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#### Recommended Citation

Patterson, Brittany RN and Racicot, Julia RN, "Nurse Residency Programmatic Changes for Improved Retention in the COVID-19 Pandemic" (2022). *Research and Education Celebration 2023*. 15. [https://scholarlycommons.libraryinfo.bhs.org/nurs\\_presentations2023/15](https://scholarlycommons.libraryinfo.bhs.org/nurs_presentations2023/15)

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# Nurse Residency Programmatic Changes for Improved Retention in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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 Baystate Health Nurse Residency Program | November 2022



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## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic placed a strain on the healthcare environment and the nursing workforce including newly licensed nurses. With the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance of social distancing, our nurse residency program needed to pivot to a virtual platform while attempting to maintain engagement and support newly licensed nurses' transition into practice. As shown in the literature, in-person courses are critical to enhance collaborative learning, networking, and relationship building (Lanahan, Montalvo, & Cohn, 2022). The aim of the programmatic and curriculum changes were to foster continued engagement utilizing a virtual platform. Additionally, nurse residents (NR) were provided different professional development pathways for their final project instead of the traditional evidence-based practice capstone.

## Introduction

Nurse Residency Programs help support newly licensed nurses with their transition from the academic setting into the practice setting, and ultimately lead to increased job satisfaction and reduce RN turnover. The Baystate Health Nurse Residency Program (BHNRP) is an ANCC PTAP Coalition on Accreditation accredited transition-to-practice program. The BHNRP is designed for nurses with less than 12 months of experience to participate in a 10-month structured curriculum to support and empower nurse residents. The major goal is close the transition-to-practice gap and improve job satisfaction, retention, competency, and confidence.

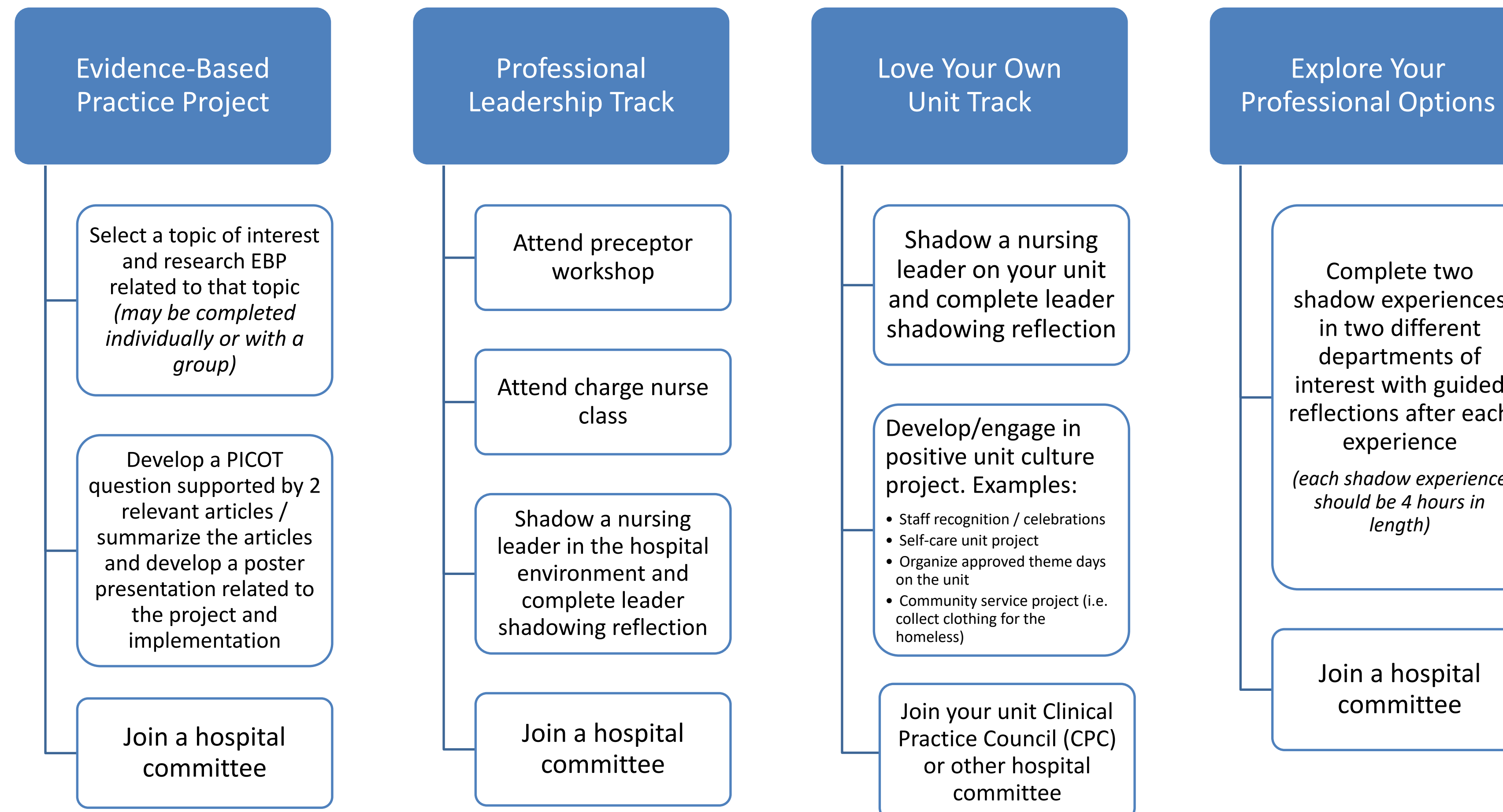
Pre-pandemic revealed retention rates of NR at Baystate Health were above or in alignment with national trends. Beginning in March of 2020, data showed a notable decrease in retention. Due to these trends, changes were made to the curriculum to improve NR engagement and satisfaction with goals of improving NR retention and turnover.

## Intervention

In September 2021, the BHNRP leadership team evaluated the residency curriculum for gaps in engagement after transitioning to a heavy virtual platform in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Didactic seminars for the program remained virtual and polling features, case-studies, and discussion pieces were added to presentations across all presenters. The didactic seminars were condensed and completed in the first 6 months of the 10-month program and then the final 4 months were dedicated to new program professional pathways.

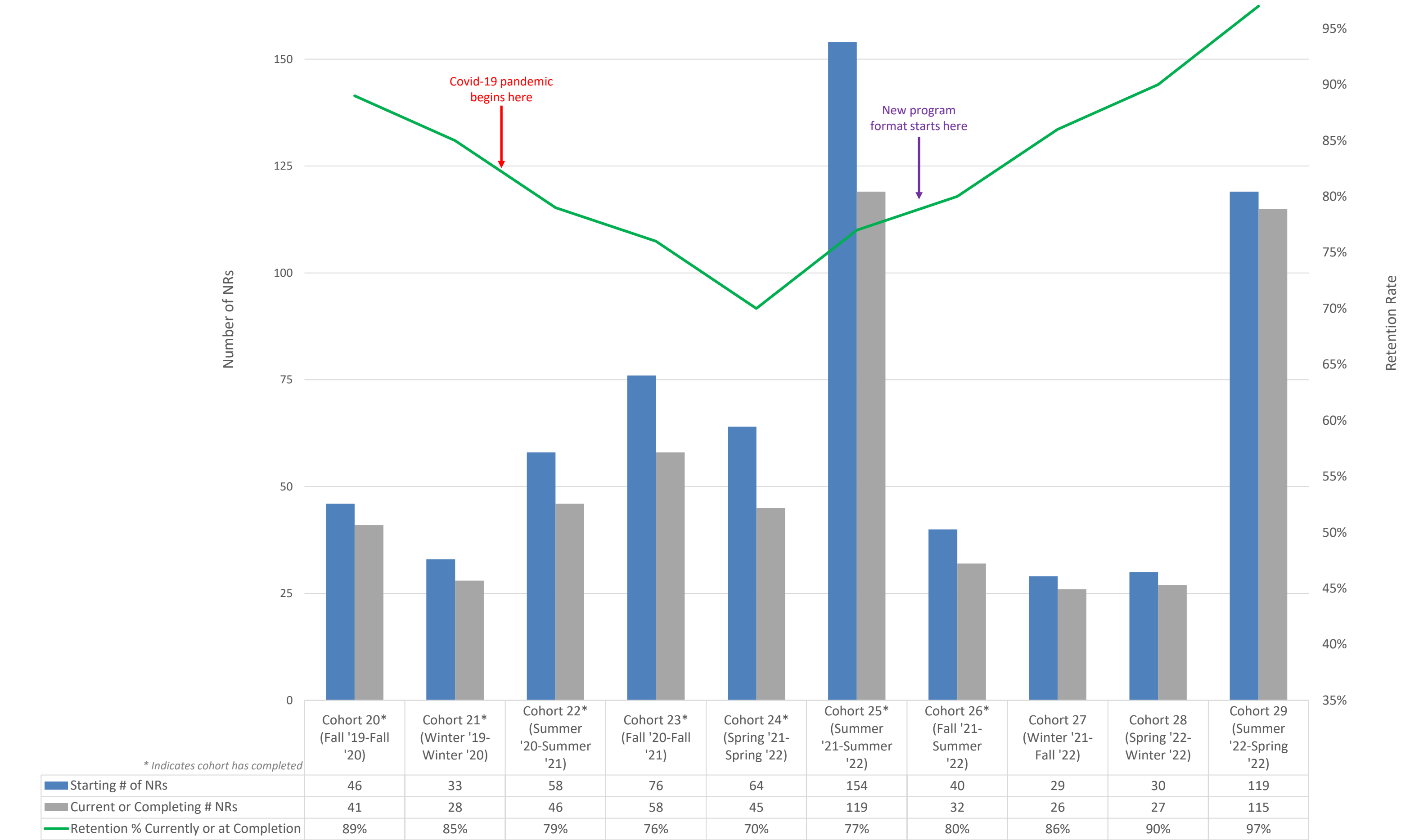
Feedback from NRs revealed that the previous curriculum focusing on the required completion of an evidence-based practice project felt repetitive after many of the NRs had completed evidence-based projects during their academic experiences. The BHNRP leadership team along with other key nursing stakeholders developed an updated curriculum by offering four professional pathways for their final NRP project.

The Nurse Residency Program Professional Pathways provide a creative opportunity for NR to choose one of the four tracks and complete all requirements to formally complete the BHNRP. The four tracks include the classic evidence-based practice project, the professional leadership track, love your own unit track, and explore your professional options pathway. All four pathways require the NRs to join a committee to help encourage their participation in a shared governance environment.



## Conclusion

## BHNRP Retention Data



The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on NR retention and turnover. Nationally, in 2021, NSI reported a 27.1% average national turnover rate for staff RNs in the hospital setting. Preliminary data reveal that programmatic changes to the BHNRP have shown an improvement in NR turnover at Baystate Health when compared to national average turnover rates. The BHNRP stakeholders continue to collaborate to explore engagement efforts and creative strategies for providing support to further improve retention of NRs. Along with the changes to the BHNRP, a mentoring program was developed to help support NRs through their program as well and the impact on retention is not yet available.

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