



Why Should School Nurses Take the Praxis I Exam?

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In case you haven't heard there has been much talk about why a school nurse should be made to take the Praxis I exam. I have received many emails and phone calls from concerned school nurses on this issue and I recently attended the Vermont Standards Board meeting on January 18 in Stowe. I would like to summarize what I learned at that meeting. I hope that I can clarify any misunderstandings you may have on this issue.

What is the praxis I exam?

The praxis I exam is part of the process in order to obtain an educator's license in the state of Vermont . The exam assesses a candidate's basic knowledge in math, reading and writing skills.

What is the praxis II exam?

The praxis II test focuses on content knowledge such as social studies, science, music, etc. Because there is no Praxis II exam for the School Nurse endorsement, candidates for this endorsement do not need to take the Praxis II exam. The standards board does not use the nursing board exam as an alternate to Praxis II.

Are there alternatives to taking the praxis I exam?

Yes. You may use your tests scores from the following if they meet the total and minimum scores listed below:

	Total	Minimum Scores Required	
GRE	1100	500 (verbal)	500 (quantitive)
SAT	1100	500 (verbal)	500 (math)
ACT		22 (English)	22 (Math)

Why should a school nurse have an educator's license?

It is required by law. The following is an excerpt from the Regulations Governing the Licensing of Educators and the Preparation of Educational Professionals issued by the Vermont Dept. of Education, Sept. 2, 2003:

5220.2 Any individual who performs educational functions covered by any endorsement authorization statement in these rules, whether as an independent contractor or an employee of a school district or supervisory union, shall hold an appropriate license and endorsement.

School nurses have an endorsement as a school nurse or as an associate school nurse. The associate school nurse endorsement was established beginning in the school year 05-06. Registered nurses with a BSN have always been required to take the Praxis I exam since this requirement was adopted by the State Board of Education.

Because we are members of the school community, we are required to have an educator's license. It is not necessary to teach in a classroom in order to be eligible for an educator's license.

Summary:

We are considered educators in our schools because we have an endorsement with the Vermont Dept. of Education. All educators are required to obtain an educator's license. We have a provisional license for the first 2 years of employment to give us time to meet the requirements for obtaining an educator's license. The requirements are to either take and pass the praxis I exam or use an acceptable substitute as listed above; have a current license as a registered nurse; and develop an individual professional development plan.

There are two issues involving school nurses and the praxis I exam. One issue is that new school nurses do not understand why they are being made to take the exam and feel that it is unnecessary because they are practicing nursing with a license. I hope that these nurses are better able to understand why this is necessary with my remarks above. We are nurses in an educational setting and are held to dual standards of nursing and of education. We are seen as and need to be seen as professionals in both arenas.

The other issue is that schools have hired nurses who were not eligible for an educator's license until the 05-06 school year when the associate school nurse endorsement was put in place. Nurses who have acted as school nurses for several years are now being asked to complete the requirements for an educator's license. Several members of the standards board and employees from the Dept of Education have given them a sympathetic ear and are trying to "grandfather" them into their license. Senator Sara Kittell, a school nurse and a state senator is working to help the school nurses in this situation.

There are a few important points that I would like to make:

- ✖ Please do not put off taking the praxis I exam if you are in the second year of your provisional license. Everything takes time and time is running out for you. It is a requirement for all educators including teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and school nurses. (It is not a requirement for paraprofessionals, secretaries, the janitors, etc) I would really hate to lose a valuable school nurse over a misunderstanding like this.
- ✖ Do you realize that if school nurses were exempted from taking the praxis I exam, that we would not be eligible for an educator's license? Without an educator's license we would not be placed on the teacher's salary schedule. Without an educator's license we would not be eligible to be members of the Vermont Teachers Retirement System.
- ✖ Most states recognize that school nurses are professionals and require them to obtain an educator's license. Showing evidence of basic math and English skills are a requirement of all educators in every state.
- ✖ Teachers do not like to be tested either. They too say that passing a basic test is no indication of their teaching skills. Teaching and nursing are both an art and cannot be measured in terms of a test. Having to take a test to prove basic competencies has been legislated on the national level.

I want to thank everyone who has taken the time to contact me on this issue. I hope that I have helped to clear up any misunderstandings you may have about having to take the praxis I exam and why we need an educator's license. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further clarification.

I was fortunate to ride to the standards board meeting with Brian Howe, the chair of the standards board. After speaking with him on that long ride I am confident that he completely understands our issue and is willing to help us understand all of this. You may also contact him with your questions at brhowe@comcast.net.