



Pennsylvania
Department of Education

Welcome to the **2026 Annual PA-SARA State Meeting**

Thursday, June 25, 2026

The meeting will begin shortly.



Today's Agenda

Time	Topic	Presenter
11:00 a.m. - 11:05 a.m.	Welcome & Introductions	Jenny Piper
11:05 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	PDE & PA SARA Updates	Jennifer Stone
11:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	The Operational Reality of Distance Education Compliance: Insights on Licensure and Federal Requirements	Kathryn Kerensky, State Authorization Network (SAN)
12:00 p.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Break for Lunch (Return promptly at 12:30 PM for our afternoon panel!)	
12:30 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Best Practices for Professional Licensure – Panel Discussion	Jenny Piper Mark Prestopnik Dr. Carl J. Sheperis
1:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Handling Student Complaints	Jennifer Stone
1:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Questions & Closing Remarks	

- **Presentation slides and shared resources are available at [Pennsylvania SARA Website](#).**
- **Please use the Q & A feature for questions.**

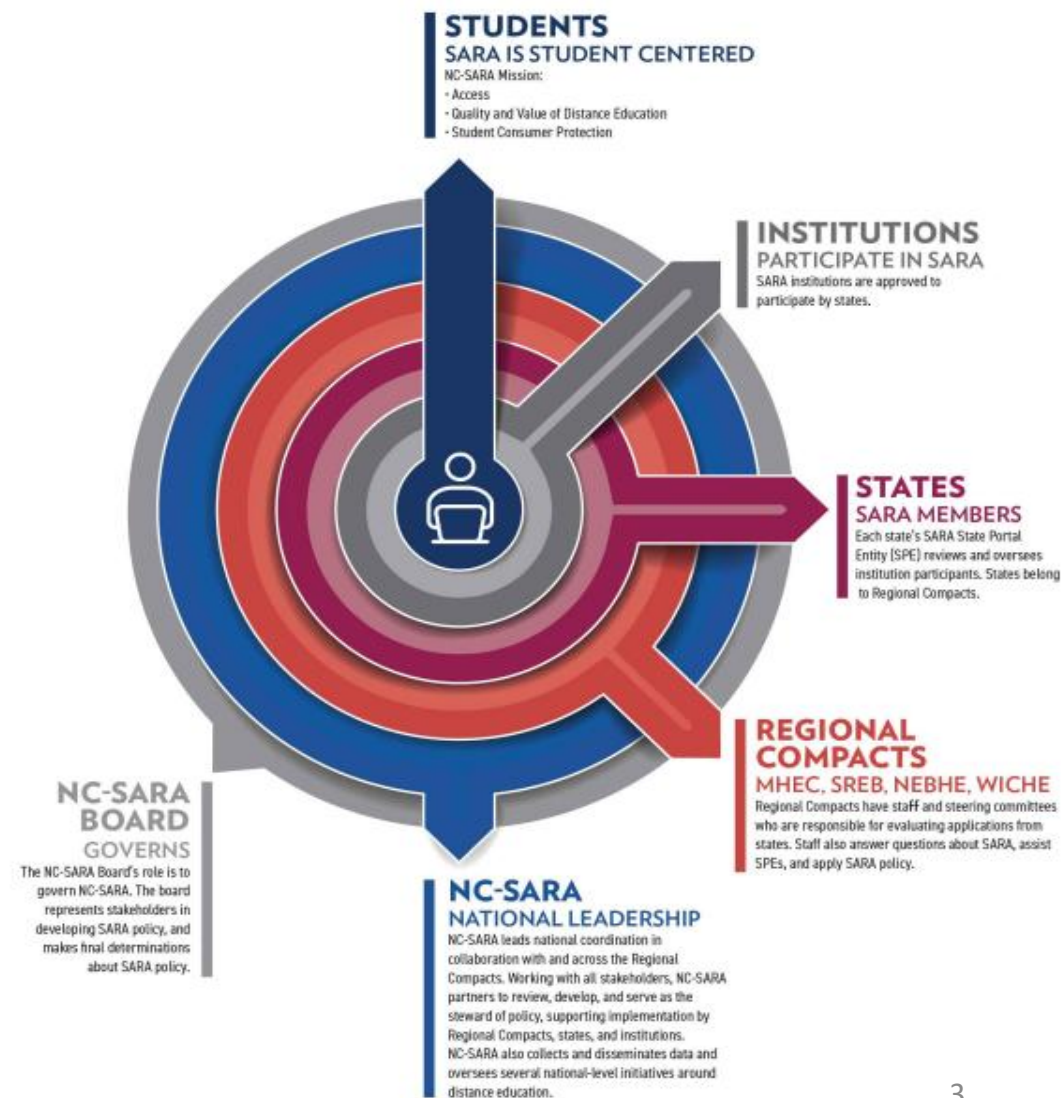


Overview of SARA

NC-SARA - The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements is a private nonprofit **organization**

SARA - State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement is the **agreement**

- Voluntary agreement
- Comparable standards for interstate distance education
- Accredited degree-granting institutions
- The goal is to simplify access to out-of-state online education





History of SARA in PA

- Act 35 of 2016 was passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Tom Wolf on June 1, 2016.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) joined SARA in Fall 2016 and was designated by Act 35 as the SARA State Portal Entity (SPE).
- To be a participating state in SARA, the state must belong to or be affiliated with a regional compact. Pennsylvania is affiliated with the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB).
- In 2016, 50 institutions applied and were approved to participate in SARA. As of today, there are 118 institutions within PA that participate in SARA.
- Pennsylvania, as the SPE, must also continue to reapply to be a participating state of the program. Each SPE has designated a SARA contact(s) to oversee its SARA participating institutions.
- PA continues to meet the necessary standards for being the State Portal Entity and was renewed in October 2024.



Annual Renewal – Institution Application Process

A 90-day reminder email will be sent from NC-SARA and SPE

1. Submit the PA fee.
2. Submit renewal materials to SPE contact.
3. Await a confirmation email with invoice from NC-SARA.
4. Pay NC-SARA invoice prior to renewal date.



Annual Institutional Renewal

1. Submit the PA fee.

- Payments must be made electronically (ACH or credit card) through PA QuickPay.
- Include the payment receipt with the PA Supplement Form.

Distance Education Tuition Revenue	Fee
New & Renewal Member Application – Tuition Revenue \$0 – 9,999	\$1,000
New & Renewal Member Application – Tuition Revenue \$10K – 5M	\$2,000
New & Renewal Member Application – Tuition Revenue \$5M – 20M	\$3,000
New & Renewal Member Application – Tuition Revenue \$20M – 40M	\$5,000
New & Renewal Member Application – Tuition Revenue ≥ \$40M	\$7,000

Two fees due annually:

1. PA Fee
2. NC-SARA fee



Annual Institutional Renewal cont.

2. Email renewal materials to SPE 60 days before renewal date.

- **SARA Institutional Renewal Application**
 - Accreditation verification
 - Composite score
- **PA Supplement Form**
 - PA Fee payment receipt
 - Definition of “Distance Education Student”
 - Verification of distance education tuition
 - Teach out plan in the event of catastrophic closure

Embed supporting documents in PDF or attach to submission email



Annual Institutional Renewal cont.

3. Await a congratulations email, including an invoice for NC-SARA payment.

4. Pay NC-SARA Fee.

- After renewal forms and documents have been received and processed by PDE, institutions must pay the NC-SARA fee.
- **NC-SARA fee must be paid before the institution's renewal due date.**

Renewal application process is **not complete until this fee is paid**



PA - SARA Updates

- Policy Modification Process
- Update to NC-SARA Application (07.01.26)
- State Meeting Survey Results
- 2027 PA-SARA State Meeting

In Process:

- Proposed change of PA fee to be based on an institution's total full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment as submitted to the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) each fall as 12-month FTE enrollment. Institutions that do not report to IPEDS use IPEDS' methodology.



PDE Updates

- On April 7th over 200 colleagues convened in Harrisburg for the annual PA Empower U convening.
- For the FY 2025-26 PDE awarded 84 grants totaling over \$4.3M.
- Work Force Pell is in full swing with a dedicated committee evaluating the applicant schools/programs.
- PDE/Division is in the process of converting all application processes to be web based.



PDE Updates cont.

- PDE/Division staff have attended:
 - 8 accreditation visits
 - 4 statewide conferences, some they also presented at
 - 1 regional SREB conference
 - Many school visits for out-of-state institutions with physical presence in PA



The Operational Reality of Distance Education Compliance: Insights on Licensure and Federal Requirements

Kathryn Kerensky

Director, Digital Learning, Policy and Compliance



<https://wcetsan.wiche.edu/resources/professional-licensure>



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Lunch Break

Please return promptly at 12:30pm



Best Practices for Professional Licensure Panel Discussion

12. Agree to professional licensure disclosures

The institution agrees to provide notifications to students related to professional licensure. Any institution approved to participate in SARA that offers courses or programs designed to lead to professional licensure or certification or advertised as leading to licensure must satisfy all federal requirements for disclosures regarding such professional licensure programs. For SARA purposes, these requirements will also apply to non-Title IV institutions and programs.



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Mark Prestopnik

Director of Online Learning & Strategy
Duquesne University



Dr. Carl J. Sheperis

Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies
Kutztown University



1. How does your institution determine whether its programs meet professional licensure requirements, and what processes work best?



2. What systems, procedures, or plans are in place and used to track and update licensure requirements, and who (what position) maintains them?



3. How are licensure requirements communicated to students, and which methods most effectively support their understanding?



4. When licensure requirements are unclear, where do you turn for guidance and what practices have you found to be most helpful?



5. What advice and instruction would you offer smaller institutions with limited resources?



Handling Student Complaints

13. Agree to provide complaint resolution policies

Institutions shall provide their and SARA's complaint resolution policies and procedures to all students taking courses under SARA policies on the institution's website and in the institution's catalog or equivalent information provided either in print or electronically to students when they enroll.



SARA Complaint Process

Provide clear and accessible information:

- Explicitly state that students must first exhaust the institution's internal grievance procedures before filing a complaint with the state.
- Provide a direct link to or a detailed description of the institution's internal policies and procedures for handling student complaints.
- Provide the contact information for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), which serves as the SARA State Portal Entity.

Include a link direct link to the [PA SARA Student Complaint Process](#).

Pennsylvania Department of Education

Division of Higher Education, Access, and Equity:

607 South Drive, Floor 3E

Harrisburg, PA 17120

Phone: 717-783-6786

Email: RA-HigherEducation@pa.gov



Scope of SARA Complaints

- SARA consumer protection covers issues such as institutional misrepresentation, fraud, and deceptive practices related to recruitment, tuition, and accreditation.
- Exclusions: Complaints regarding grades or student conduct are typically governed by institutional policies and are not handled as a SARA complaint.
- Provide SPE directory link and specific instructions for students in California (the only non-SARA state), directing them to the California Department of Consumer Affairs.



Resources & PDE SARA Contacts

[NC-SARA Policy Manual](#)

[Pennsylvania SARA Website](#)

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Division of Higher Education, Access, and Equity

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Questions & THANK YOU!



The mission of the Department of Education is to ensure that every learner has access to a world-class education system that academically prepares children and adults to succeed as productive citizens. Further, the Department seeks to establish a culture that is committed to improving opportunities throughout the commonwealth by ensuring that technical support, resources, and optimal learning environments are available for all students, whether children or adults.