



WHAT

# PRACTICE PARTNERS

NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE AACN ESSENTIALS



American Association  
of Colleges of Nursing

*The Voice of Academic Nursing*

Preparing practice-ready nurses to thrive across all healthcare settings is a top priority for academic nursing. Sweeping changes in healthcare delivery, including new models of care delivery, emerging technology, and health system restructuring call for a new approach to how nurses are educated and transitioned into the workforce. The transformational work can only be achieved through close collaboration among nurses in academia and practice.



## ANSWERING THE CALL FOR CHANGE

In April 2021, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) announced the adoption of a new model and framework for preparing registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses, and advanced nurse specialists, which is outlined in *The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education*. This landmark document delineates the necessary curriculum content and expected competencies of graduates from baccalaureate, master's, and Doctor of Nursing Practice programs using a competency-based approach to nursing education.

# WHY COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION (CBE)?

A growing body of evidence shows that outcomes-focused, active learning strategies are more effective at enabling learners to master new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Used extensively across the health professions, CBE is a learner-centered approach to education that focuses on an individual’s ability to develop and demonstrate a new standard of competence, and:

- Focuses on the desired outcomes for learners.
- Requires students to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to progress in their studies.
- Matches active learning strategies with each student’s learning style.
- Provides students with frequent, formative feedback and assessments to enhance learning and ensure equity.
- Integrates assessments across the curriculum and provides multiple ways for learners to demonstrate competence.

## RE-ENVISIONING CLINICAL NURSING EDUCATION

Implementing the *Essentials* provides a rich opportunity for academic and practice leaders to work together to rethink clinical learning experiences. Today’s competency guidelines call for:

Entry-level Programs (BSN, entry MSN)	Advanced-level Programs (MSN, DNP)
<p>Clinical experiences focus on the needs of individuals in four spheres of care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wellness and disease prevention</li> <li>• Regenerative and restorative care</li> <li>• Chronic disease management</li> <li>• Hospice and palliative care.</li> </ul> <p><i>Reflects patient care needs, not care setting</i></p>	<p>A minimum of 500 direct and indirect practicum hours for the attainment of advanced-level competencies</p> <p>Additional clinical hours are required by other certification agencies and vary by specialty</p>
<p>Both entry- and advanced-level programs require one or more clinical immersion experiences with concentrated practice time.</p>	

The move to advance CBE and reimagine clinical learning is generating robust dialogue among academic and practice leaders about what constitutes a practice-ready nurse.

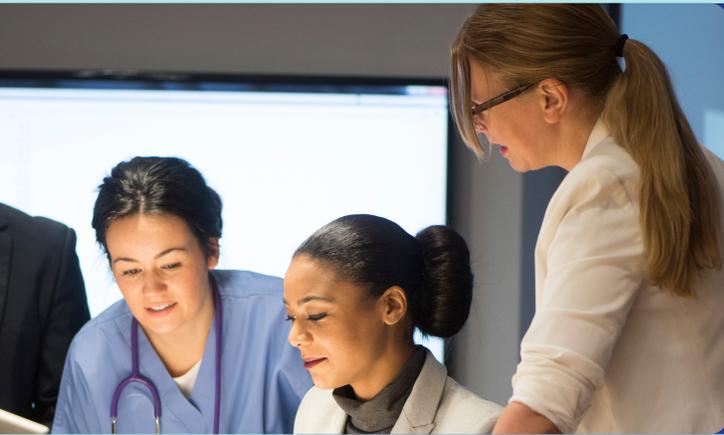
# ACADEMIC-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS ARE KEY

Fully implementing the 2021 *Essentials* and transforming nursing education can only be achieved by nurses in practice and academia working together.

**The benefits of academic-practice partnerships focused on the *Essentials* are many:**

- A clear understanding of the knowledge and competencies of graduates from entry- and advanced-level nursing programs.
- Curricula and learning experiences co-created by faculty and practice partners will help to ensure more practice-ready nurses.
- Students become integral part of the care team.
- New nurse graduates will be better equipped to meet workforce expectations, which will make them less vulnerable to stress and burnout and reduce turnover.
- The *Essentials* competencies provide a strong foundation for new nurse residency programs, APRN fellowship programs, and for practicing nurses ongoing competency evaluation and development.





## OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

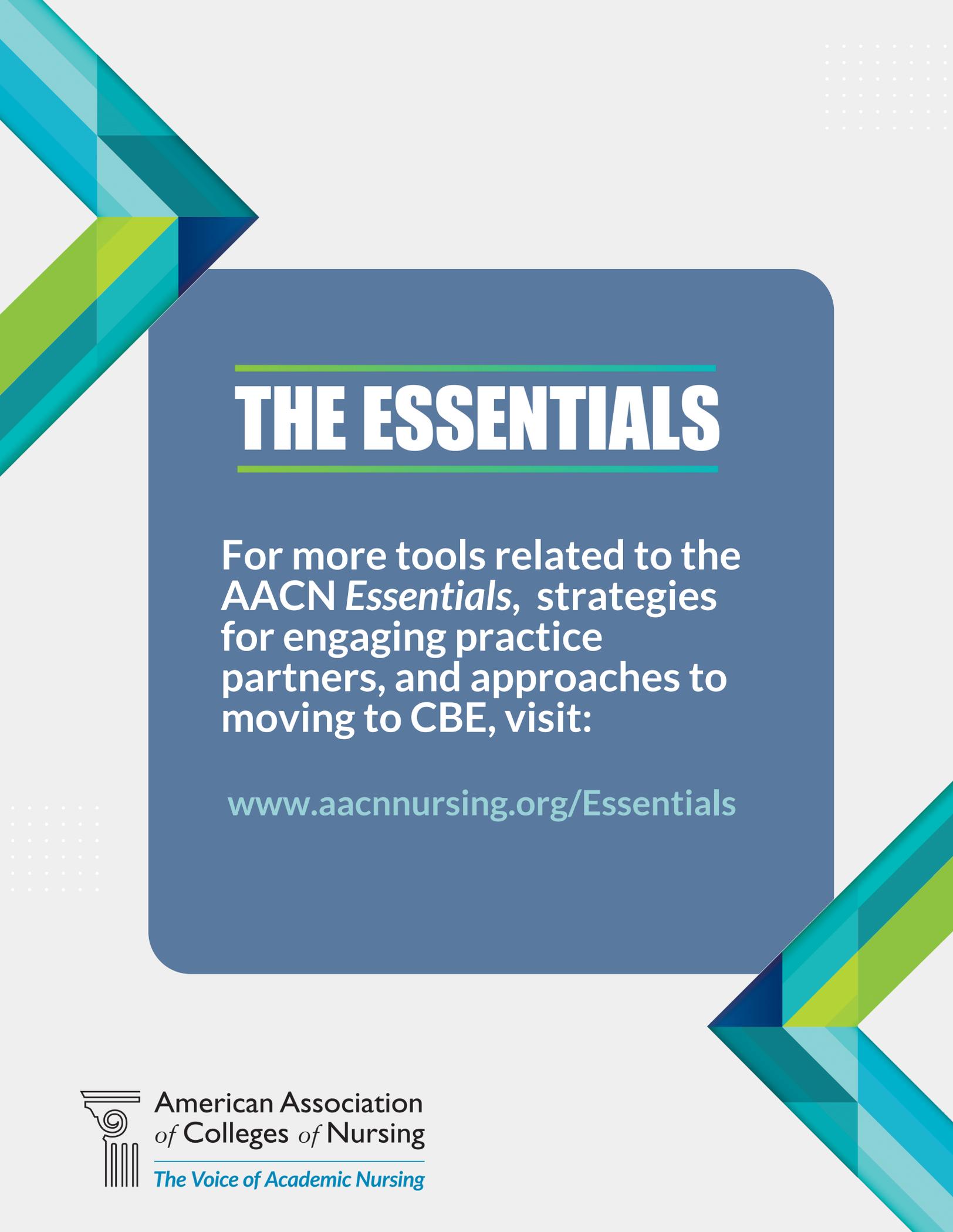


To facilitate implementation of the *Essentials*, partnerships are forming to reassess clinical learning experiences, identify skills assessment measures, enhance the practice readiness of new graduates, and meet many other shared goals. Here are some suggestions for engaging with nurse educators on the *Essentials*.

- **Review the new *Essentials*** to learn more about this historic shift in nursing education and the impact practice can have on workforce development.
  - Learning resources on the AACN website include an Executive Summary, Implementation Roadmap, overview videos, and free on-demand webinars providing an overview of the *Essentials*, competency-based education, and related topics.
- **Invite representatives from area nursing schools** to share information about the *Essentials* and their implementation efforts.
- **Open a dialogue with your nursing school partners** on where you would like to engage. For example:
  - Create opportunities to work with faculty on defining learning outcomes and guiding students to engage in active learning and self-reflection.
  - Re-evaluate clinical learning experiences and assessment measures to facilitate experiential learning that encompass the four spheres of care.
  - Pilot experiences that address new competency expectations related to areas of special interest (e.g., social determinants of health, population health, other priority areas).
- **Leverage the *Essentials* as an opportunity to connect with a larger network of area nursing schools** and establish a new pipeline of entry-level recruits.
- **Facilitate the transition of nurses into new practice roles** by working with faculty to develop nurse residencies, APRN fellowships, and entry-to-practice programs.
- **Strengthen your relationship with nursing education** by offering joint faculty appointments and inviting academic leaders to serve on your governing board and in other leadership capacities.

Visit [aacnnursing.org/essentials](https://aacnnursing.org/essentials) to find out more about how nursing schools and practice partners are working together to implement the 2021 *Essentials*.





# THE ESSENTIALS

For more tools related to the *AACN Essentials*, strategies for engaging practice partners, and approaches to moving to CBE, visit:

[www.aacnnursing.org/Essentials](http://www.aacnnursing.org/Essentials)



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