

How Does SARA Support & Protect Student Consumers?

NC-SARA operates as a collaborative partner to the triad of organizations – states, the federal government, and accreditors – that oversee higher education in the United States. The organization was established to help expand students' access to educational opportunities and ensure more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance education programs; student consumer protections and quality assurance oversight are a central area of focus in its work.

Two critical components of NC-SARA's [mission](#) are (1) to assure students are well-served in a rapidly changing education landscape, and (2) to increase the quality and value of higher education credentials earned through distance education programs. To do so, SARA-participating institutions and member states must meet certain requirements – many of which are focused on ensuring appropriate [consumer protections for students](#).

[Don't miss Part I and Part II in this series – "What is SARA & Why Does it Matter?" and "What is NC-SARA?"](#)

[Outside of SARA, do all states and institutions have standard consumer protections in place for higher education students?](#)

Outside of SARA, it is up to each state to establish its own standards around postsecondary regulations and consumer protections. However, only about half of the states have established distance education regulations to help assure quality, and only one-third of states require institutions to be accredited by a recognized accrediting body.

When states join SARA, though, they agree to follow a uniform set of policies for approving their eligible institutions' participation and ensuring ongoing compliance. In the majority of states, SARA's policies provide even greater consumer protections than home state protections do. SARA's policies help protect students and provide benefits to both states and institutions carrying out distance education across 49 member states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

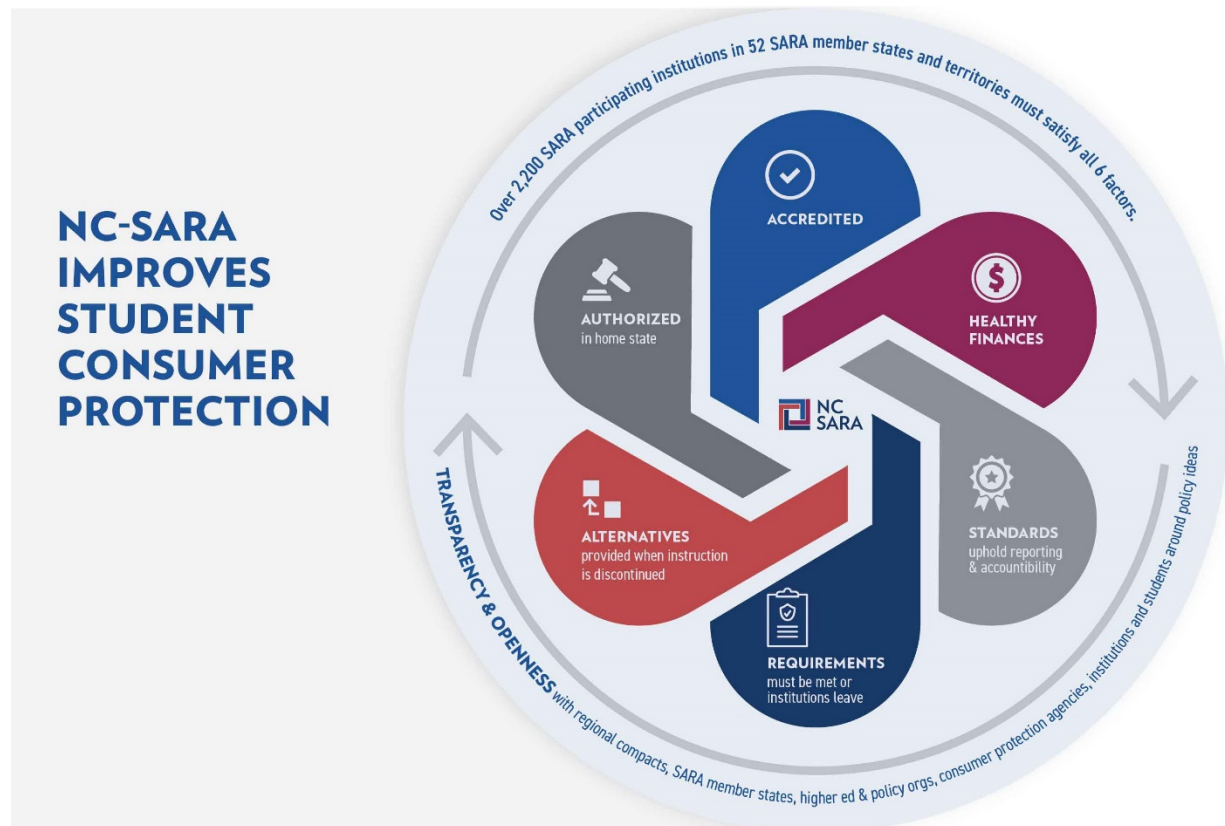
What is a SARA State Portal Entity, and how do they support student consumer protections?

Each SARA member state must designate a State Portal Entity (SPE) that oversees SARA-participating institutions in that state. [Learn more and find State Portal Entity contact information.](#)

Most importantly, SPEs conduct oversight of institutions to help ensure institutions' ongoing compliance with key consumer protections. They oversee SARA-related student complaints, and serve as a resource for students who have questions or concerns. SPEs also liaise between institutions, [regional compacts](#), other SARA member states, the state SARA council (if applicable), students, and other stakeholders. About 70% of SPEs are also the staff who provide state authorization of institutions in their states, and many others formerly held this role.

How has SARA helped improve student consumer protections?

Because nearly all of the U.S. states, territories, and districts are SARA members, and well more than half of eligible colleges and universities in the country participate in the agreements, overall consumer protections for distance education students have been improved.



Click the image above to view more detail about SARA student consumer protections.

Key SARA Student Consumer Protections mean that all SARA institutions must:

- Be accredited and in good standing with their accreditors.
- Hold authorization in their home state.
- Demonstrate healthy finances.
- Be accountable for third-party providers.
- Uphold stringent reporting and accountability requirements.
- Demonstrate transparency around professional licensure.
- Provide the program promised or otherwise compensate students.
- Agree to elevate unresolved student complaints.

To participate in SARA, compliance with [all SARA policies](#) is non-negotiable.

**To learn more about SARA and student consumer protections, visit
www.nc-sara.org**