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Amid a National Nursing Shortage, Prospective Nursing Students Say Lack of Academic Preparedness Is the Driving Decision to Delay or Forego Nursing School

A national survey by ATI Nursing Education shows students have an increased interest in nursing careers, but many have deferred their dreams due to educational and economic challenges related to COVID-19

LEAWOOD, KS – According to a new national survey of nearly 4,000 prospective nursing students, for many students who are delaying or foregoing application to nursing school, the COVID-19 pandemic made them more interested in nursing careers, but they feel academically unprepared for the rigors of nursing education.

The survey comes at a crucial crossroads: As U.S. hospitals and health systems reel from nurse staffing shortages, many nursing programs are struggling to enroll, retain, support, and graduate academically prepared students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Compounding these nursing education and pipeline challenges, the pandemic has erased nearly two decades of progress in core math and reading skills among elementary-aged students, according to the [results](#) of a national standardized test released recently.

The new survey of 3,917 prospective nursing students was conducted by ATI, a leading provider of education technology and support to more than 60% of the nation's undergraduate nursing programs. The students surveyed had recently taken the ATI Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS), designed to determine students' academic preparedness to enter nursing school. Many U.S. undergraduate nursing programs include the TEAS as one of several considerations in the admissions process, based on well-established [literature](#) that shows [consistent links between a student's performance on the TEAS and future academic success](#).

The purpose of the survey was threefold. Researchers wanted to understand:

- TEAS-takers' academic, emotional, and financial preparedness for nursing school
- Current sentiment about applying to nursing school
- COVID-19-related impacts that may be driving these trends

Key survey findings included:

- **Of the 85% of respondents who applied to nursing school within five months of taking the TEAS, approximately three-quarters (74%) were accepted to a nursing program.** Most (83%) who applied to more than one program said they were accepted into their top choice of program.
- **15% of respondents had not yet applied to a nursing program at the time of the survey.** The vast majority (86%) of this group stated they were either delaying their application or were not yet ready to apply. **The most cited reason for delaying application to nursing school was the desire to improve academic preparedness (69%).**
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has made some prospective students more interested in nursing careers, regardless of academic readiness.** Thirty-nine percent (39%) of those who applied to nursing school and 35% of those who delayed application reported that COVID-19 made them more interested in a nursing career. Conversely, only 8% of those who applied to nursing school and 10% of those who delayed application reported the pandemic made them less interested in pursuing nursing as a career.
- **14% of respondents who had not yet applied to a nursing program indicated they had changed their minds about a career in nursing. The most cited reason was lack of academic preparedness (35%),** but other factors included students' inability to afford nursing school (23%) and inability to fit nursing school into their lives due to the difficulties of family obligations and other responsibilities (13%).

“It is clear that students want to pursue careers in nursing – and equally apparent they need more support throughout their education to make these dreams a reality,” said Patty Knecht, Ph.D., RN, ANEF, Chief Nursing Officer for ATI and Ascend Learning. “Earlier and more sustained investment in academic support and remediation can help to mitigate the challenges cited by prospective nursing students and bring more nurses into the pipeline at a time of critical need. Targeted investments in school communities that experienced significant learning loss during COVID-19 would help to bridge equity gaps and support more students who have the aptitude, desire, and passion to pursue nursing careers but lack the academic and financial resources they need to succeed.”

The online survey was conducted among a sample of TEAS-takers who had registered for the exam between January 13, 2022, and February 24, 2022. More than 3,900 qualified respondents completed the survey, which was fielded between May 13, 2022, and June 13, 2022.

About ATI

Founded in 1998 with a vision to use technology to inform and enhance nursing education, ATI helps prepare hundreds of thousands of students every year so they can become safe, practice-ready nurses. ATI develops nursing leaders who are ready to provide skilled and safe nursing care in a rapidly changing healthcare marketplace. Our innovative product solutions and best-in-class support are developed and administered by a team that includes doctorate- and

master's-prepared nurse educators and psychometricians. Together, the solutions they design help nursing students master core curriculum, develop into practice-ready nurses, and succeed on the National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX). Nursing students from ATI client schools garner better results on the NCLEX required for practice, with pass rates that significantly exceed industry counterparts.

To learn more about ATI, visit <https://www.atitesting.com/>

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