

Paid Pre-Licensure Nurse Apprenticeship: A Model for Workforce Stability

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Background

The U.S. nursing workforce continues to face challenges in preparing, recruiting, and retaining a practice-ready pipeline

Challenges are especially noted in rural health, long term care, post-acute and community health settings

Employers face longstanding nursing vacancies, increased turnover, and increased onboarding costs for new nurses

A collaborative solution was needed to expand access, reduce barriers, and strengthen workforce readiness

Program Overview

The paid Pre-licensure Nursing Apprenticeship Model (PNAM) is a structured, earn-as-you-learn model

Apprentices receive:

- 3 days/week paid or forgivable loan academic release time
- 2 days/week paid supervised clinical experience
- Access to all nursing professional development and learning opportunities the employer offers
- Wrap-around support through the program navigators, such as twice monthly meetings to address any needs (financial, social, emotional, cultural, etc.) which may impact success

Employers receive:

- Commitment of one year of RN employment after apprentice graduation and NCLEX passage

Lessons Learned

Early and continuous engagement of academic and employer partners is essential

High-level coordination between schools and employers ensures smooth implementation

Trust-building and clear communication channels support sustainability

Apprentices benefit from clear expectations, consistent mentorship, and structured support systems



Linn, K. (2026). Macy Westby, RN Apprentice and Jenna Adams, RN

“I really like the PNAM experience – I feel like I am getting ‘so much more’ out of my clinical time. I’m learning so much!”

~ Current Apprentice



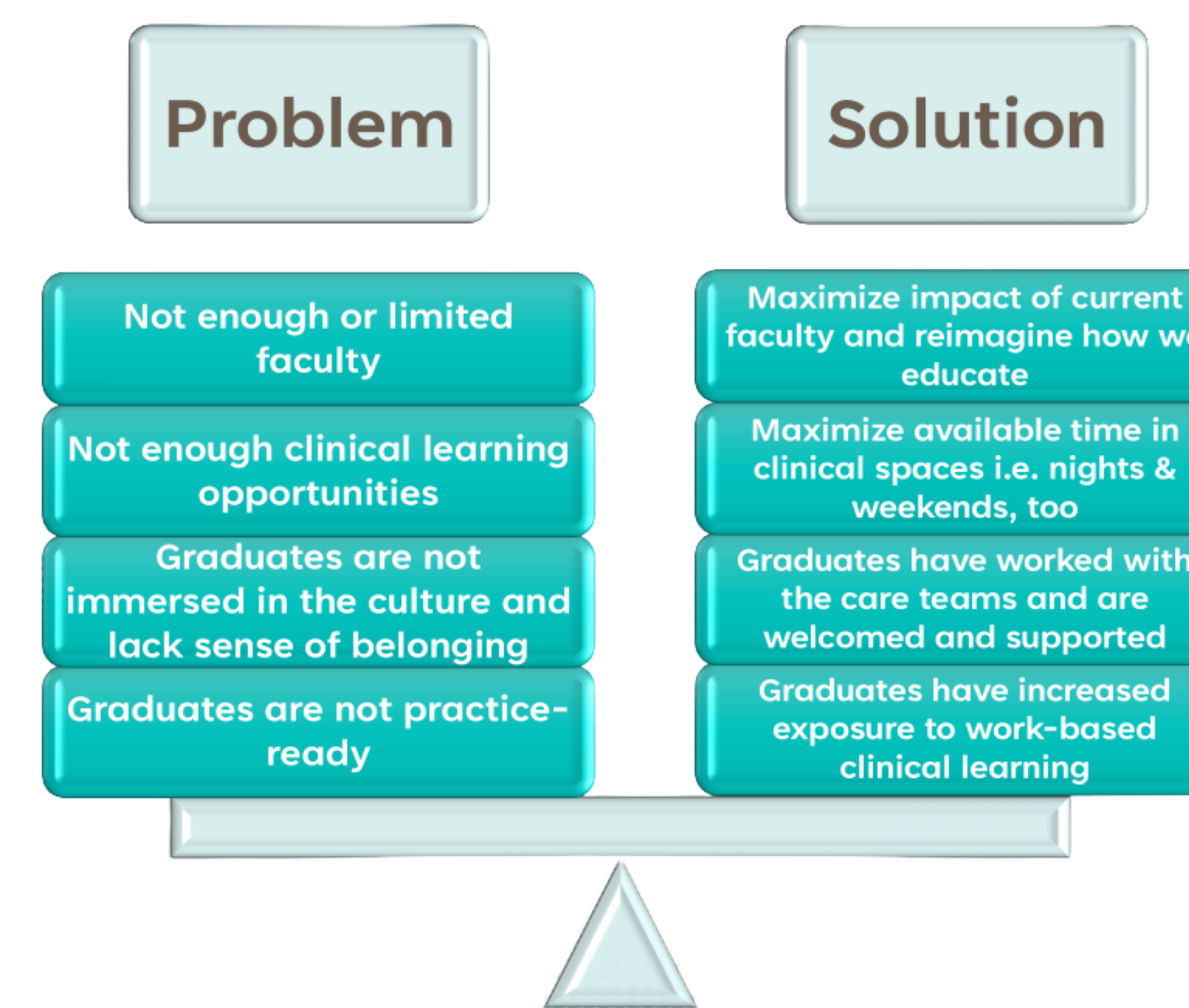
Linn, K. (2026). Sarah Ellis, RN, and Harrison Reinke, RN Apprentice

Outcomes

100% NCLEX-RN® success among apprentice graduates

Zero vacancy in historically hard-to-fill positions

50–75% reduction in orientation time



Impact

Increased confidence in clinical decision-making and professional identity formation

Stronger cultural integration

Reduced financial, social, and academic barriers to becoming a nurse

Meaningful partnerships between academia and employers to prepare highly skilled and practice-ready nurses

Reduced experience-complexity gap

A nurtured and supported pipeline of compassionate, competent nurses

“The apprenticeship immerses nursing students in consistent, real-work nursing experiences on the very units they will serve, building confidence, competence, and strong clinical judgement. By the time they pass their boards, graduates are polished, unit-ready professionals who can truly hit the ground running from day one.”

Cathy Mattfield, Director of Nursing

Application to Other Settings

Scalable for:

- LPN, ADN, BSN and Post-Baccalaureate programs
- Implementation in acute, specialty, post-acute, long-term care, critical access, rural health, and all diverse healthcare environments



Linn, K. (2026). Thea Harte, RN Apprentice and Kelly Thelen, RN

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References and Contact Info



Use the QR Code to access the references and contact information.



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