

New Jersey's Educational Capacity: RN-Producing Schools
New Jersey Collaborating Center for Nursing
February 2004

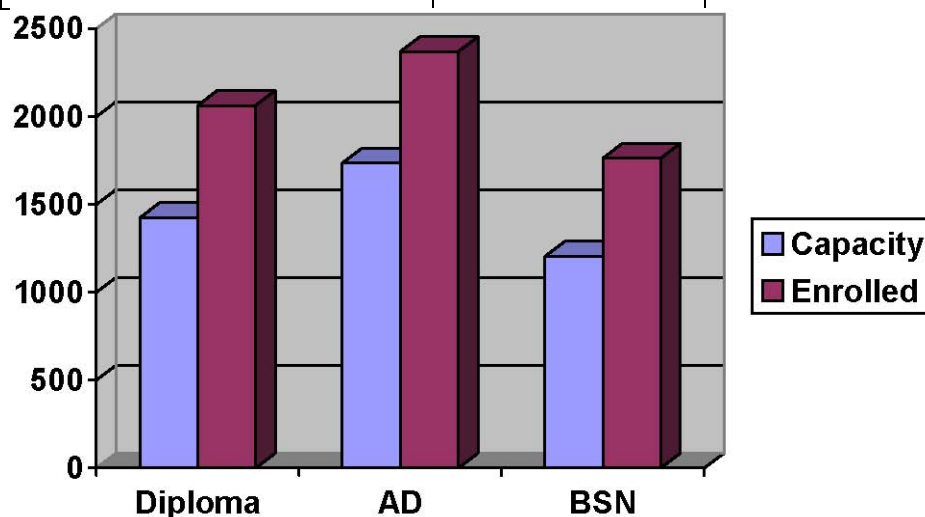
Evidence of a severe nursing shortage has grown in the past few years. Since 1994, New Jersey has seen a steady decline of its entry-level nursing graduates. Many organizations implemented nursing student recruitment campaigns and nursing schools began to report an increased interest by students. To determine the educational capacity of New Jersey entry-level RN schools, the Center conducted a survey of the schools' ability to increase their enrollments.

The findings are reported here by type of entry-level RN school: Diploma (hospital), Associate Degree (Community College), and generic Baccalaureate Degree (4-year Colleges and Universities), all of whom are identified as RN-producing because they add new RNs to the existing State supply of RNs. Two major findings regarding educational capacity are: (1) 1,621 qualified New Jersey RN students were denied admission to nursing schools in the fall of 2003, and (2) most schools lack financial resources to add faculty positions to increase their capacity.

I. Enrollment Vs. Capacity: Academic Year 2003 – 2004

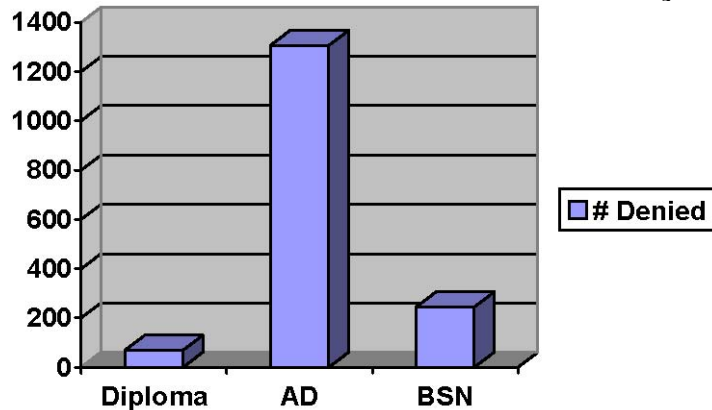
Each school was asked to report the total number of students they can educate, i. e., their capacity. Forty-five percent of Diploma, 36% of Associate Degree, and 45% of baccalaureate programs indicated that they exceeded their total enrollment capacity.

	Reported Capacity	Reported Enrollment	% Over Capacity
Diploma Programs (n = 11)	1,425	2,063	45%
Associate Degree Programs (n = 13)	1,736	2,370	36%
BSN (generic) Programs (n = 9)	1,205	1,763	46%
Grand Total (N = 33)	4,366	6,196	42%



II. Number of Qualified Students Denied Admission (by Program Type)

Although a total of 79% of all RN-producing schools of nursing in the State increased enrollments in 2003 compared to 2002, a total of 60% of all RN-producing schools in New Jersey reported denying admission to qualified applicants because of capacity limitations. This resulted in a total of 1,621 qualified student applicants to New Jersey nursing schools for fall 2003 who were denied admission primarily because the schools lacked financial resources to hire the necessary number of nursing faculty.

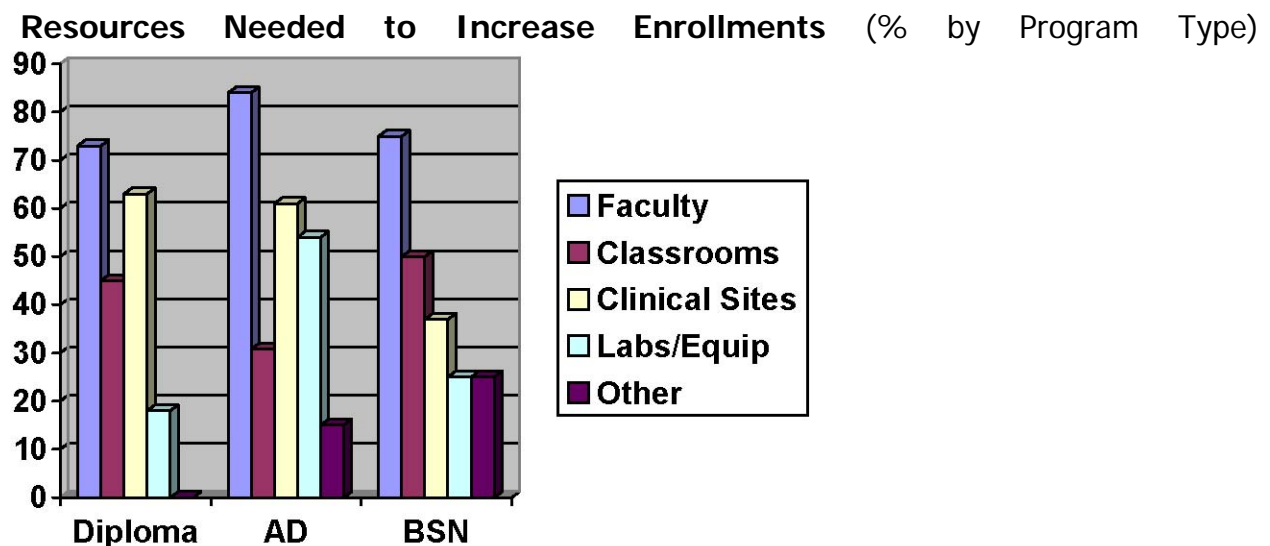


Percentage of Schools That Denied Admission (by Program Type)

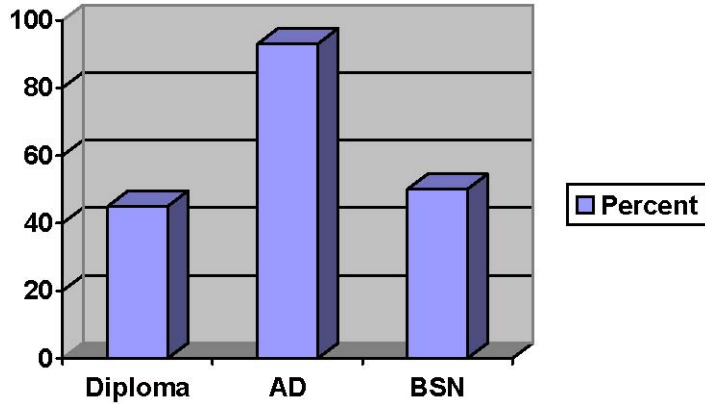
III. Financial Resources Lacking to Hire Needed Faculty

Because of the mandated accreditation requirements of a 1:10 ratio of faculty to students in the clinical courses, nursing programs are more expensive to run than other majors, such as business, education, and/or liberal arts. When asked what prevented them from increasing their enrollments, the overwhelming majority of schools reported that the lack of funding for additional faculty positions prevented them from expanding their capacity to educate students (See RN-Enhancing Schools Report).

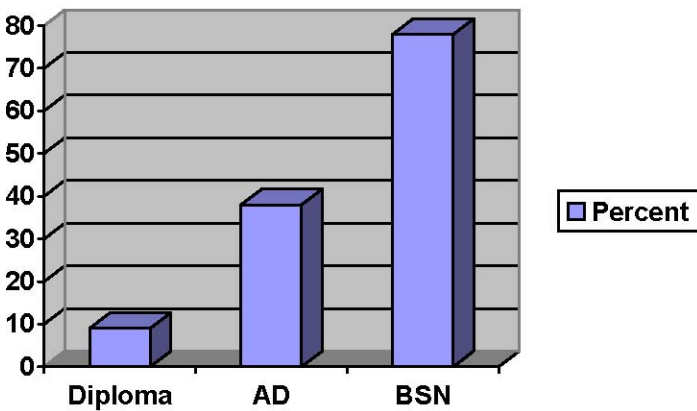
The following chart summarizes the percentages that were lacking resources from each type of school that would enable them to increase enrollments. In addition to faculty lines, several other categories of additional resources were reported as playing a role in each school's ability to enroll greater numbers of students.



IV. Budget Cuts in 2003 – Trying to Do More With Less

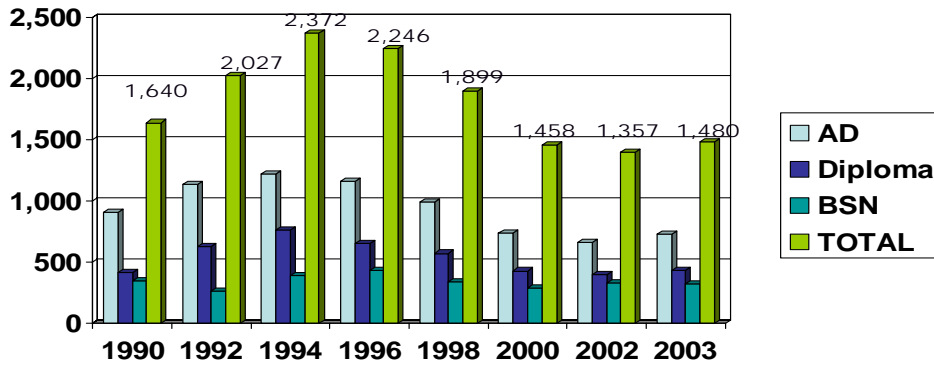


Despite the ongoing need to increase nursing student enrollments in response to a statewide shortage of nurses, a total of 42% of all RN-producing schools of nursing in New Jersey reported experiencing budget cuts for academic year 2003. Figure IV shows the percentage of schools reporting budget cuts in 2003 by program type. Without budget increases in 2004 to secure additional needed resources, many schools of nursing in New Jersey will not be able to increase enrollments over current levels, and it is anticipated that large numbers of qualified applicants to schools of nursing will continue to be denied admission.



V. The Good News: Entry-Level RN Graduates on the Upswing

The number of entry-level nursing graduates in 2003 totaled 1,480; a modest 7% increase compared to 2002. The number of graduates in 2003 remains below that of entry-level nurse graduates in 1994, the peak of graduates (see the following table). It should be noted, however, that an increase in nursing student enrollments alone, albeit necessary, will not be sufficient to resolve the deficit between nurse demand and supply; issues related to retaining nurses and the nursing work environment also must be addressed. Increased student enrollments, however, will make an important contribution to closing the supply gap.



VI. Conclusion

The gap between nurse demand and supply is projected to create a nursing shortage of crisis proportions. Today, health care facilities in New Jersey are reporting vacancy rates of 14% of RN positions unfilled and by 2020 the RN vacancy rate in the State is projected to result in 24,000 unfilled positions or a 30% vacancy of the RN workforce. Such a significant shortage of nurses will have serious consequences for patients, particularly in light of recent research linking fewer RNs per patient with higher rates of in-patient mortality¹. Recruitment efforts to increase nursing school enrollments will remain fruitless if State schools of nursing lack the capacity to increase enrollments. It is time for the State to invest in nursing by increasing financial support to nursing schools in order for them to increase their educational capacity, which in turn will assist in stemming the shortage in the supply of nurses and avert a major public health crises.

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