

Empower to Excel: Advancing Nursing Assistant Nursing Student Success

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- Nursing assistants (NAs) enrolled in nursing programs face challenges balancing academic and job demands, leading to stress, burnout, and higher turnover.
- Mentoring programs reduce turnover and support retention among nursing students (Djiovanis, 2023). Mentorship is crucial for nursing students' growth, improving transition-to-practice and retention (Nassour et al., 2020). Evidence demonstrates that structured mentoring can improve retention and facilitate successful transition into professional nursing roles (Djiovanis, 2023; Nassour et al., 2020).
- After implementation of a structured leadership-guided mentoring program, 100% of mentored NAs remained employed and in school. Also, four of the nine mentees graduated as Registered Nurses (RNs) and remained as employees in the health system. Mentoring Effectiveness Tool (MET) survey scores showed a 9.4% improvement from the beginning to the end of implementation.
- Findings support structured mentoring as a sustainable workforce development strategy that can strengthen the internal nursing pipeline and reduce staffing shortages.

Background and Purpose

NAs are vital in healthcare, especially in large medical centers. Many balance nursing studies with demanding work, leading to stress, fatigue, and burnout, which cause high turnover. This negatively affects staffing and raises costs.

Internal data from the project site showed a high NA turnover of 50.1%, above the 41.8% national benchmark in 2025. This project aimed to create, implement, and evaluate a structured mentoring program to support NAs in nursing or prerequisite courses, improve retention,

promote academic success, and strengthen the transition to RN roles. Specific project aims included:

- Achieving a 9% reduction in NA turnover, lowering rates below the 2025 national benchmark of 41.8%
- Increasing the number of NA graduates transitioning to RN roles by 5% by May 2026
- Improving MET survey scores by 10% among participating mentees

These findings are intended to guide nursing leadership, workforce development teams, and healthcare administrators in developing retention strategies and strengthening internal nursing workforce pipelines.

Methodology

This project used a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) guided quality improvement design. Eligible mentee participants included NAs employed within the Central Staffing Office (CSO) who were actively enrolled in a nursing program or enrolled in pre-requisite nursing courses. Mentees were paired with volunteer RN mentors who received structured training from the Talent Development team. The mentoring program was implemented over a six-month period and included several key components:

- Biweekly mentor-mentee meetings
- RN shadowing opportunities
- Academic support and study strategies
- Stress management and coping techniques
- Professional development activities, including mock interviews

Data collection covered outcomes such as NA turnover, comparisons of mentored vs. non-mentored resignation rates, RN transitions, and MET survey scores before and after the intervention. Descriptive statistics analyzed data and run charts tracked trends over time.

Retention and Workforce Outcomes

The mentoring program demonstrated significant positive outcomes related to workforce retention. Notably, 100% of NA participants remained employed throughout the project period. Additionally, four senior NA participants successfully transitioned into RN roles, contributing to the project goal of increasing NA-to-RN advancement.

Turnover Trends

Analysis of turnover data showed a substantial improvement after the implementation of the mentoring program. Overall, NA turnover decreased from 50.1% at baseline to 18.7% during the implementation period, representing a 31.4 percentage point reduction and exceeding the goal of reducing turnover below the national benchmark of 41.8%. Figure 1 illustrates NA turnover rates by fiscal year (FY) compared with the national benchmark. Monthly variation is present in Figure 2. The 9.35% increase in May included the NA-to-RN transitions, which explained the increase in turnover, but it was a positive turning point. Trend analysis using run charts demonstrated a consistent decline in turnover during the intervention period compared to prior months. Among the nine mentored participants, 100% were retained throughout the program, with no mentee resignations observed, as illustrated in Figure 3. In contrast, turnover persisted among non-mentored staff during the same period, highlighting a potential protective effect of the intervention. Career advancement outcomes also improved, as shown in Figure 4. Of the nine mentees, four were senior nursing students and eligible to graduate (44.4%), and of those four, all successfully transitioned into RN roles during or immediately after the intervention period,

exceeding the targeted 5% increase. This finding demonstrates meaningful progress in strengthening the internal workforce pipeline.

MET survey findings indicated improved perceptions of support and mentoring effectiveness. Seven of the nine participants completed both the pre-and post-MET surveys and were included in the matched analysis. The mean MET score increased from 2.6 to 2.85, representing a 9.4% increase and approaching the project goal of 10%. The increase in the scores suggested enhanced mentee confidence, satisfaction, and engagement. Collectively, these results indicate that the structured mentoring program was effective in improving retention, supporting career advancement, and enhancing the mentoring experience for NA students.

Mentoring Effectiveness and Qualitative Feedback

Survey data from the MET showed improvements in mentee perceptions of support, confidence, and professional growth. Qualitative feedback confirmed these, with participants reporting academic and emotional benefits from mentorship. Feedback included:

- “I would have never passed my last semester if it had not been for my mentor.”
- “Just by having my mentor, I increased my test score by 10 points.”

These insights emphasize mentorship's role in academic success, stress reduction, and professional growth.

Strengths and Limitations

The project's strengths included a structured, evidence-based mentoring framework, strong leadership support, and alignment with workforce development goals. However, limitations such as a short implementation period, a small sample size, and potential bias related to the project leader's organizational role may affect the generalizability and interpretation of the outcomes. MET survey results were based on matched responses from seven of the nine participants, which

may limit the interpretation of mentoring effectiveness outcomes. Future studies should include larger, multi-site samples and extended follow-up periods to evaluate sustained impact. Despite these limitations, consistent improvements across multiple outcome measures support the intervention's effectiveness.

Recommendations

1. Sustain the mentoring program as a workforce retention strategy.
2. Expand participation to additional nursing assistant cohorts across the organization.
3. Continue leadership-supported mentor training and program evaluation to ensure long-term sustainability.

Implications and Conclusions

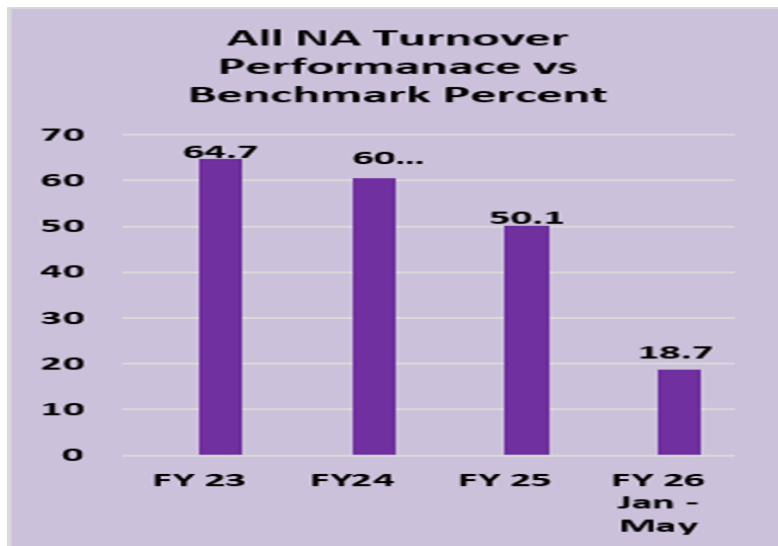
The project demonstrates that structured mentoring can improve NA retention, support academic success, and facilitate progression to RN roles. These outcomes have important implications for healthcare organizations facing workforce shortages because retaining nursing assistants while developing future nurses strengthens staffing stability, reduces recruitment costs, supports continuity of patient care, and builds an internal nursing workforce pipeline. Expanding structured mentoring programs may provide a sustainable strategy for addressing nursing workforce challenges across healthcare systems.

References

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- Nassour, I., Balentine, C., Boland, G.M., Chu, D., Habermann, E., Holscher, C., Idress, K., In, H., Kimbrough, M.K., Mitchem, J., Warner, S.G., Karakousis, G., & Committee on Academic Advancement of the Association for Academic Surgery. (2020). Successful mentor-mentee relationship. *Journal of Surgical Research*, 247, 332-334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jss.2019.09.066>

Figure 1

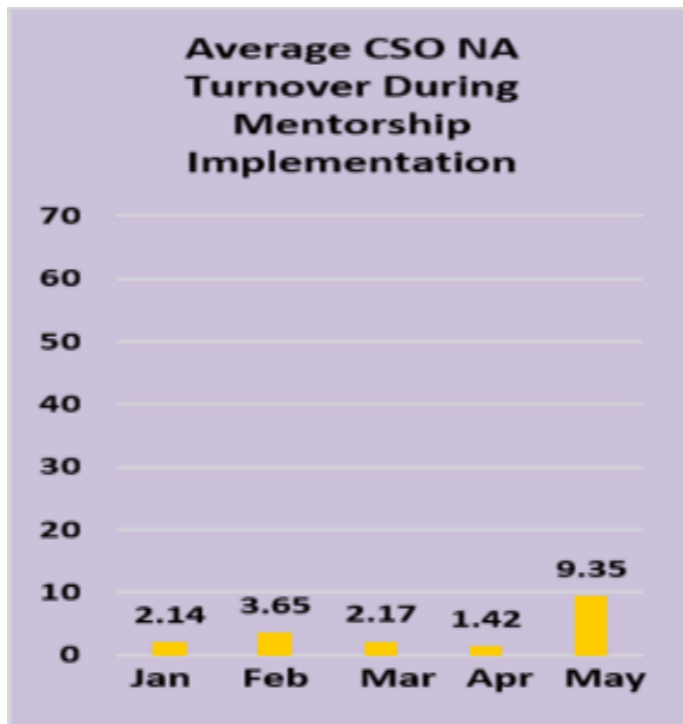
Annual Nursing Assistant Turnover Rates



Note. Nursing assistant (NA) turnover rates by fiscal year (FY) 2023-2026 compared with the 2025 national benchmark of 41.8%.

Figure 2

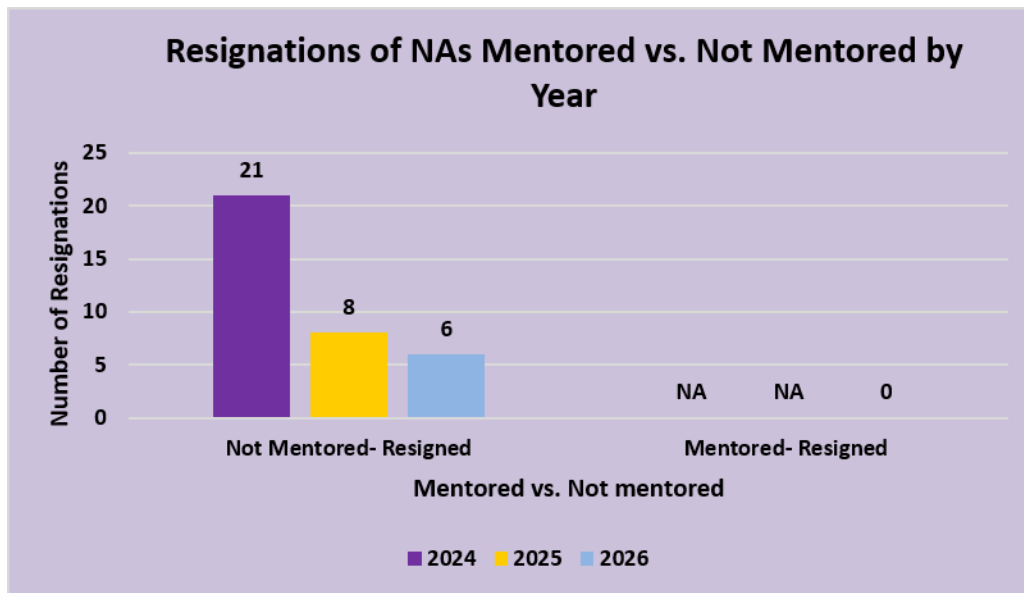
Average CSO NA Turnover During Mentorship Implementation



Note. Average Central Staffing Office (CSO) NA turnover during the mentoring program implementation period (January-May 2026).

Figure 3

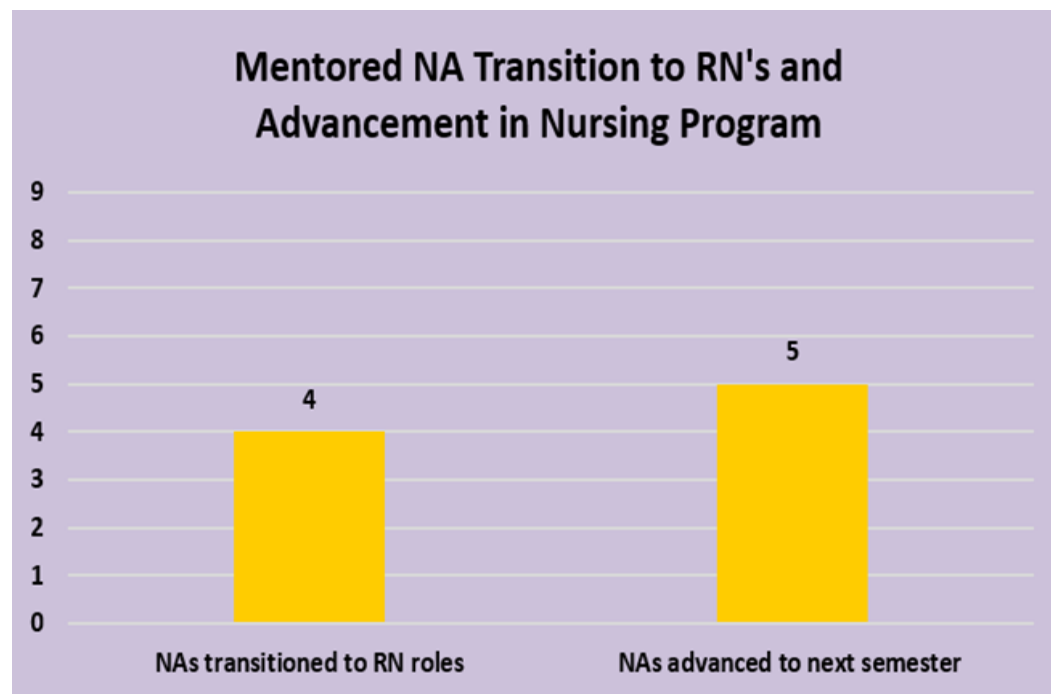
Annual Resignations among Mentored and Non-Mentored Nursing Assistants



Note. Number of NA resignations comparing mentored versus non-mentored staff by year. FY 26 data reflect a partial year (Jan-May 2026).

Figure 4

Mentored NA Transition to RN Roles and Advancement in Nursing Program



Note. Data represent advancement outcomes among mentored NA participants during the implementation period (Jan-May 2026).