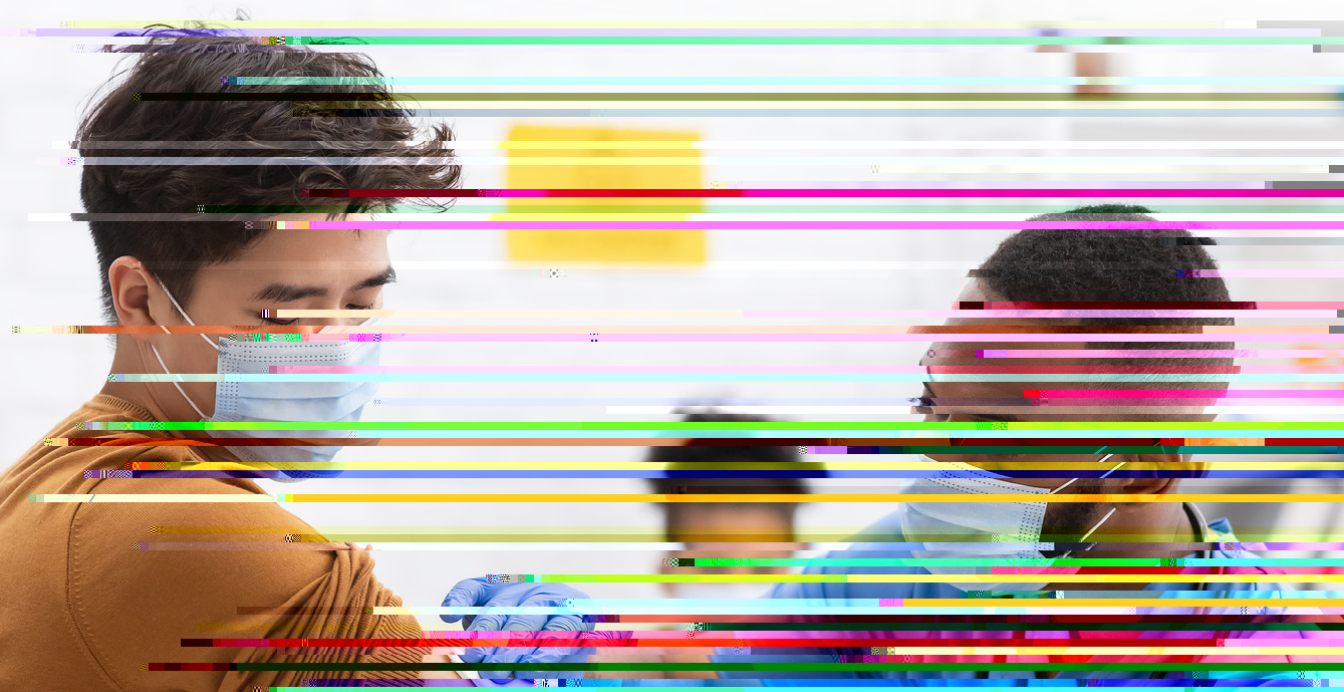


RESEARCH BRIEF  
Volume 80 | June 6.RES1





# 2020 NCLEX<sup>®</sup> Examination Statistics

National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc. (NCSBN<sup>®</sup>)

## **Mission Statement**

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN®) provides education, service and research through collaborative leadership to promote evidence-based regulatory excellence for patient safety and public protection.

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## Introduction

In 1982, NCSBN substantially revised the State Board Test Pool Examination (SBTPE). NCSBN changed the examination from a norm-referenced test to a criterion-referenced test, implemented a new test plan and used Rasch's (1960) one parameter logistic model to calibrate items and measure candidates' abilities. At that time, NCSBN renamed the examinations the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN®) and the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN®). However, these NCLEX® examinations were very different than the NCLEX examinations taken by candidates today. These examinations were only administered twice a year in a pencil-and-paper format; each administration lasted two days.

In 1986, the NCSBN Board of Directors (BOD) funded an initial investigation on the feasibility of using computerized adaptive testing (CAT) procedures. CAT held the promise of making examinations available year round, shortening examination length by only giving candidates items that were appropriate for their ability and providing greater security for the content of the items. On April 1, 1994, NCSBN began administering the NCLEX-RN and NCLEX-PN Examinations exclusively via CAT. On Jan. 5, 2015, the first candidates were able to take the NCLEX-RN examination for purposes of licensure/registration in Canada. This publication provides a detailed breakdown of candidate performance for 2020, as well as historical data.

## Computerized Adaptive Testing


CAT is a method of administering examinations that combines the power and speed of current computer technology with modern measurement theory. With CAT, each candidate's test is unique; it is assembled interactively as the individual is tested. As the candidate answers each question, the computer calculates an ability estimate based on all earlier answers. The test administration software then identifies the content area for the next item. Next, the software scans through available items within the identified content area for an item that has a degree of difficulty sufficient to give the candidate approximately a 50% chance of answering it correctly. This item is selected and presented to the candidate on the computer screen. This process is

repeated for each item, creating an examination tailored to the individual's ability level, while fulfilling all NCLEX test plan requirements. The examination continues in this way until a pass-fail decision can be determined. Because the examination could end at any time after the minimum number of items has been answered, it is important that the test plan specifications are met throughout the entire test.

## Setting the Passing Standard

To ensure a consistent standard of competence in nursing practice, NCSBN uses a criterion-referenced standard, which means that passing or failing depends solely upon a candidate's level of performance in relation to the established point that represents safe entry-level competence. There is no preassigned percentage of candidates that pass or fail each examination. Because the practice of nursing changes over time, it is necessary to reevaluate the appropriateness of the passing standard from time to time. To ensure that the passing standards for the NCLEX-RN and NCLEX-PN examinations accurately reflect the knowledge, skills and abilities essential for entry-level nurse practice, NCSBN's BOD reevaluates the passing standard every three years or when the test plan changes. In evaluating the passing standard, the BOD considers information from a variety of sources. Although there is no limit on the information it may consider, the BOD is typically presented with the following information:

1. The results of a standard-setting exercise undertaken by the panel of judges. Currently, this exercise consists of a modified Angoff procedure with additional statistical compromise procedures. A list of the members on the panel of judges and their qualifications is also included.
2. A historical record of the passing standard and annual summaries of candidate performance on the NCLEX examination since the implementation of the CAT methodology in 1994.
3. The results from the annual standard-setting survey, which solicits the opinions of employers and educators regarding the competence of the current cohort of entry-level nurses.

- 
4. Information detailing the educational readiness of high school graduates who expressed an interest in nursing.

Candidates clearly above the passing standard pass.  
Candidates clearly below the passing standard fail rOJO

In April 1998, the passing standard for the NCLEX-RN Examination increased from  $-0.42$  logits to  $-0.35$  logits. In April 2001, this standard was retained for another three years. In April 2004, the standard increased to  $-0.28$  logits. In April 2007, the standard increased again to  $-0.21$  logits. In April 2010, the standard increased to  $-0.16$  logits. In April 2013, the standard increased to  $0.00$  logits. In April 2016, this standard was retained for another three years. In April 2019, this standard was again retained for another three years.

The passing standard for the NCLEX-PN Examination has experienced a similar increase over time. In April 1999, the passing standard for the NCLEX-PN Examination increased from  $-0.51$  logits to  $-0.47$  logits. In April 2002, this standard was retained for another three years. In April 2005, the NCLEX-PN passing standard increased from  $-0.47$  to  $-0.42$  logits. In April 2008, the standard increased to  $-0.37$  logits. In April 2011, the standard increased to  $-0.27$  logits. In April 2014, the standard increased to  $-0.21$  logits. In April 2017, this standard was retained for another three years. On March 25, 2020, this standard increased to  $-0.18$  logits. It is important to note that the RN and PN standards are not directly comparable because they are based on different item pools and different scopes of practice.

### Pass-Fail Decisions

Candidate performance on the NCLEX examinations is reported only as a pass-fail decision. Scores are never reported. As a result, almost all the statistics presented here are pass rates or statistics based upon a pass-fail decision.

To make pass-fail decisions, the computer seeks to determine with 95% certainty whether the candidate's true ability is above or below the passing standard. To do this, three pieces of information must be known: the current person ability estimate, the precision of that estimate and the passing standard. After the minimum number of items has been answered, the computer compares the candidate's ability level to the standard required for passing.

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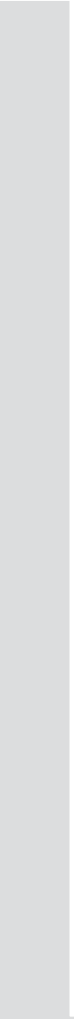
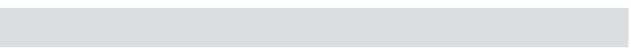


**Table 1. Candidates Taking the NCLEX-RN® for U.S. Licensure by Type of Candidate**

Type of Candidate	Jan. – March <sup>1</sup>			April – June <sup>2</sup>			July – Sept.			Oct. – Dec.			Total (2020)		
	Candidates	Passed	%	Candidates	Passed										







[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Table 5. First-Time, U.S.-Educated Candidates Taking the NCLEX-RN® for U.S. Licensure by Type of Degree (March 25 - June 30, 2020)<sup>1</sup>**

Jurisdiction	RN-Diploma			RN-Associate Degree			RN-Baccalaureate			Total March 25 – June 30, 2020		
	Candidates	Passed	%	Candidates	Passed	%	Candidates	Passed	%	Candidates	Passed	%
Northern Mariana Islands				1	1	100.0				1	1	100.0
Ohio	75	54	72.0	806	669	83.0	1173	1076	91.7	2,054	1,799	87.6
Oklahoma				378	330	87.3	373	341	91.4	751	671	89.3
Oregon				109	96	88.1	242	216	89.3	351	312	88.9
Pennsylvania	174	168	96.6	613	567	92.5	1141	1081	94.7	1,928	1,816	94.2
Rhode Island				88	73	83.0	67	65	97.0	155	138	89.0
South Carolina				489	434	88.8	507	476	93.9	996	910	91.4
South Dakota				14	13	92.9	298	279	93.6	312	292	93.6
Tennessee				277	252	91.0	529	504	95.3	806	756	93.8
Texas	64	56	87.5	2089	1875	89.8	2494	2369	95.0	4,647	4,300	92.5
Utah				554	494	89.2	325	305	93.8	879	799	90.9
Vermont				91	82	90.1	94	84	89.4	185	166	89.7
Virginia	2	2	100.0	477	413	86.6	476	444	93.3	955	859	89.9
Washington				359	337	93.9	166	155	93.4	525	492	93.7
West Virginia				268	249	92.9	134	124	92.5	402	373	92.8
Wisconsin				583	519	89.0	953	884	92.8	1,536	1,403	91.3
Wyoming				133	113	85.0	11	9	81.8	144	122	84.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>89.8</b>	<b>25,714</b>	<b>21,975</b>	<b>85.5</b>	<b>25,244</b>	<b>23,300</b>	<b>92.3</b>	<b>51,477</b>	<b>45,741</b>	<b>88.9</b>

<sup>1</sup> Exams with special Program Codes were excluded from this table.







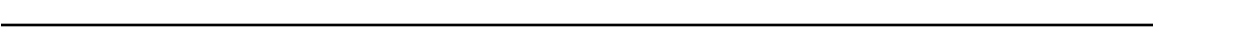
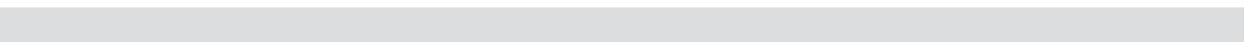
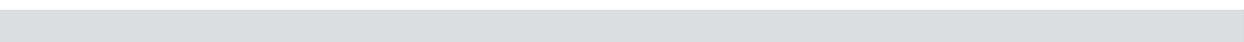
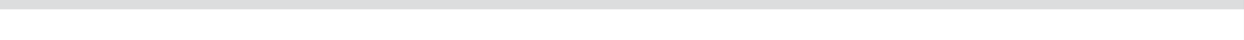
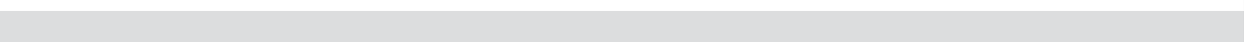
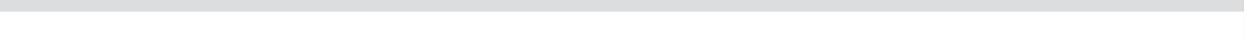
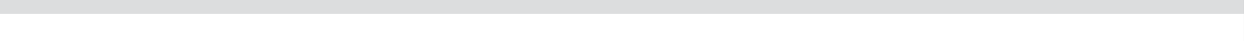
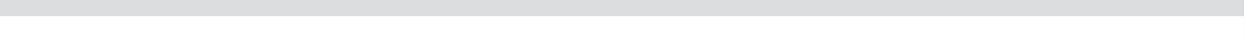
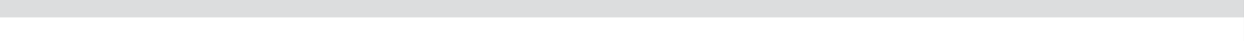
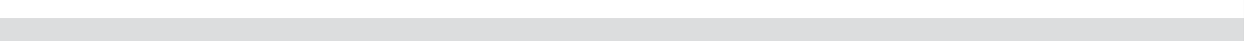
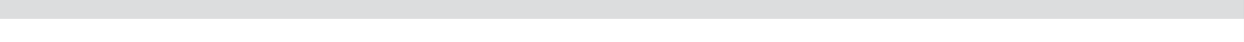
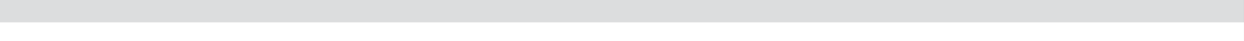
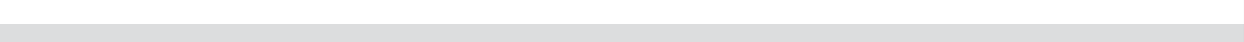
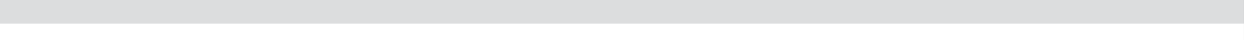
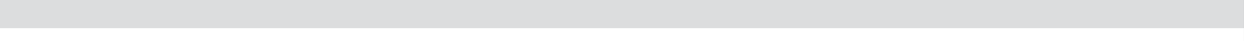
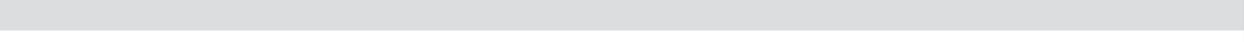
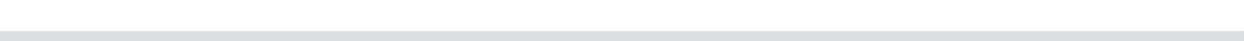
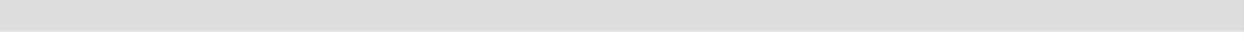
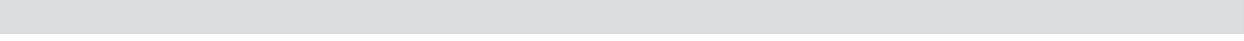
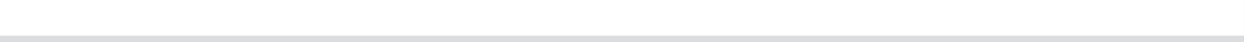
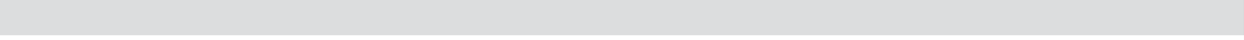
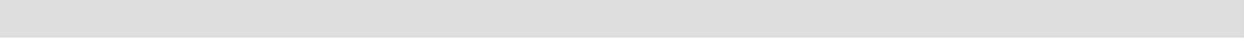
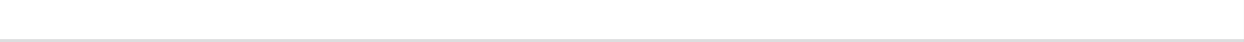
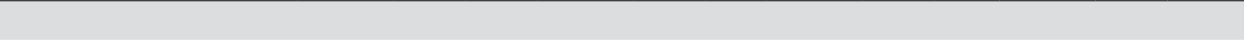


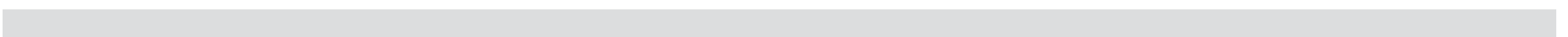
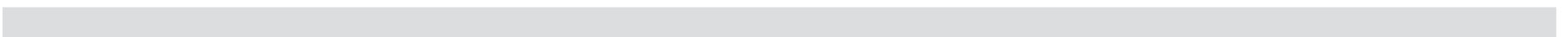
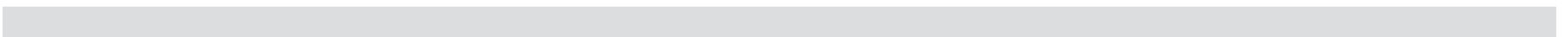
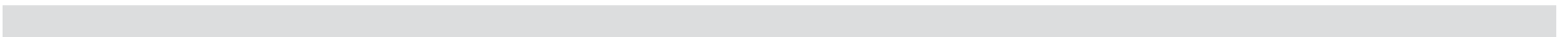
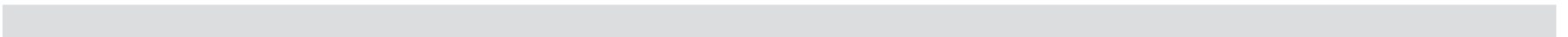
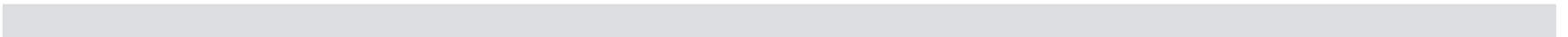
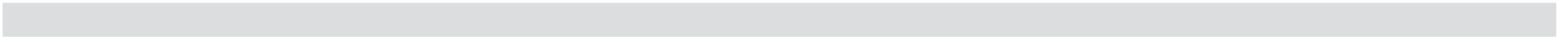
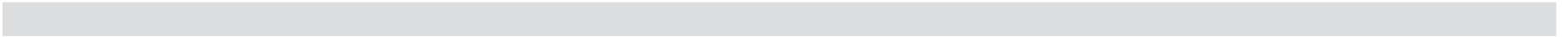
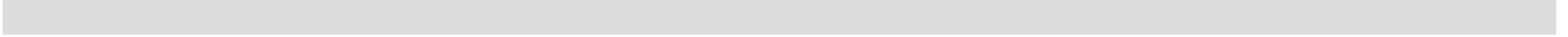








Table 8. First-Time, U.S.-Educated Candidates Taking the NCLEX-RN<sup>®</sup>











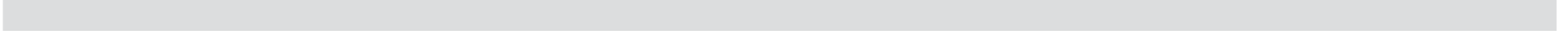
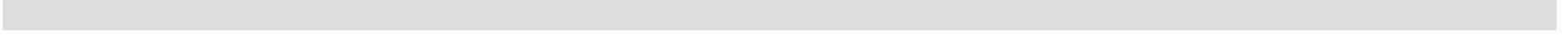
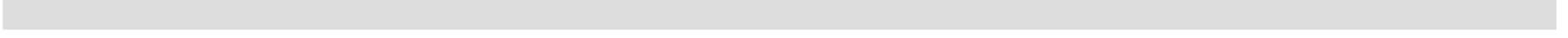
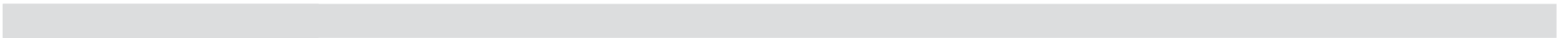
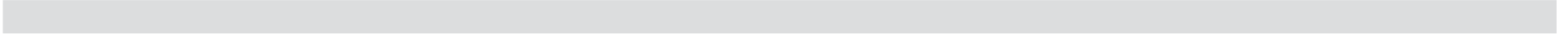


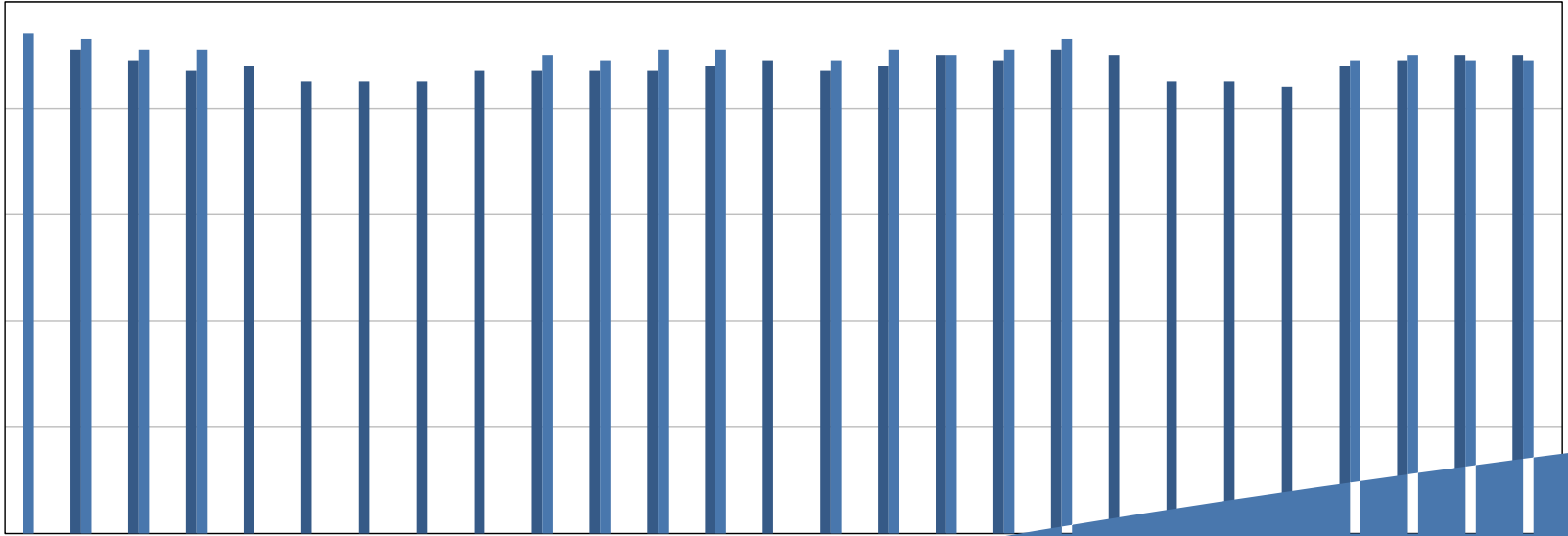








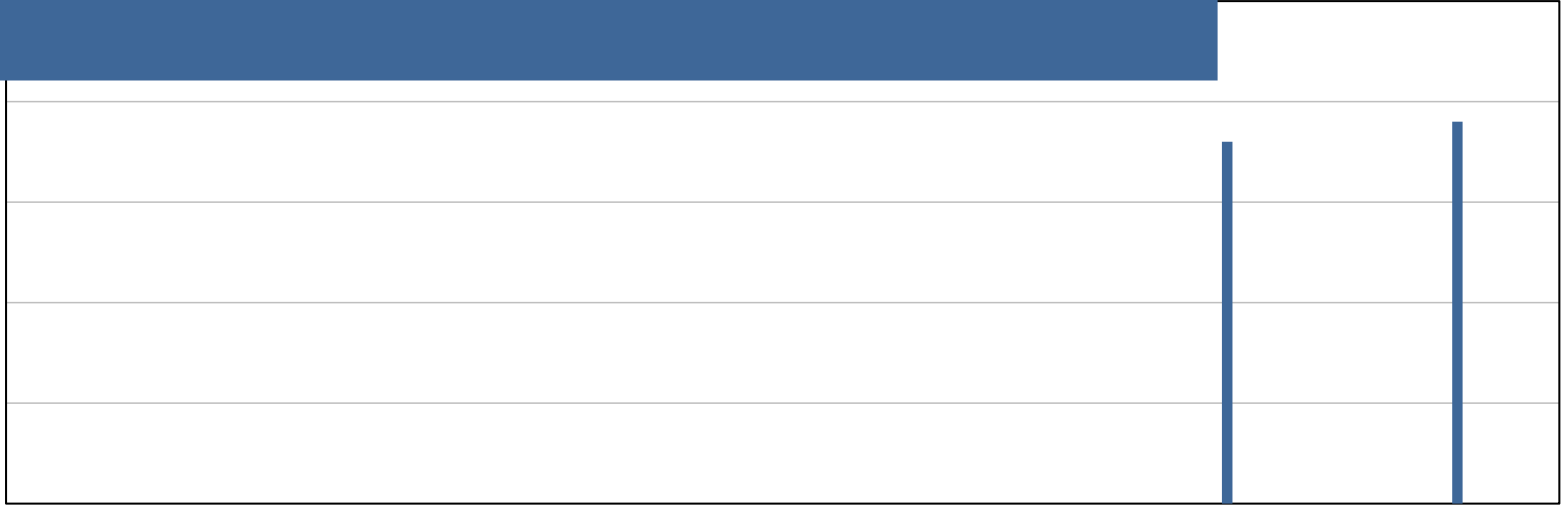
Figure 1. NCLEX-RN® Pass Rates for First-Time, U.S.-Educated Candidates for U.S. Licensure



\*April 1994 Comput

\*\*Oct. 1995

\*\*\*



\*April 1994 Computer Adaptive Test (CAT) begins. Passing Standard -0.4766 logits.

\*\*Oct. 1995 Passing Standard changed from -0.4766 to -0.42 logits.

\*\*\*April 1998 Passing Standard changed from -0.42 to -0.35 logits.

\*\*\*\*April 2004 Passing Standard changed from -0.35 to -0.28 logits.

\*\*\*\*\*April 2007 Passing Standard changed from -0.28 to -0.21 logits.

\*\*\*\*\*April 2010 Passing Standard changed from -0.21 to -0.16 logits.

\*\*\*\*\*April 2013 Passing Standard changed from -0.16 to 0.00 logits.

Due to COVID-19, 2020 Q1 data contain NCLEX examinations administered from Jan. 1 to March 24, 2020, and Q2 data contain NCLEX examinations administered from March 25 to June 30, 2020.



Figure 3. NCLEX-RN





Figure 4. NCLEX-RN® Pass Rates for First-Time, Canada-Educated Candidates for Canadian Licensure/Registration

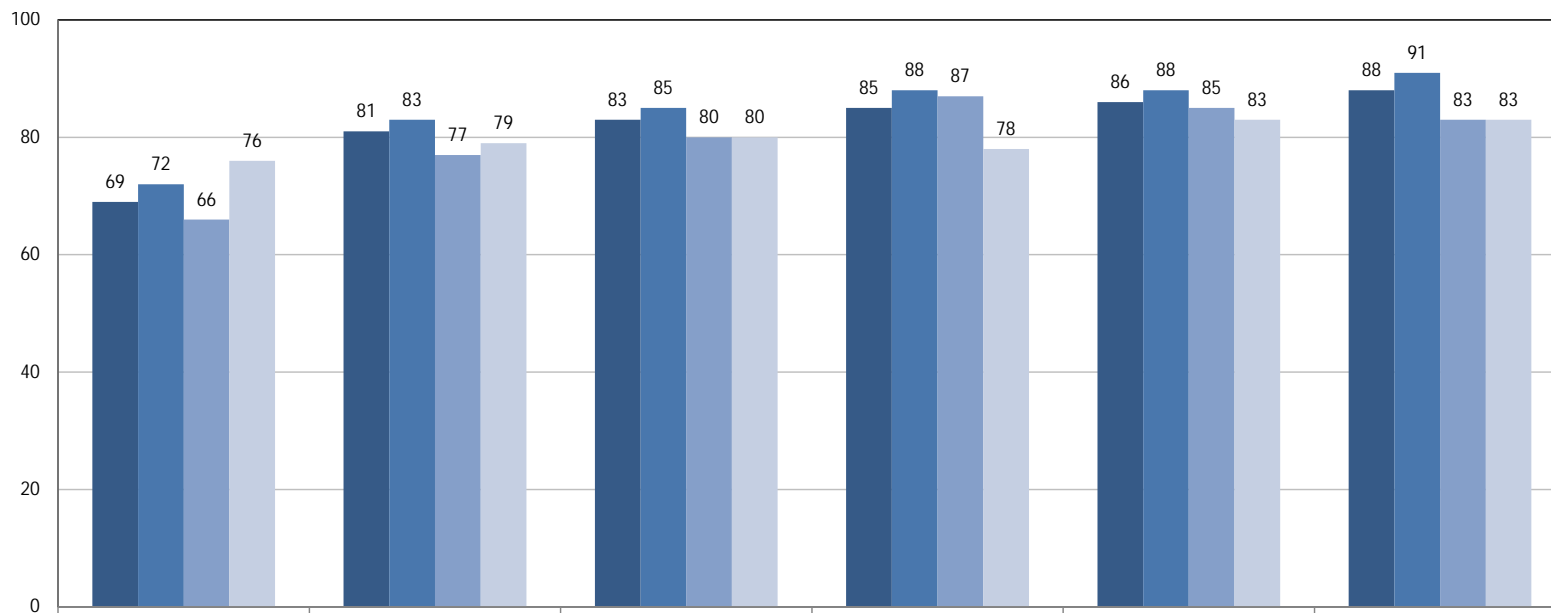


Figure 5. NCLEX-RN® Pass Rates for All Candidates for Canadian Licensure/Registration

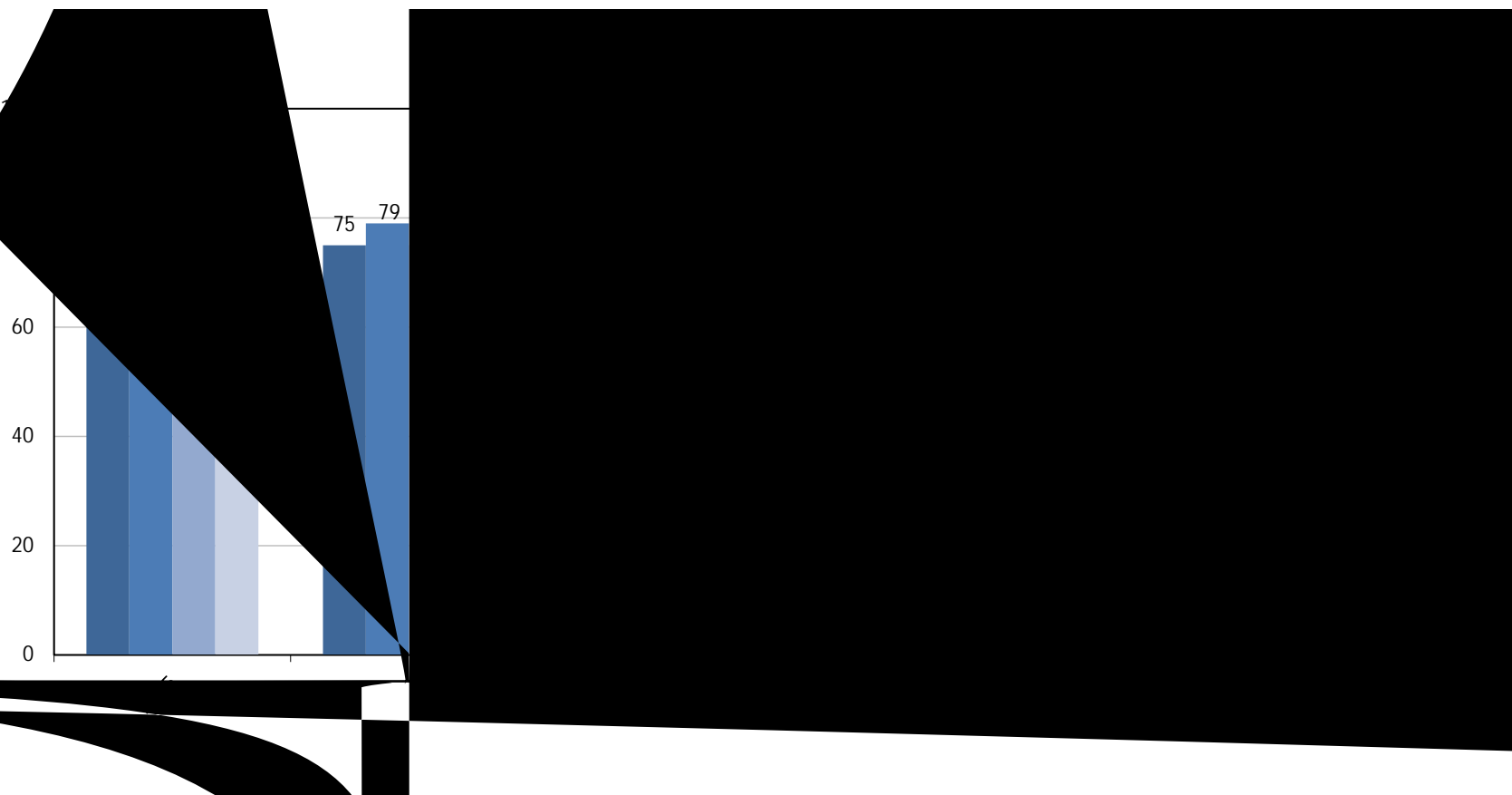


Figure 6. NCLEX-RN® Yearly Pass Rates for Canadian Licensure/Registration

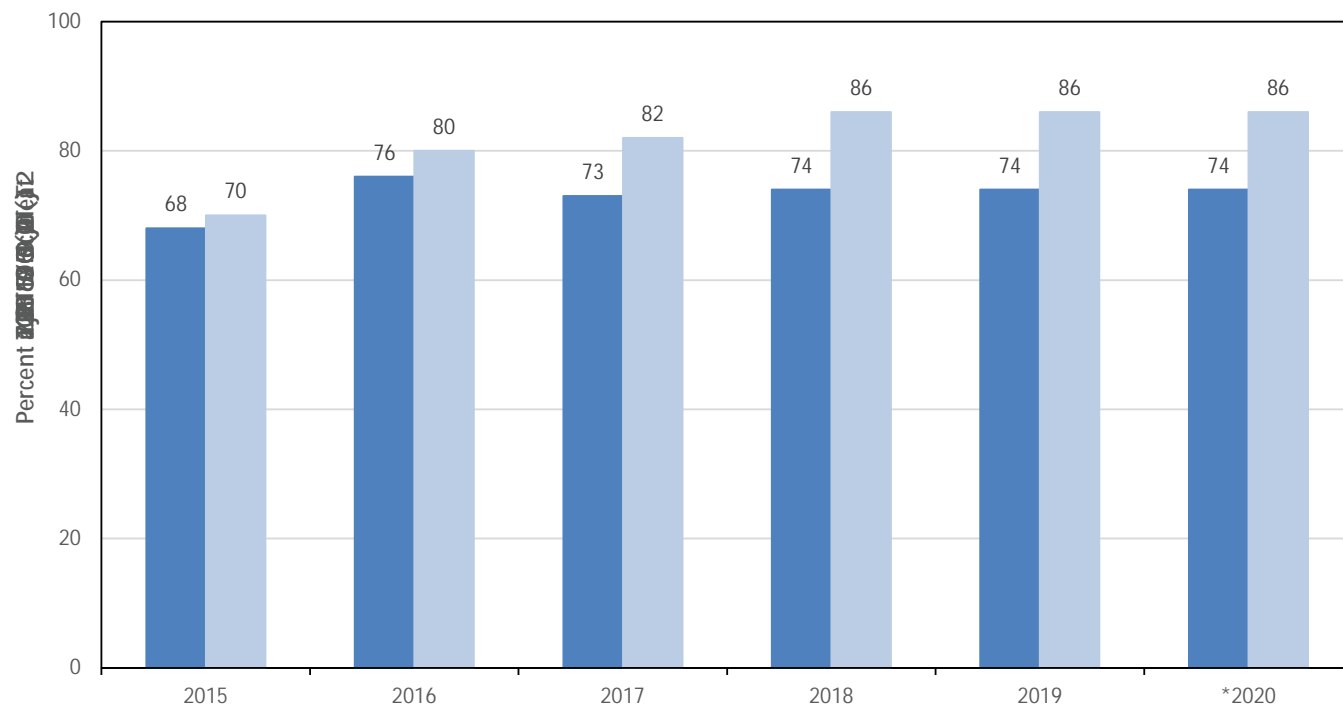












Figure 11. NCLEX-RN® Volume for All Candidates for Canadian Licensure/Registration

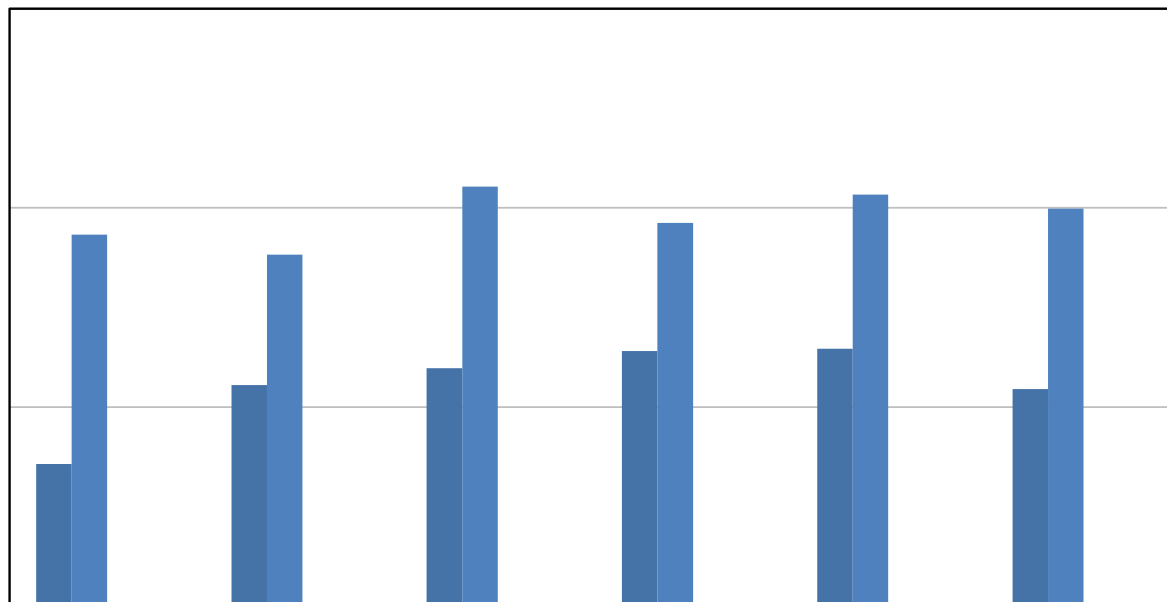




Figure 12. NCLEX-RN® Annual Volume for Canadian Licensure/Registration, January 2015 – December 2020

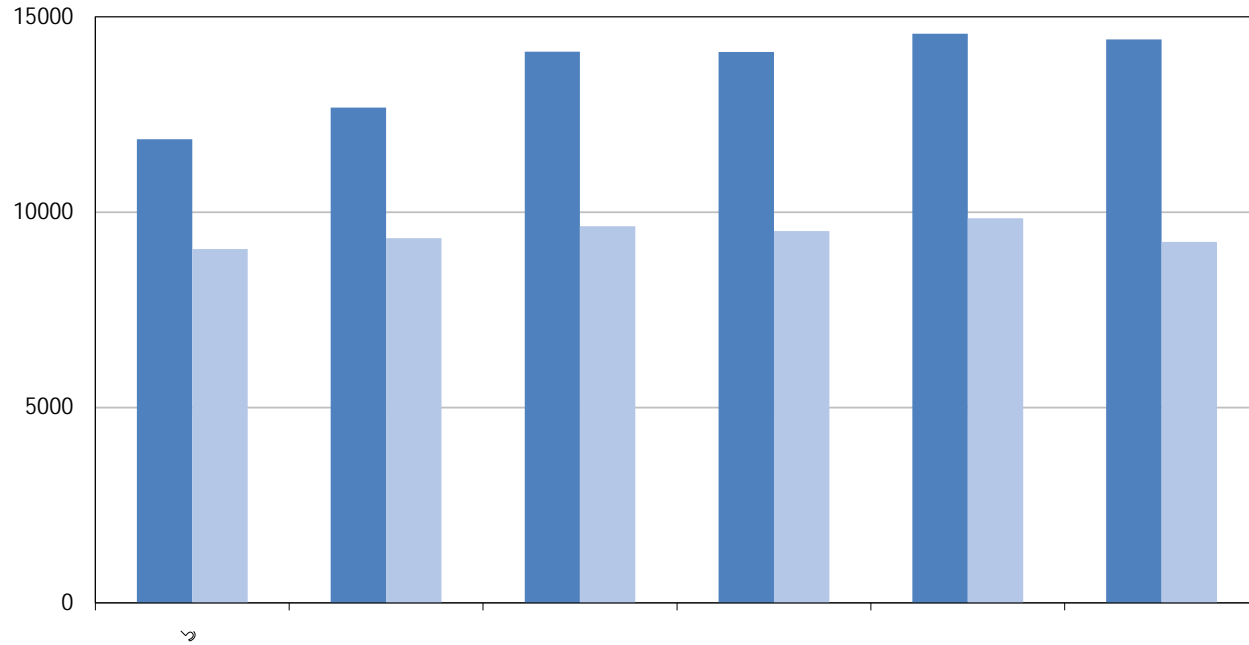
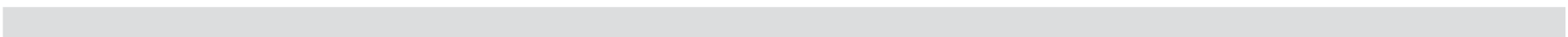
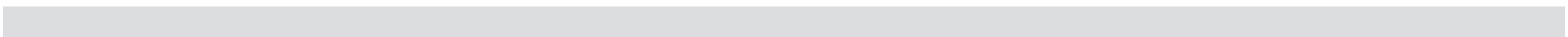
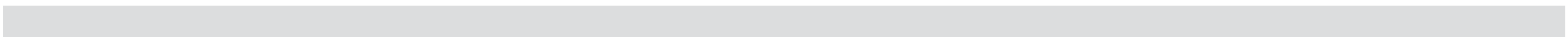
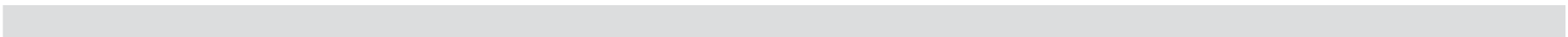
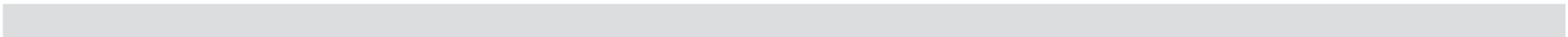
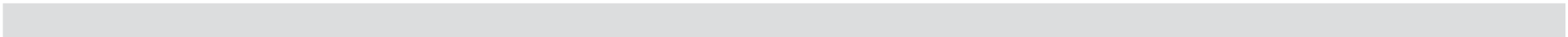
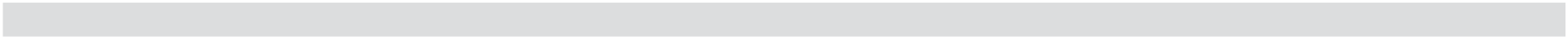
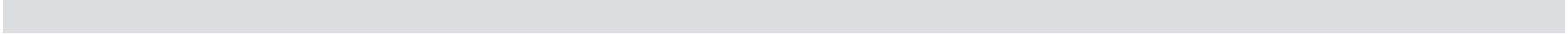




Table 12. Candidates Taking the NCLEX-PN® by Type of Candidate

Type of Candidate															











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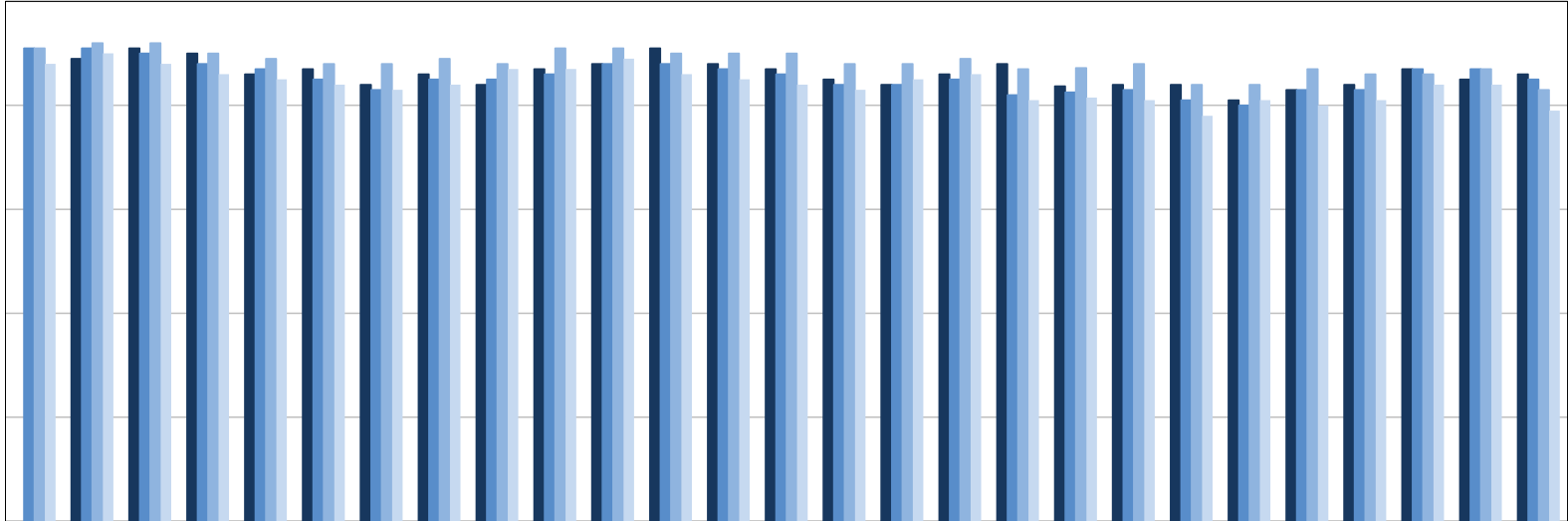
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Figure 13. NCLEX-PN® Pass Rates for First-Time, U.S.-Educated Candidates



\*April 1994 Computer Adaptive Test (CAT) begins. Passing Standard -0.56 logits.

\*\*Oct. 1996 Passing Standard changed from -0.56 to -0.51 logits.

\*\*\*April 1999 Passing Standard changed from -0.51 to -0.47 logits.

\*\*\*\*April 2005 Passing Standard changed from -0.47 to -0.42 logits.

\*\*\*\*\*April 2008 Passing Standard changed from -0.42 to -0.37 logits.

\*\*\*\*\*April 2011 Passing Standard changed from -0.37 to -0.27 logits.

\*\*\*\*\*April 2014 Passing Standard changed from -0.27 to -0.21 logits.

\*\*\*\*\*April 2020 Passing Standard changed from -0.21 to -0.18 logits.

Due to COVID-19, 2020 Q1 data contain NCLEX examinations administered from Jan. 1 to March 24, 2020, and Q2 data contain NCLEX examinations administered from March 25 to June 30, 2020.



Figure 14. NCLEX-PN® Pass Rates for All Candidates

\*April 1994 Computer Adaptive Test (CAT) begins. Passing Standard -0.56 logits.  
\*\*Oct. 1996 Passing Standard changed from -0.56 to -0.51 logits.  
\*\*\*April 1999 Passing Standard changed from -0.51 to -0.47 logits.  
\*\*\*\*April 2005 Passing Standard changed from -0.47 to -0.42 logits.  
\*\*\*\*\*April 2008 Passing Standard changed from -0.42 to -0.37 logits.  
\*\*\*\*\*April 2011 Passing Standard changed from -0.37 to -0.27 logits.  
\*\*\*\*\*April 2014 Passing Standard changed from -0.27 to -0.21 logits.  
\*\*\*\*\*April 2020 Passing Standard changed from -0.21 to -0.18 logits.

Due to COVID-19, 2020 Q1 data contain NCLEX examinations administered from Jan. 1 to March 24, 2020, and Q2 data contain NCLEX examinations administered from March 25 to June 30, 2020.



Figure 15. NCLEX-PN® Annual Pass Rates, April 1994 – December 2020



Figure 16. NCLEX-PN® Volume for First-Time, U.S.-Educated Candidates

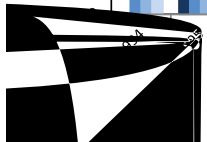
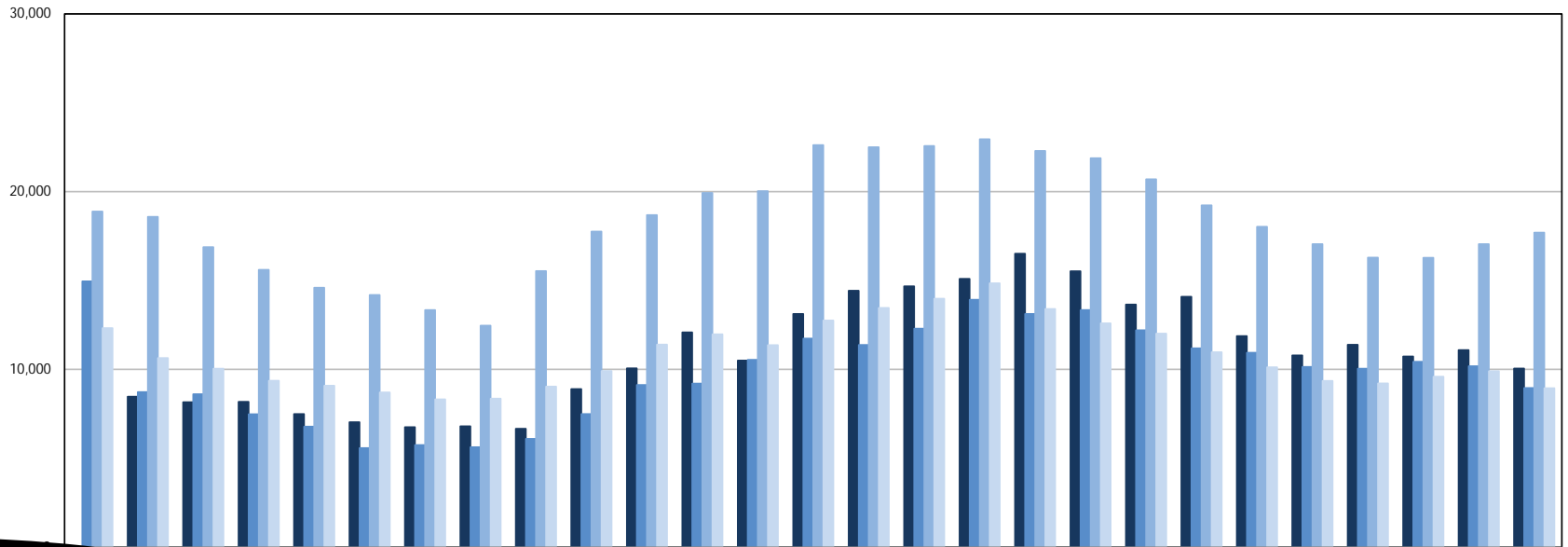


Figure 17. NCLEX-PN® Volume for All Candidates



Figure 18. NCLEX-PN® Annual Volume, April 1994 – December 2020



