



National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 | **Introduction: A Message from NC-SARA's Interim President**
A letter from Dr. Marianne Boeke
- 4 | **About NC-SARA**
- 5 | **2023 Spotlight**
The New SARA Policy Modification Process
- 7 | **By the Numbers**
Our reach, impact, and scale
- 8 | **NC-SARA's Board Of Directors**
Essential Leaders
- 9 | **Regional Compact Partners**
Impactful Partners
- 10 | **NC-SARA's Stakeholder Groups**
Engagement and Collaboration
- 11 | **Financial Summary**
A high-level overview of NC-SARA's financials

INTRODUCTION: A MESSAGE FROM OUR INTERIM PRESIDENT

Dear Friend of NC-SARA,

Thank you for your interest in the 2023 Annual Report from the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). It's my great honor, as NC-SARA's Interim President, to introduce this report during a year of change for NC-SARA.

I am happy to share a few of the significant accomplishments of our entire SARA community over this past year as NC-SARA has continued to recommit to our core work of supporting SARA state members, State Portal Entity staff, regional compacts, and SARA-participating institutions in the important work of protecting student consumers while expanding students' access to quality distance educational opportunities.

As you will read in this report, 2022-2023 not only marked a year of renewed commitment to our mission, but also provided a year of continued service to SARA member states and participating institutions. In the last year, NC-SARA and the SARA community led several important initiatives, which you can read more about in this report, including:

- Launching the new SARA Policy Modification Process to allow for engagement and transparency in the continuous improvement of SARA;

- Furthering NC-SARA Board's development, including the creation of several new important board committees designed to lead NC-SARA into the future;
- Completing NC-SARA's three-year strategic plan and, in working with the board's new Strategy Committee, beginning the process for developing its next one.

The last year tells NC-SARA's continuing story of the increased need for and numerous essential partnerships involved in building a stronger and better infrastructure for students and institutions involved in interstate distance education.

The staff and I are immensely grateful for everyone's support, hard work, and commitment to this mission and to SARA.



Sincerely,
Marianne Boeke, Ph.D.
Interim President
NC-SARA

ABOUT NC-SARA

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a private nonprofit organization [501(c)(3)] that helps expand students' access to educational opportunities and ensure more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance education programs.

Recognizing the growing demand for distance education opportunities, higher education stakeholders – including state regulators and education leaders, accreditors, the U.S. Department of Education, and institutions – joined together in 2013 to establish

the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA), which streamline regulations around distance education programs. The first state joined in 2014; SARA is almost 10 years old!

In partnership with four regional compacts, NC-SARA helps states, institutions, policymakers, and students understand the purpose and benefits of participating in SARA. Today, almost 2,400 institutions in 49 member states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands all voluntarily participate in SARA.



NC-SARA'S MISSION



To provide **broad access** to postsecondary education opportunities to students across the country;



To increase the **quality and value of higher learning credentials** earned via distance education; and



To assure **students are well served** in a rapidly changing education landscape.

THE 2023 SARA POLICY MODIFICATION PROCESS



SARA—the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements—provides a streamlined, reciprocity-based process for participating postsecondary institutions to gain approval to offer interstate distance education in SARA member states without individually applying to each state for such approval, subject to certain limitations. SARA centralizes the authorization process for each SARA-participating institution in a single state that SARA calls the institution’s “home state.” Institutions approved by their states to participate in SARA must be appropriately accredited and meet academic and financial requirements designed to protect and benefit students.

The *SARA Policy Manual* is the authoritative source of the policies and procedures employed to implement the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements.

In June 2022, the NC-SARA Board adopted a revised process for making changes to SARA Policy: the SARA Policy Modification Process. This process was launched in January 2023 and reflects the following guiding principles: transparency; collaboration; consistency; and clear and open communication among regional compacts, states, institutions, NC-SARA, and other stakeholders.

2023 SPOTLIGHT

Transparency, Collaboration, and Consistency

In 2023, 63 policy modifications were proposed and will be evaluated based on SARA’s fundamental reliance on interstate reciprocity and trust, and on the fundamental purposes of SARA, which are to support high quality distance education, resolve problems encountered by students, and simplify and support the interstate offering of distance education using a model under which an institution’s home state is primarily responsible for what the institution offers under the aegis of SARA.

Other guiding principles for the review, clarification and modification of SARA Policy include:

- Ensuring strong and appropriate consumer protections for students attending SARA-participating institutions;
- Allowing for broad consultation with key stakeholders;
- Maintaining consistency in policy and procedures;
- Ensuring transparency and openness; and
- Being responsive to stakeholders and emerging policy issues.

WHO’S BEEN INVOLVED?

More than 50 individuals—including Regional Compact staff, Regional Steering Committee leadership, SARA State Portal Entities, and NC-SARA staff—have been involved in the design and implementation of the SARA Policy Modification Process. This national team

MODIFICATION PROCESS (cont'd)

has provided the leadership to build this process and system collaboratively in order to meet a variety of stakeholder's needs. If you are with a state or participating institution, please contact Regional Compact SARA Directors for information about who from your state or region has been involved with the SARA Policy Modification Process.

REGIONAL COMPACT REVIEW PROCESSES

Per the SARA Policy Manual, Section 8.2, each Regional Compact has adopted and published a transparent process for their review (with their respective Regional Steering Committees) of proposed SARA Policy modifications.

STAY TUNED!

Proposed policy modifications that are approved by each of the four Regional Compacts shall be placed on the agenda of the Fall 2023 NC-SARA Board meeting. NC-SARA's Board shall then review and vote to approve or not approve proposed policy modifications.



BY THE NUMBERS

Our reach, impact, and scale

STATES

52

states, territories, and districts are voluntary members of SARA

100+

SARA State Portal Entity staff administer SARA across the states

INSTITUTIONS

2,350+

institutions participate in SARA

48%

of SARA-participating institutions are public; 45% are private non-profit; 7% are private for-profit

STUDENTS

372,040

students from SARA-participating institutions participated in out-of-state learning placements in 2022 (source: NC-SARA's most recent Annual Data Report)

1,500,912

students attended out-of-state SARA-participating institutions exclusively via distance education through SARA in Fall 2022. This excludes students from CA and other non-SARA members, as well as students attending an institution in-state

SARA POLICY MODIFICATION PROPOSALS

63

SARA Policy modification proposals were submitted by February 3, 2023

300+

people viewed the two SARA Policy Public Forums

4

regional compacts are in partnership with NC-SARA to advance the mission of expanding students' access to educational opportunities and ensuring more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance education programs

50+

people participate in SARA Regional Steering Committees nationally

3

proposals from WCET/SAN

1

proposal from NC-SARA Board Working Group

9

proposals from institutions

10

proposals jointly from The Century Foundation/Other Organizations

40

proposals from Regional Steering Committees (RSC)/Regional Compacts

BOARD MEMBERS

19

national leaders with expertise in higher education and state policy serve on NC-SARA's Board

NC-SARA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Learn about the essential
leaders that make SARA work



The NC-SARA Board of Directors includes the chief executive officers of the four regional compacts, as well as leaders from states, institutions, accreditors, and other higher educational organizations and associations, to assure that the perspectives of all stakeholder groups are represented, while keeping the board small enough to be workable and effective. The NC-SARA Board is a fully committed and engaged group of leaders who serve to advance the mission and strategic direction of the organization. This past year, the Board has worked to further mature its structure and governance, including creating three new Board committees and one task force designed to support even more effective decision-making and organizational leadership.

New Board Committees

The Governance and Nominations Committee

The Governance and Nominations Committee assists the Board of Directors of NC-SARA to fulfill its responsibilities regarding matters that relate to governing the organization and in identifying and making recommendations to the board candidates to be Board Directors.

The Policy Committee

The Policy Committee will support the NC-SARA Board of Directors by serving as the policy specialists who are committed to understanding SARA policy proposals and advising the full board consistent with the policy process outlined in the SARA Policy Manual. The Policy Committee will also serve as the lead resource for helping the Board set a strategy with respect to federal policy as it pertains to reciprocity.

The Strategy Committee

The Strategy Committee shall assist the Board of Directors in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities related to the NC-SARA strategy consistent with the board's long-term goals. The Strategy Committee shall review the development of strategy and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of any planning documents and make recommendations to the board.

The Consumer Protection Task Force

The Consumer Protection Task Force will support the NC-SARA Board of Directors in ensuring that the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA) includes robust and effective consumer protection mechanisms.

Learn more about the Board members and committee appointments on the [NC-SARA Board webpage](#).

REGIONAL COMPACT PARTNERS

Learn about the impactful partners
that help make SARA work



NC-SARA works collaboratively with leadership from each of the four regional education compacts in support of our shared goal to expand quality distance education options across state lines.

Each regional compact provides staff devoted to supporting SARA and leading the shared work of SARA implementation. Regional compacts provide on-the-ground assistance to and oversight of the states and institutions in their respective regions.

Midwestern Higher Education Compact

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact brings together Midwestern states to develop and support best practices, collaborative efforts, and cost-sharing opportunities. Through these efforts it works to ensure strong, equitable postsecondary educational opportunities and outcomes for all.

New England Board of Higher Education

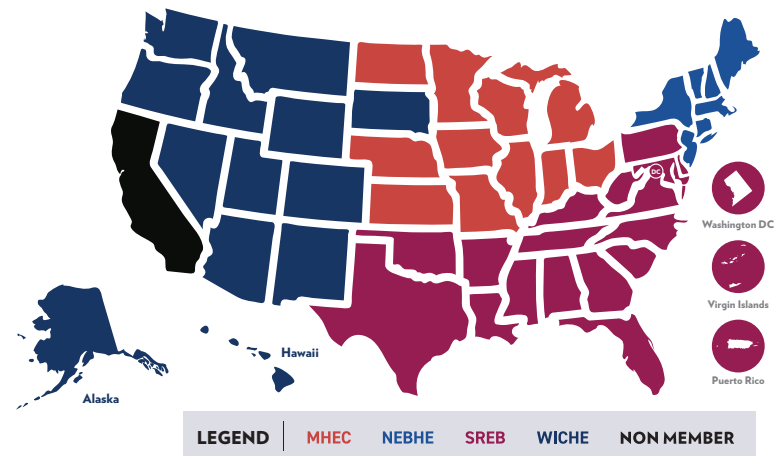
The New England Board of Higher Education promotes greater educational opportunities and services for the residents of New England. It works across the six New England states to engage and assist leaders in the assessment, development, and implementation of sound education practices and policies of regional significance; promote policies, programs, and best practices to assist the states in implementing important regional higher education policies; promote regional cooperation and programs that encourage the efficient use and sharing of educational resources; and provide leadership to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the economic well-being of New England.

Southern Regional Education Board

The Southern Regional Education Board works with 16 member states to improve public education at every level, from pre-K through Ph.D. SREB is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Atlanta.

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and its 16 members work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life. WICHE programs—Student Exchange, the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies, Policy Analysis and Research, and Mental Health—work to find answers to critical questions facing higher education today.



NC-SARA'S STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Engagement & Collaboration

STATES

NC-SARA regularly works with state regulators and policymakers responsible for overseeing distance education in postsecondary institutions. Enhancing these efforts remains a top priority.

HIGHER EDUCATION AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

NC-SARA has an active partnership with many higher education agencies and organizations, including:

- American Council on Education
- Competency-Based Education Network
- Council of College and Military Educators
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation
- Council of State Governments
- Credential Engine
- Lightcast
- National Association of State Administrators & Supervisors of Private Schools
- National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
- National Conference of State Legislatures
- Online Learning Consortium
- Presidents' Forum
- Quality Matters
- State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
- United States Distance Learning Association
- University Professional and Continuing Education Association
- WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies / State Authorization Network
- And many others

STUDENT CONSUMER PROTECTION GROUPS

We are hopeful that our shared commitments to student consumer protections will continue to provide a strong foundation for future collaboration.

REGIONAL COMPACTS

As always, our work with the regional compacts is essential. MHEC, SREB, NEBHE, and WICHE are important partners in administering SARA in their regions and expanding distance education opportunities across state lines.

ACCREDITORS

NC-SARA recognizes and supports the value that accreditors provide to the public regarding distance education quality assurance. We rely on the accreditors to support quality, and we regularly identify avenues to seek their partnership and guidance on initiatives.

STUDENTS

Ultimately, SARA is focused on serving 21st century learners by providing easier access to quality distance education. Whether through interstate distance education opportunities or out-of-state learning placements, the consistent set of student consumer protections provided through SARA reassures learners that their SARA-participating institution has met several requirements to help ensure a quality learning experience.

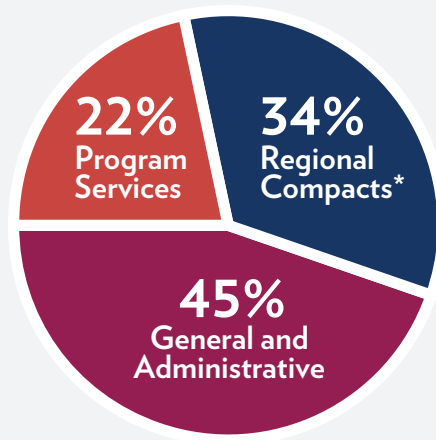
INSTITUTIONS

NC-SARA supports almost 2,400 institutions that participate in SARA through our communications, resources, and regular engagement with SARA member states and regional compacts.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Our work is made possible by annual fees (\$2,000-\$6,000 annually depending upon enrollment) paid by institutions that wish to voluntarily participate in SARA. Since the founding of NC-SARA in 2013, institution fees have never increased and we have never charged fees to states to be members.

NC-SARA EXPENSES



**Includes funds toward compact reserves.*

In the fiscal year July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023, NC-SARA's total income was \$7.7 million. A high-level overview of how these funds have been used to support the work of SARA and our dedicated partners is provided below.

REGIONAL COMPACTS

- Supports the on-the-ground efforts of the four regional compacts as they administer SARA in their regions and engage with member states and participating institutions. Funding also provides compacts with resources to support SARA-dedicated staff.

PROGRAM SERVICES AND GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

- Funds NC-SARA engagement with higher education and distance learning stakeholders through conferences and webinars.
- Supports educational programming and training for SARA State Portal Entities and SARA institutions.
- Supports research, data collection, and reporting efforts.
- Funds resource development, such as the State Authorization Guide and Professional Licensure Directory.
- Funds communications activities and general administration of NC-SARA.



2024 WILL BE SARA'S 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY!

Stay tuned to learn about
the SARA community's
celebratory activities!



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