of nursing from 2012-2017 to examine indicators associated with both full approval and loss of approval among nursing education programs. Programs with NCLEX pass rates at or above 80% shared several statistically significant characteristics. These included holding programmatic accreditation, offering instruction in traditional or hybrid formats, operating as longer-established programs, maintaining higher enrollment capacity or multiple instructional sites, and having a greater proportion of full-time faculty. Programs housed within private nonprofit or public institutions were also more likely to meet the 80% benchmark. Leadership characteristics mattered as well: programs led by directors with a PhD and those that experienced no more than 3 program directors over a 5 year period demonstrated higher performance.¹⁰

Pre-licensure RN education programs in SC have shown steady growth and adaptation over the past several years, reflecting both increasing interest in nursing and the state's investments in supporting and expanding the nursing workforce. In the budget bills passed in the 2022-2023 legislative sessions, the state allocated funding to support nursing faculty salaries and tuition reimbursement for graduate student nurses who agree to become faculty in a public nursing education program upon their graduation.¹¹ They recognized the barriers education programs face in recruiting and retaining sufficient faculty needed to train more nurses and alleviate perceived nursing shortages. As of July 2025, 152 individuals were enrolled in the tuition reimbursement program, and participants from the 2023 borrower cohort had begun to enter faculty positions.¹² There is not enough direct evidence to show that this program alone has enabled expanded nursing education program capacity, but it is likely one factor contributing to the increasing number of faculty and declining faculty vacancy rates reported by the programs in this survey.

While enrollment increased by 18.0% between 2021 and 2024, the number of graduates showed a more modest increase of 9.4%. The slower growth in graduates may not yet reflect students who are still completing their education program under more recently expanded enrollment.

The number of qualified applicants continues to increase, and a portion continues to be turned away. However, with recent expansions in program capacity, the percentage of qualified applicants not offered admission has improved, decreasing from 34.8% (1,798) in 2021 to 22.5% (1,435) in 2024. Currently, there is no statewide system to match qualified applicants to unfilled seats. While recent improvements suggest expanded capacity or changes in applicant volume, the continued presence of qualified applicants unable to secure a seat underscores ongoing limitations in the pipeline.

The demographics of pre-licensure RN students have remained relatively stable, with students continuing to be predominantly female. Programs also reported a gradual increase in the average age of students, from 26 to 27 over the past five years. Age trends varied by program type, with ADN students becoming older on average while BSN students became slightly younger. These shifts may reflect changes in who is choosing nursing as a career, the availability of accelerated pathways, and broader economic conditions.

Faculty capacity continues to shape the ability of pre-licensure RN programs to enroll and graduate students. In 2024, programs reported employing 1,318 faculty members, a number that has increased steadily since 2020, with the largest percentage growth occurring among part-time faculty. The proportion of full-time faculty

has declined over the same period, from 50.5% in 2020 to 37.9% in 2024. Programs also reported increased use of clinical adjunct faculty, while the number of adjunct faculty not formally employed by programs has decreased. Leadership stability varied across programs: most programs reported having only 1 or 2 directors over the past five years, although 10.3% had 4 or more. In the past year alone, 6 programs reported having a new program director, and 2 reported having a new assistant or associate director, highlighting ongoing turnover in key leadership roles.

South Carolina's pre-licensure RN education programs continue to make meaningful contributions to the state's nursing workforce, expanding enrollment and graduation numbers while adapting to changing student demographics and evolving instructional needs. At the same time, trends in admissions, graduation output, and faculty composition demonstrate the importance of continued investment in nursing education infrastructure. Strengthening faculty recruitment and retention, expanding clinical training capacity, and supporting student success will be essential to sustaining growth and meeting SC's ongoing demand for RNs.

Data Sources and Limitations

Each fall, the SC BON conducts the South Carolina Annual Pre-Licensure Nursing Program Survey, in conjunction with the NCSBN. The survey is an annual national data collection effort designed to capture standardized information on the capacity and characteristics of nursing education programs in the United States. Each year, NCSBN shares a link to an electronic survey with the SC BON, which then distributes the link to program directors of all approved and accredited pre-licensure RN education programs.¹³ Programs report data for the previous academic year, including enrollment, graduations, faculty composition, student demographics, program structure, and barriers to expanding capacity. NCSBN conducts follow-up validation to address missing or inconsistent responses before aggregating the data for national analysis. Findings are published on the NCSBN website, which serves as one of the most comprehensive national sources on nursing program capacity and trends.¹⁴ The survey for SC programs includes additional questions developed by the SC BON.

In Fall 2024, 19 ADN programs, 19 BSN programs, and 1 MSN entry program responded to survey. Of the pre-licensure RN education programs that had students during the survey period, all but 1 responded. This report includes information on these programs.

All information is reported directly by nursing program administrators. Programs may interpret questions differently, use varying internal definitions, or make errors in data entry. Although NCSBN performs data validation, the accuracy of the survey ultimately depends on program reporting. Not all programs complete every survey item each year. Missing data may lead to undercounting of faculty, students, or program characteristics, and can bias trend analyses if the same programs are missing data across multiple years.

References

1. Health Resources and Services Administration. 2022 National sample survey of registered nurses snapshot. March 2024. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/Nurse-Survey-Fact-Sheet-2024.pdf>
2. Fu B, Chastain-Brown A, Campbell C, Palmer C, Fluharty M, Gaul K. (2026). 2026 South Carolina health professions data book. Charleston, SC: South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce, South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium. January 2026. <https://www.scahec.net/scohw/reports/149>
3. South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. Requirements to take the National Council Licensure Examination for registered nurse and licensed practical nurse. Accessed February 19, 2026. <https://llr.sc.gov/nurse/bonexam.aspx>
4. Gaba, DM. The future vision of simulation in health care. *BMJ Qual Saf.* 2004;13(suppl 1):i2-i10. doi:10.1136/qshc.2004.009878
5. National Council of State Boards of Nursing. 2023 Education Survey. 2024. Accessed February 24, 2026. https://www.ncsbn.org/public-files/Education_Survey_2023.pdf
6. National Council of State Boards of Nursing. NCLEX-RN examination statistics, 2020–2024. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.ncsbn.org/exams/exam-statistics-and-publications/nurse-licensure-and-nclex-exam-statistics.page>
7. National Council of State Boards of Nursing. Next generation NCLEX. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.nclex.com/next-generation-nclex.page>
8. National Council of State Boards of Nursing. National nursing education database: 2023-2024 aggregate data. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.ncsbn.org/public-files/2023-2024-AggregateData-digital-v2.pdf>
9. South Carolina Code of Regulations, Section 91-11. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/coderegs/Chapter%2091.pdf>
10. Spector N, Silvestre J, Alexander M, et al. NCSBN regulatory guidelines and evidence-based quality indicators for nursing education programs. *J Nurs Regul.* 2020;11(2):S1-S64. doi:10.1016/S2155-8256(20)30075-2
11. South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. Higher education nursing initiative. Accessed February 19, 2026. <https://che.sc.gov/institutions-and-educators/higher-education-nursing-initiative>
12. South Carolina Student Loan. BOLD nursing faculty loan program shows marked impact at two years. Accessed February 19, 2026. <https://www.scstudentloan.org/news/bold-nursing-faculty-loan-program-shows-marked-impact-two-years>
13. National Council of State Boards of Nursing. NCSBN's annual report program. Accessed January 27, 2026. https://www.ncsbn.org/public-files/NCSBNCOREAnnualReportProject_OverviewFlyer.pdf
14. National Council of State Boards of Nursing. National nursing education database. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.ncsbn.org/nursing-regulation/education/national-nursing-education-database.page>

Appendix A

Acronyms and Definitions

Acronym	Meaning	Definition
ADN	Associate Degree in Nursing	One of the types of degrees that allow a person to sit for their licensure exam to be a registered nurse.
APRN	Advanced Practice Registered Nurse	A registered nurse who has completed a master's or doctoral degree and completed the requirements to increase the scope of nursing practice (such as writing patient care orders or prescribing medications).
BSN	Bachelor of Science in Nursing	One of the types of degrees that allow a person to sit for their licensure exam to be a registered nurse.
NLC	Nurse Licensure Compact	An agreement between state nursing governing bodies to recognize multi-state licenses of nurses from any participating state so that nurses can practice care in locations other than where they reside using their home state license.
LLR	South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation	The South Carolina government agency that oversees professional licensure rules, regulations, and worksites.
LPN	Licensed Practical Nurse	A nurse who has a license to practice basic nursing care, defined by the nurse practice act in the state where they are licensed. The LPN has a smaller scope of practice than the registered nurse. LPNs may also be referred to as Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVN) in some states.
MEPN	Master's Entry to Practice Nursing	An accelerated pathway to RN practice offered by the University of South Carolina that can be completed in 5 semesters, for individuals already holding a bachelor's degree and required prerequisite courses.
MSN	Master of Science in Nursing	One of the types of degrees that allows a person to sit for their licensure exam to be a registered nurse.
NCLEX	National Council Licensure Examination	The examination used to qualify nurses for their LPN or RN license following completion from a state-approved school of nursing. There are two versions used to license nurses in the United States; NCLEX-PN for LPN licensure and NCLEX-RN for RN licensure.
NCSBN	National Council of State Boards of Nursing	The professional council for nursing regulation that oversees the NCLEX and NLC.
RN	Registered Nurse	A nurse who has a license to practice full nursing care, defined by the nurse practice act in the state where they are licensed.
SC BON	South Carolina Board of Nursing	The regulating agency for nursing licensure and practice in SC.

Appendix B

List of Pre-licensure RN Programs Responding to the Survey in 2024

Program Name	Program Type	City	State
Aiken Technical College	RN - Associate's	Graniteville	SC
Anderson University	RN - Bachelor's	Anderson	SC
Arizona College of Nursing	RN - Bachelor's	Greenville	SC
Bob Jones University	RN - Bachelor's	Greenville	SC
Central Carolina Technical College	RN - Associate's	Sumter	SC
Charleston Southern University	RN - Bachelor's	Charleston	SC
Clemson University	RN - Bachelor's	Clemson	SC
Coker University	RN - Bachelor's	Hartsville	SC
Columbia International University	RN - Bachelor's	Columbia	SC
ECPI University	RN - Associate's	Columbia	SC
ECPI University	RN - Associate's	Greenville	SC
ECPI University	RN - Associate's	North Charleston	SC
ECPI University	RN - Bachelor's	North Charleston	SC
Florence-Darlington Technical College	RN - Associate's	Florence	SC
Fortis College	RN - Associate's	Columbia	SC
Francis Marion University	RN - Bachelor's	Florence	SC
Galen College of Nursing	RN - Associate's	Myrtle Beach	SC
Galen College of Nursing	RN - Bachelor's	Myrtle Beach	SC
Greenville Technical College	RN - Associate's	Greenville	SC
Horry Georgetown Technical College	RN - Associate's	Myrtle Beach	SC
Lander University	RN - Bachelor's	Greenwood	SC
Medical University of South Carolina	RN - Bachelor's	Charleston	SC
Midlands Technical College	RN - Associate's	West Columbia	SC
Newberry College	RN - Bachelor's	Newberry	SC
Northeastern Technical College	RN - Associate's	Cheraw	SC
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	RN - Associate's	Orangeburg	SC
Piedmont Technical College	RN - Associate's	Greenwood	SC
South University	RN - Bachelor's	Columbia	SC
Technical College of the Lowcountry	RN - Associate's	Beaufort	SC
The Citadel	RN - Bachelor's	Charleston	SC
Tri-County Technical College	RN - Associate's	Pendleton	SC
Trident Technical College	RN - Associate's	Charleston	SC
University of South Carolina	RN - Bachelor's	Columbia	SC
University of South Carolina	RN - Master's Entry	Columbia	SC
University of South Carolina Aiken	RN - Bachelor's	Aiken	SC
University of South Carolina Beaufort	RN - Bachelor's	Bluffton	SC
University of South Carolina Upstate	RN - Bachelor's	Spartanburg	SC
Williamsburg Technical College	RN - Associate's	Kingstree	SC
York Technical College	RN - Associate's	Rock Hill	SC

SCOHW is a division of South Carolina AHEC



www.scahec.net/scohw