

APPENDIX G6. NURSE QUALIFICATION STANDARD

Veterans Health Administration

1. SECTION A. COVERAGE

a. Appointments

(1) Effective December 10, 1999, individuals appointed to VHA RN positions will be subject to all qualification requirements stated in section B of this Qualification Standard. These requirements apply to:

(a) Individuals not on VA rolls;

(b) VA employees in other positions who are appointed or reappointed as RNs; and

(c) RNs who have had a break in service of more than one year who are subsequently considered for the same or different RN position.

(2) RNs who are reappointed to VA after a break in service of one year or less, are not considered to have had a break in service for purposes of applying all the qualification requirements effective on and after October 1, 2005.

(3) Employees separated due to work-related injuries, or restored based on military service are not considered to have had a break in service for purposes of applying all the qualification requirements in this Nurse Qualification Standard, provided the employee is reappointed within 1 year of becoming eligible for reappointment.

b. Promotions and Advancements

(1) RNs covered by this Qualification Standard who are eligible for promotion consideration shall be considered for promotion and advancement under the procedures in chapter 4 of part III, this Handbook.

[(2)] Effective October 1, 2005, all VA RNs will be considered for promotion and advancement based solely on the criteria in section B of this Standard.

[(3)] RNs appointed before December 10, 1999, who maintain continuous employment in VHA as a RN will not be reduced in grade based on application of this Standard.

[(4)] The Under Secretary for Health or designee is authorized to act upon requests for promotion reconsideration for RNs.

c. **Periodic Step Increases.** RNs appointed before December 10, 1999, will not be denied a periodic step increase on the basis of not meeting the educational requirements specified in section B of this Qualification Standard for their current grade.

2. SECTION B. NURSE QUALIFICATION STANDARD

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(1) **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. (Noncitizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g, this part.)

(2) **Graduation from School of Nursing**

(a) Graduate of a school of professional nursing approved by the appropriate State agency, and accredited by one of the following accrediting bodies at the time the program was completed by the applicant. [NOTE: See exception in subparagraph (b) below for candidates who are enrolled in a MSN Bridge Program.]

1. The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC), an accrediting arm of the National League for Nursing located at 61 Broadway, 33rd Floor, New York, New York 10006 or call (800) 669-1656 extension 153. The NLNAC accredits all levels of nursing programs. Additional information may be obtained from the NLNAC web site; **or**

2. The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), an accrediting arm of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). The CCNE accredits bachelors and masters degree programs, and is located at One Dupont Circle N.W., Suite 530, Washington, DC 20036 or call (202) 463-6930. Additional information may be obtained from the CCNE web site.

(b) [The completion of coursework equivalent to a nursing degree in a MSN Bridge Program that qualifies for professional nursing registration constitutes the completion of an approved course of study of professional nursing. In these programs, students are given a certificate of professional nursing to sit for the NCLEX and should submit this certification to VA prior to appointment. Students do not earn a BSN, but receive a MSN degree upon completion of course work. A copy of the MSN transcript must be provided to VA. Bridge programs that confer a master's degree also fully meet the education requirement, even though a Bachelor's Degree is not awarded.

(c) In cases of graduates of foreign schools of professional nursing, possession of current, full, active, and unrestricted registration (see paragraph 2a(3)) will meet the requirement of graduation from an approved school of professional nursing.

NOTE: *Most individuals admitted as permanent residents or adjusting to permanent resident status as registered nurses on or after December 14, 1998, for the purpose of working as a registered nurse, must meet the certification requirements in Section 343 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (Pub. L. 104-208, September 30, 1996). This certification involves a review of the alien's education, training, license(s), and experience, verification that the alien possess an acceptable level of competence in written and oral English, and a requirement that the individual has passed either the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) Qualifying Examination or the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc. examination, the NCLEX-RN. For additional information see Pub. L. 104-208, 63 Federal Register 55007-55012, dated October 14, 1998, and the CGFNS web site.*

(3) Registration

(a) **Condition of Employment.** A registered nurse (RN) will have a current, full, active and unrestricted registration as a graduate professional nurse in a State, Territory, or Commonwealth (i.e., Puerto Rico) of the U.S. or in the District of Columbia. The appointing official may waive this registration if the RN is to serve in a country other than the U.S. and the RN has registration in that country (e.g., Philippines). *The RN must maintain a current, full, active and unrestricted registration to continue employment with VA.*

(b) **Impaired Registration.** An impaired registration is any registration(s) revoked, suspended, denied, restricted, limited, or issued/placed in a probationary status. A registered nurse who has or ever had any such impairment to their registration as listed above may be appointed only in accordance with the provisions of chapter 3, section B, paragraph 15 of this part.

(4) **Physical Standards.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

(5) **English Language Proficiency.** RNs appointed to direct patient care positions must be proficient in spoken and written English as required by 38 U.S.C. 7402(d) and 7407(d).

(6) **Nurse Practitioners and Clinical Nurse Specialists.** On and after [March 17, 2009], registered nurses appointed or otherwise moving into these assignments must meet and maintain the following additional qualifications. This includes employees appointed before [March 17, 2009], who obtain such qualifications on or after [March 17, 2009.]

(a) **Nurse Practitioners.** A nurse practitioner must be licensed or otherwise recognized as a nurse practitioner in a State, possess a master's degree from a program accredited by the NLNAC or CCNE, and maintain full and current certification as a nurse practitioner from the American Nurses Association or another nationally recognized certifying body. [The certification must be in the specialty to which the individual is being appointed or selected.]

(b) **Clinical Nurse Specialists.** A clinical nurse specialist must possess a Masters degree from an academic program accredited by the NLNAC or CCNE [and maintain full and current certification as a clinical nurse specialist from the American Nurses Association or another nationally recognized certifying body. The certification must be in the specialty to which the individual is being appointed or selected.]

(c) **Prescriptive Authority.** This handbook does not address any additional requirements that nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists must meet before they are granted prescriptive authority.

b. Definitions

(1) **Successful Nursing Practice.** Documented evidence of experience as an RN that is determined to be sustained and consistently at or above an acceptable level of quality. This may include experience as a Graduate Nurse Technician (GNT) provided the candidate was utilized as a professional nurse and passed the State licensing (board) examination on the first attempt, and experience as a Nurse Technician Pending Graduation provided the candidate possessed an active, current registration to

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practice nursing in a State and was utilized as a professional nurse (See chapter 3, section G, paragraph 5, this part). It may also include performance as a VA registered nurse that is at or above the fully satisfactory level. Professional nursing experience should be documented on the Proficiency Report, VA Form 10-2623, the VA Form 10-2850a, Application for Employment – Nurses and Nurse Anesthetists, or on a candidate's resume.

(2) **Length of Nursing Practice (Experience).** The amount of time documented on VA Form 10-2850a or on a candidate's resume. (A performance evaluation or reference covering the candidate's most recent employment as a RN is essential.) Part-time experience as a RN is credited according to the relationship it bears to the full-time workweek. For example, a RN who worked 20 hours a week (i.e., on a half-time basis) would receive one full-time workweek of credit for each 2 weeks of such service.

(3) **Length of LPN Practice (Experience).** LPN experience may be counted towards successful nursing practice for an RN at the rate of ½ credit as compared to full credit for RN experience. The amount of time that may be credited toward RN experience may not exceed 5 years. For example, LPN experience would be counted as one full-time workweek of credit for each 2 weeks of such service. (A performance evaluation or reference covering the candidate's most recent employment as an LPN is essential.)

(4) **Degree in a Related Field.** Baccalaureate and graduate degrees in fields related to nursing from a college or university which was accredited by the state at the time the candidate completed the program. Information on accredited colleges and universities is contained in Accredited Institutions of Post-secondary Education, published annually by the American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle NW, Washington, DC 20036 or call (202) 939-9300. Information can be obtained from the ACE web site.

[(5)] **Level Within a Grade.** The Locality Pay System (LPS) recognizes that some employees at the Nurse I grade have higher qualifications assignments than other employees within the same grade. The qualification requirements for attainment of a higher level within the Nurse I grade are contained in [paragraph c], Grade Determinations, below.

[(6) Four] Dimensions of Nursing

[(a)] The Four Dimensions of Nursing are:

1. Practice
2. Professional Development
3. Collaboration
4. Scientific Inquiry

(b) Within the Four Dimensions of Nursing,] nine criteria define the performance requirements for RNs at each grade and/or level in the Nurse Qualification Standard. These requirements listed below, are based on the American Nurses Association (ANA) Standards of Care and Standards of Professional Performance.

[1.] **Practice.** Extent to which the RN effectively uses the nursing process components of assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation in varied practice settings.

[2.] **Quality of Care.** Extent to which the RN systematically evaluates and improves the quality and effectiveness of nursing practice and health care delivery.

[3.] **Performance.** Extent to which the RN evaluates his/her own nursing practice as well as the performance of others.

[4.] **Education/Career Development.** Extent to which the RN acquires and uses current knowledge for self and others.

[5.] **Collegiality.** Extent to which the RN contributes to the professional development of peers, colleagues, and others.

[6.] **Ethics.** Extent to which the RN makes decisions and takes action in an ethical manner.

[7.] **Collaboration.** Extent to which the RN collaborates with clients, significant others, and other health care and service providers.

[8.] **Research.** Extent to which the RN uses research in practice.

[9.] **Resource Utilization.** Extent to which the RN considers factors related to safety, effectiveness, and cost in planning and delivering care.

[(c) The above criteria are conceptualized within the Four Dimensions of Nursing as follows:

1. Practice (Practice, Ethics, Resource Utilization)
2. Professional Development (Education/Career Development, Performance)
3. Collaboration (Collaboration, Collegiality)
4. Scientific Inquiry (Quality of Care, Research)

(d) Four career paths have been established to help guide the professional nurse toward a more comprehensive use of the qualification standards throughout their professional career. Nurses follow the career path that appropriately aligns with their functional statement. Opportunities exist to move between the career paths as the individual shifts among the diverse nursing roles. Movement among the career paths is a fluid and seamless transition as the individual assumes new roles during their career progression. The paths are as follows:

1. Clinical (Direct Care Nurse, Clinical Nurse Leader)
2. Advanced Practice (Clinical Nurse Specialist, Advanced Practice Nurse)

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3. Consultant (Quality Manager, Recruiter, Educator, Researcher, Informatics, Infectious Disease)
4. Supervisory (Nurse Manager, Shift Supervisor)]

c. **Grade Determinations.** In addition to the Basic Requirements specified in paragraph a above, the following criteria must be met in determining the grade assignment of candidates, and if appropriate, the level within a grade. With regard to the "dimension" requirements, the requirements for all "dimensions" at a particular grade/level must be met in order for a RN to be qualified at that particular grade/level.

(1) Nurse I Level 1

Scope: Delivers fundamental, knowledge-based care to assigned clients while developing technical competencies.

NURSE I LEVEL 1

EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE	DIMENSION REQUIREMENTS
Associate Degree or Diploma in Nursing	None	<p>[PRACTICE</p> <p>1. Practice: Uses the nursing process (assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation). Accurately documents care of clients.</p> <p>2. Ethics: Safeguards client privacy and confidentiality. Provides care in a non-judgmental, non-discriminatory manner, respecting the values and belief of members of all cultures.</p> <p>3. Resource Utilization: Provides care in a safe and cost-effective manner.</p> <p>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>1. Performance: Participates in appraisal of own performance.</p> <p>2. Education/Career Development: Seeks opportunities to acquire and develop basic skills.</p> <p>COLLABORATION</p> <p>1. Collegiality: Establishes professional relationships with peers. Seeks out colleagues for mutual information exchange.</p> <p>2. Collaboration: Communicates with clients and other healthcare providers regarding client care.</p> <p>SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY</p> <p>1. Quality of Care: Describes the quality improvement process, roles and responsibilities, and identifies quality improvement activities on the unit.</p> <p>2. Research: Assists in identifying problem areas in nursing practice.]</p>

NOTE: As used in this and subsequent tables, “Experience” refers to total years of successful nursing practice rather than experience at current grade level.

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(2) Nurse I Level 2

Scope: Demonstrates integration of biopsychosocial concepts, cognitive skills, and technically competent practice in providing care to clients with basic or complex needs.

NURSE I LEVEL 2

EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE	DIMENSION REQUIREMENTS
Associate Degree or Diploma in Nursing	Approx. 1 year	<p>[PRACTICE</p> <p>1. Practice: Demonstrates competency using the nursing process in providing care for clients. Directs others who provide care.</p> <p>2. Ethics: Assumes responsibility and accountability for individual nursing judgments and actions. Acts as a client advocate.</p>
(OR)		
Associate Degree or Diploma in Nursing and bachelors degree in a related field	None	<p>3. Resource Utilization: Plans and organizes care based on client needs and provider competencies to assure safe, efficient and cost-effective care.</p> <p>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>1. Education/Career Development: Seeks knowledge and skills appropriate to the practice setting to improve performance</p> <p>2. Performance: Incorporates feedback regarding performance and interpersonal skills to enhance professional development. Participates in the performance evaluations of others.</p>
(OR)		
Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)	None	<p>COLLABORATION</p> <p>1. Collaboration: Participates effectively on teams to plan and manage client care.</p> <p>2. Collegiality: Shares knowledge/skills with colleagues/others.</p> <p>SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY</p> <p>1. Quality of Care: Uses quality improvement findings to guide and direct own practice.</p> <p>2. Research: Demonstrates awareness of research application to practice.]</p>

(3) Nurse I Level 3

Scope: Demonstrates proficiency in practice based on conscious *and* deliberate planning. Self-directed in goal setting for managing complex client situations.

NURSE I LEVEL 3

EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE	DIMENSION REQUIREMENTS
Associate Degree or Diploma in Nursing	Approximately 2-3 years	<p>[PRACTICE]</p> <p>1. Practice: Demonstrates proficiency using the nursing process in providing care for clients with complex nursing care needs. Guides and directs others who provide care.</p> <p>2. Ethics: Identifies ethical issues in practice and takes appropriate action.</p> <p>3. Resource Utilization: Delegates care in a safe, efficient, and cost-effective manner. Assists clients in identifying and securing appropriate services.</p>
(OR) Associate Degree or Diploma in Nursing and bachelors degree in a related field.	Approximately 1-2 years	<p>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>1. Education/Career Development: Implements an ongoing educational plan to support own professional development.</p> <p>2. Performance: Conducts self-assessment of performance and identifies own learning needs. Assesses performance of others.</p>
(OR) BSN	Approximately 1-2 years	<p>COLLABORATION</p> <p>1. Collaboration: Refers to, consults with, and makes provision for continuity of care with other health care providers.</p> <p>2. Collegiality: Provides feedback regarding the practice of others to improve client care.</p>
(OR) Master’s degree in nursing or related field with a BSN or bachelor’s degree in a related field. [If MSN obtained in a Bridge Program, no BSN required.]	None	<p>SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY</p> <p>1. Quality of Care: Participates in established quality improvement studies and/or activities.</p> <p>2. Research: Uses a body of research to validate and/or change own professional practice.]</p>

NOTE: Employees at Nurse I must successfully advance through each level of the grade before being promoted to Nurse II

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(4) Nurse II

Scope: Demonstrates leadership in delivering and improving holistic care through collaborative strategies with others.

NURSE II

EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE	DIMENSION REQUIREMENTS
BSN (OR) Associate Degree or Diploma in Nursing and bachelors degree in a related field (OR)	Approximately 2-3 years Approximately 2-3 years	<p>[PRACTICE]</p> <p>1. Practice: Applies the nursing process to systems or processes at the unit/team/work group level to improve care. Demonstrates leadership by involving others in improving care.</p> <p>2. Ethics: Supports and enhances client self-determination. Serves as a resource for clients and staff in addressing ethical issues.</p> <p>3. Resource Utilization: Identifies and assesses resource utilization and safety issues, taking appropriate action.</p>
Master’s degree in nursing or related field with BSN or bachelor’s degree in a related field. [If MSN obtained in a Bridge Program, no BSN required.]	Approximately 1-2 years	<p>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>1. Education/Career Development: Acquires knowledge and skills to maintain expertise in area of practice. Participates in educational activities to improve clinical knowledge and enhance role performance.</p> <p>2. Performance: Evaluates practice of self and others using professional standards, relevant statutes, and regulations. Takes action to improve performance.</p>
(OR) Doctoral degree in nursing or meets basic requirements for appointment and has doctoral degree in related field.	None	<p>COLLABORATION</p> <p>1. Collaboration: Uses group process to identify, analyze, and resolve care problems.</p> <p>2. Collegiality: Educates colleagues and/or students and serves as a preceptor and/or mentor.</p> <p>SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY</p> <p>1. Quality of Care: Initiates/participates in quality improvement activities that result in approved outcomes.</p> <p>2. Research: Uses a body of research to validate and/or change work group practice.]</p>

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NOTE: *Nurse III must demonstrate performance and leadership that is broad enough to improve the care for a group of patients. The Nurse III is responsible for the documented outcomes at the program or service level. Program or service level outcomes must be broad and complex and can be demonstrated at any organizational level within a facility, VISN, or VACO.*

In order to be considered for appointment or promotion to Nurse III, outcomes must be documented. Meeting the Practice dimension involves incorporating and implementing the requirements of the other qualification standards, including:

- (a) Leading and organizing delivery of care to assure continuity of care and peer accountability for practice, including access to care and discharge planning.
- (b) Using advanced clinical knowledge/judgment to promote staff involvement in planning, decision-making and evaluating outcomes.
- (c) Functioning as an expert in clinical practice and/or in areas related to the assigned roles and responsibilities.
- (d) Systematically evaluating current practice, and formulating outcomes for groups of patients and/or organizational processes within area of expertise.
- (e) Guiding, developing and supporting staff from a leadership perspective.
- (f) Using professional standards of care, scientific evidence and practice to evaluate programs and/or service activities.

(6) Nurse IV

Scope: Executes leadership that is characterized by substantial and continuous responsibility and accountability for population groups or integrated programs that cross service and/or discipline lines and influence organizational mission and health care.

NURSE IV

EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE	DIMENSION REQUIREMENTS
<p>Master's degree in nursing or related field with BSN</p> <p>[If MSN obtained in a Bridge Program, no BSN required.]</p>	<p>Approximately 4-5 years</p>	<p>[PRACTICE]</p> <p>1. Practice: Uses an analytical framework, such as the nursing process, to create an environment that facilitates the delivery of care. Coordinates and evaluates integrated programs or demonstrates clinical excellence in management of population groups.</p> <p>2. Ethics: Provides leadership in addressing ethical issues that impact clients and staff in or beyond the organization and the local health care community.</p> <p>3. Resource Utilization: Designs, modifies, and implements systems compatible with professional standards and with the mission and goals of the organization to improve the cost-effective use of resources.</p>
<p>(OR)</p>		<p>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p>
<p>Doctoral degree in nursing or related field</p> <p>(AND)</p>	<p>Approximately 3-4 years</p>	<p>1. Education/Career Development: Develops staff for career progression. Forecasts new knowledge needs for changing practice environments/population groups. Plans, implements, and evaluates strategies to meet those needs.</p> <p>2. Performance: Implements standards of professional practice and accrediting bodies, and applicable regulations.</p>
<p>Appropriate basic or advanced certification desired</p>		<p>COLLABORATION</p> <p>1. Collaboration: Demonstrates leadership in developing productive working relationships with groups in other programs, services, academic settings, and community agencies</p> <p>2. Collegiality: Contributes to the professional growth and development of colleagues and other health care providers at the local, regional, state, or national level.</p> <p>SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY</p> <p>1. Quality of Care: Provides leadership in improving and sustaining the quality and effectiveness of care in diverse or complex programs.</p> <p>2. Research: Collaborates with staff, other disciplines, faculty, and peers in developing, conducting, and evaluating research activities and programs.]</p>

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(7) Nurse V

Scope: Practice of an executive nature, comprised of complex leadership and administrative components, associated with critical health care issues and activities that influence the organizational mission, health care, and policy.

NURSE V

EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE	DIMENSION REQUIREMENTS
Master's degree in nursing or related field with BSN [or a Bachelors degree in a related field If MSN obtained in a Bridge Program, no BSN required.]	Approximately 5-6 years	<p>[PRACTICE]</p> <p>1. Practice: Collaborates with health care executives in creating the organizational mission and vision. Directs the integration of nursing or nursing related activities in the mutual development and achievement of organizational goals.</p> <p>2. Ethics: Advocates for ethical decision-making on behalf of the public and staff. Develops an environment for ethical decision-making at the organization/system level.</p> <p>3. Resource Utilization: Develops resource utilization strategies to improve organizational performance. Strategies reflect the changing societal and health care environments and the economic climate.</p>
<p>(OR)</p>	Approximately 4-5 years	<p>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>1. Education/Career Development: Mentors others in executive leadership positions. Forecasts knowledge needs for complex multi-system change</p> <p>2. Performance: Develops policy related to professional practice and relevant statutes and regulations on community, regional, and/or national levels.</p>
<p>(AND)</p>	Appropriate basic or advanced certification desired	<p>COLLABORATION</p> <p>1. Collaboration: Collaborates with other executives for strategic planning, decision-making, and problem solving about health care services and organizational priorities.</p> <p>2. Collegiality: Serves as an expert to communicate nursing and health care trends and issues at the local, regional, state, and/or national level.</p>
		<p>SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY</p> <p>1. Quality of Care: Improves the quality and effectiveness of the facility's overall health care program by providing leadership, coordinating, and facilitating the evaluation and improvement of a wide range of programs. Excellence is reflected in improved client outcomes and organizational performance.</p> <p>2. Research: Promotes an environment that supports the conduct and utilization of research in practice and a spirit of inquiry.]</p>

d. Deviations

(1) **Waiver of NLNAC or CCNE Accreditation Requirement.** The approving official may authorize a waiver of the requirement for NLNAC or CCNE accreditation of any degree in nursing provided the college or university has regional accreditation or was State approved at the time of the candidate's graduation and the composite qualifications of the applicant warrant such consideration. Waivers at the doctoral level are not required; however, the program must be regionally accredited at the time of the candidate's graduation.

(2) **Waiver of Experience and/or Degree Requirements.** The approving official may authorize a waiver of experience and/or the degree requirements for individuals whose professional accomplishments, performance, and qualifications warrant such consideration based on demonstrated ability to meet the requirements for promotion to the next higher grade or advancement to a higher level within the grade. Waivers of degree requirements are not authorized for appointments. Waivers of degree requirements are also not authorized for Nurse IV and Nurse V.

[NOTE: An RN is eligible for a waiver of one degree only. Waivers of two degrees are not authorized. Once an employee has obtained the degree that was initially waived they may be considered for waiver of another degree. For example: An Associate Degree prepared nurse receives an educational waiver of the bachelor's degree for promotion to Nurse II. The nurse then earns a bachelor's degree and is seeking promotion to Nurse III. If the nurse has met all of the dimension requirements as outlined in this qualification standard and all conditions for promotion are met in accordance with the qualification standard, an education waiver of the Master's degree would be considered.]