



Brief Report

Expanding Maryland's Nursing Workforce Capacity Through an Accelerated Associate of Science Degree Nursing Program: Outcomes of A Three-Year Implementation Project

Nancy Norman-Marzella^{1*}, Catherine Jordan²

¹Dean of Health and Human Sciences, Cecil College, USA

²Accelerated Program Director at Cecil College, USA

*Corresponding author: Nancy Norman-Marzella, Dean of Health and Human Sciences, Cecil College, USA

Citation: Norman-Marzella N and Jordan C (2026) Expanding Maryland's Nursing Workforce Capacity Through an Accelerated Associate of Science Degree Nursing Program: Outcomes of A Three-Year Implementation Project. Int J Nurs Health Care Res 9:1723. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29011/2688-9501.101723>

Received Date: 24 August 2026; **Accepted Date:** 02 September 2026; **Published Date:** 07 September, 2026

Abstract

The nursing workforce shortage continues to challenge healthcare systems throughout Maryland and the United States. To address this need, Cecil College implemented an Accelerated Associate of Science Degree Nursing (ASN) Program designed for second-degree students and individuals who had previously completed the prerequisite requirements for nursing education. The initiative aligned with the goals of the Maryland Nursing Support Program II (NSPII) by increasing pre-licensure nursing enrollment, graduation, and workforce participation. Over a three-year implementation period, the program expanded educational capacity, enrolled multiple cohorts of accelerated nursing students, and produced 35 additional nursing graduates. Graduates completed the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and entered the nursing workforce throughout Maryland and the surrounding region. Program outcomes demonstrated that an accelerated associate degree pathway can effectively increase nursing workforce capacity while maintaining academic quality, accreditation standards, and student success outcomes. The project established a sustainable framework for continued enrollment growth and academic progression into RN-to-BSN and graduate nursing programs.

Keywords: Accelerated nursing education; Nursing workforce development; Associate degree nursing; Nursing shortage; Maryland Nursing Support Program II; Nursing program evaluation

Introduction

Nursing workforce shortages have remained a significant concern for healthcare organizations throughout Maryland (SB 440/Ch. 708 (2022) – 2023 Final Report) [1,2]. Hospitals and healthcare

systems have experienced increasing challenges related to nurse recruitment, retention, and workforce sustainability. These shortages have been intensified by an aging nursing workforce, increasing healthcare demands, and growing patient complexity. Educational institutions have therefore played a critical role in developing innovative pathways that increase the number of qualified registered nurses entering clinical practice.

In response to these workforce challenges, Cecil College

implemented an Accelerated Associate of Science Degree Nursing Program designed to provide an expedited pathway to registered nurse licensure for second-degree students and academically advanced applicants. Before implementation, students who possessed bachelor's degrees or substantial prior college coursework only had the option to complete the traditional two-year Associate of Science Degree Nursing curriculum despite having already satisfied prerequisite requirements. The accelerated pathway was developed to reduce time-to-completion, increase program capacity, and provide a cost-effective educational alternative for individuals seeking entry into professional nursing practice.

Supported through the Maryland Nursing Support Program II, the initiative sought to increase the number of pre-licensure nursing graduates entering Maryland's healthcare workforce and create additional opportunities for qualified applicants seeking admission into nursing education programs.

Background and Significance

Nursing Workforce Shortages in Maryland

Maryland healthcare organizations have continued to experience workforce shortages that affect patient care delivery, staff retention, and organizational performance (Maryland Department of Health, 2023). The need for qualified registered nurses has increased due to demographic changes, the prevalence of chronic disease, and workforce attrition. Expanding nursing education capacity has therefore become a strategic priority for healthcare systems and academic institutions alike.

Accelerated Nursing Education as a Workforce Strategy

Accelerated nursing programs have emerged as an effective strategy for addressing workforce shortages by providing academically prepared students with an expedited pathway into professional nursing practice. Research has demonstrated that second-degree students frequently possess strong academic skills, prior professional experiences, and high levels of motivation that support success in accelerated learning environments (Davis et al., 2025). These characteristics make accelerated pathways particularly effective for increasing workforce production while maintaining educational quality.

Program Implementation

Program Development

The Accelerated Associate of Science Degree Nursing Program was implemented as Maryland's first accelerated Associate Degree Nursing pathway through the support of a Nurse Support Program II (NSP II) 3-year grant. The program was specifically designed for students who had previously completed a bachelor's degree

or substantial college coursework and who had already satisfied prerequisite requirements.

The accelerated curriculum mirrored the existing fully accredited Associate of Science Degree Nursing curriculum and included all required nursing courses, laboratory experiences, simulation activities, and clinical education requirements. Students completed the nursing curriculum in an intensive 13-month format while meeting all requirements established by the Maryland Board of Nursing and the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN).

Student Eligibility and Admission Criteria

Eligible students entered the program with completed prerequisite coursework and demonstrated academic readiness for accelerated study. Admission requirements remained consistent with those of the traditional nursing program while recognizing prior academic achievement and degree completion.

Faculty Recruitment and Resource Allocation

During program implementation, the program recruited additional faculty and clinical staff to support increased student enrollment and to maintain the quality of instruction. Faculty resources were expanded throughout the implementation period to meet the growing demand for classroom teaching and clinical supervision.

Clinical Partnerships and Academic Support

Established partnerships with healthcare organizations provided students with clinical placement opportunities and diverse experiential learning experiences. As enrollment increased, additional weekend clinical placements were added to expand clinical capacity and ensure students completed required practice experiences. Throughout the accelerated curriculum, students received comprehensive academic support, including academic advising, tutoring, simulation-based learning, and faculty mentoring, all of which contributed to student success.

Workforce Outcomes

Enrollment and Capacity Expansion

The program was implemented using a phased growth model over the three-year project period. During Year 1, the accelerated program recruited and enrolled eight students. Enrollment increased to 12 students in Year 2 as faculty resources and program infrastructure expanded. By Year 3, enrollment reached 27 students, supported by additional faculty, enhanced program infrastructure, and expanded clinical placement capacity.

Graduate Outcomes

Cecil College's traditional Associate of Science Degree Nursing

Program historically graduates approximately 35 to 55 students annually. The addition of the accelerated pathway significantly increased the number of pre-licensure nursing graduates entering Maryland's healthcare workforce without reducing enrollment opportunities within the traditional nursing program.

Over the three-year implementation period, the program produced 35 additional nursing graduates. Graduates from the first two cohorts completed the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) with a 100% first-time pass rate and secured employment as registered nurses within Maryland hospitals and regional healthcare organizations. The program's retention rate for students was 74-75% for the first 3 years of the program.

NCLEX-RN Success and Workforce Placement

The accelerated curriculum maintained the same educational standards and learning outcomes as the traditional nursing program. Graduates demonstrated successful licensure outcomes and transitioned into professional nursing practice throughout Maryland and neighboring healthcare systems.

Academic Progression Outcomes

Program graduates were provided opportunities to continue their education through established articulation agreements supporting progression into RN-to-BSN, RN-to-MSN, and graduate nursing programs. These pathways promoted lifelong learning and the development of a highly educated nursing workforce.

Program Evaluation Outcomes

Evaluation Framework

Program effectiveness is consistent with the method for evaluating the traditional ASN program including the retention rates, graduation rates, NCLEX-RN success, employment outcomes, and progression to higher levels of nursing education.

Student Success Measures

Faculty evaluations, student evaluations, course reviews, retention rates, and clinical assessments were conducted annually to identify strengths, opportunities for improvement, and program effectiveness.

Stakeholder Engagement and Communities of Interest

Program outcomes and student learning outcomes were shared annually with communities of interest, including Advisory Council members, alumni, students, clinical partners, employers, Cecil College administration, the Maryland Board of Nursing (MBON), Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), and the Cecil College Board of Trustees.

The expected level of achievement was achieved by actively engaging all identified stakeholder groups in program evaluation and decision-making. Stakeholders participated through annual meetings, program outcome reviews, and formal reporting processes, ensuring ongoing input into program improvement.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Stakeholder feedback informed curriculum review, clinical experiences, policy revisions, and strategic planning activities. This collaborative evaluation process supported ongoing quality improvement and ensured continued alignment with workforce and educational needs.

Outcomes and Sustainability

Enrollment and Capacity Expansion

The program successfully expanded nursing education capacity while maintaining compliance with accreditation standards and preserving educational quality. Enrollment growth occurred gradually throughout the implementation period and established a sustainable framework for continued workforce development.

Outcome Data Timeline

Program Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Student Recruitment	May–August 2023	September 2023–March 2024	September 2024–March 2025
Student Enrollment	8 Students	12 Students	27 Students
Full-Time Faculty	1.5 FTE	2.0 FTE	2.0 FTE
Adjunct Clinical Faculty	As Required	Expanded Capacity	Expanded Capacity
Program Retention Rate	0.75	0.75	0.741
Length of Program	13 Months	13 Months	13 Months

Graduate Outcomes

Annual Outcome	Projected Increase in Graduates	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	Total Additional Graduates
Nursing Pre-Licensure Graduates	40	6	9	20	35

The program generated 35 additional nursing graduates during the initial three-year funding period. Graduates from the first two cohorts completed the NCLEX-RN examination with a 100% pass rate and entered the nursing workforce throughout Maryland and regional healthcare agencies.

Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Program growth remained within ACEN standards regarding enrollment expansion. The accelerated curriculum maintained the same academic standards, student learning outcomes, and clinical requirements as the traditional nursing program while preserving program quality and regulatory compliance.

Long-Term Sustainability

The accelerated pathway established a sustainable model for increasing nursing workforce capacity by integrating the program into the existing infrastructure and operations of the nursing department. Existing faculty expertise, curriculum resources, clinical partnerships, simulation facilities, advising processes, and student support services were leveraged and expanded to support the accelerated cohort while maintaining the quality, rigor, and accreditation standards of the nursing program. By aligning resources across both the accelerated and traditional pathways, the program was able to increase enrollment capacity efficiently while maximizing institutional resources.

The success of the accelerated pathway was further supported through established partnerships with clinical agencies, which provided reliable access to high-quality clinical learning experiences and expanded opportunities for students to develop essential nursing competencies. Coordinated academic advising and student support services helped promote student retention,

progression, and successful completion of the program. Because the accelerated pathway serves qualified applicants who already hold a bachelor’s degree, it created an additional entry point into nursing education without reducing opportunities available to traditional nursing students. This model increased the overall number of students prepared for entry into the nursing profession while strengthening the use of existing faculty, clinical resources, and academic infrastructure.

Cecil College has successfully sustained the growth of the accelerated program, which is now in its fourth year of operation and continues without grant funding. The program currently enrolls 30 students and has become an established component of the nursing program’s long-term enrollment strategy. Continued operation of the accelerated pathway will support the institution’s commitment to expanding pre-licensure nursing education and addressing the ongoing demand for qualified nurses throughout Maryland.

Discussion

Impact on Maryland’s Nursing Workforce

The accelerated nursing pathway contributed directly to Maryland’s workforce development goals by increasing the number of licensed nurses entering practice and strengthening the healthcare workforce pipeline.

Cost-Effectiveness of the Accelerated ASN Model

The program provided an affordable alternative to accelerated bachelor’s degree nursing programs while producing comparable workforce outcomes and creating opportunities for academic progression.

Implications for Community College Nursing Education

The successful implementation of the accelerated ASN model demonstrated that community colleges can play a significant role in addressing workforce shortages through innovative educational pathways.

Lessons Learned

Key lessons included the importance of strong clinical partnerships, dedicated faculty support, stakeholder engagement, and continuous program evaluation in supporting successful implementation and sustainability.

Limitations

Limitations included relatively small cohort sizes during the initial implementation period and challenges associated with faculty recruitment and clinical placement availability. Future evaluations should examine long-term workforce retention, career advancement, and the model's replication across additional institutions.

Conclusion and Implications for Nursing Workforce Development

The implementation of the Accelerated Associate of Science Degree Nursing Program demonstrated that a community college-based accelerated pathway can effectively address nursing workforce shortages while maintaining academic rigor, accreditation standards, and positive student outcomes. Over the three-year implementation period, the program produced 35 additional nursing graduates, increased educational capacity, and

contributed directly to Maryland's healthcare workforce needs.

The program established a sustainable model for expanding nursing education opportunities for second-degree students while simultaneously creating additional capacity within the traditional nursing program. Graduates successfully transitioned into professional nursing practice and continued to pursue academic progression opportunities through RN-to-BSN and graduate nursing education pathways.

These findings support accelerated associate degree nursing education as an innovative, affordable, and scalable workforce development strategy. The outcomes of this project provide evidence that community colleges can play a critical role in addressing nursing shortages and meeting future healthcare workforce demands throughout Maryland and beyond.

Funding

This project was partially funded by the Nurse Support Program II (NSPII) of the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

References

1. About Nurse Support Program II (NSP II) (2026). The Maryland Nurse Support Program.
2. Davis, A. H., Manning, J., Tartavouille, T., Harrell, A., Brennan, K., Pigg, M., & Ramos, M. D. (2025). Predictors of success among accelerated bachelor of science in nursing students: A retrospective study. *Nurse Education Today*, 155, 106882.
3. Maryland Department of Health (2023). SB 440/Ch. 708 (2022) – 2023 Final Report – Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis.