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Enclosure 8a
February 4, 2015

To: Council on Postsecondary Education
From: Commissioner Jim Purcell, Ed.D. 
Date: January 30, 2015
Subject: Council support of Rhode Island's participation in NC-SARA

Overview

The state public and private colleges and universities are interested in Rhode Island participating in the National Council State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, or NC-SARA. SARA was created in response to a 2010 U.S. Department of Education rule that made each state responsible for authorizing online education offered to its residents from institutions outside the state. This regulation had major implications:

- Institutions of higher education would have to begin expensive and time-consuming processes to request authorizations for each state;
- States faced the prospect of requests from thousands of institutions.

Accreditors, government agencies and higher education organizations have joined together to develop a nationwide reciprocity agreement to address these challenges. The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, or SARA, requires each participating accredited, degree-granting institution be authorized by its home state which then eliminates the need to obtain individual approvals in all of the states where they serve distance education students. Institutions in states participating in SARA are recognized to deliver online offerings in other participating states, which are assured that the programs have been reviewed and approved under the same standards. To participate in SARA, institutions agree to the distance education requirements that all of the regional accreditors now use. An institution's home state is responsible for verifying that the institution meets the requirements and for resolving student issues. A copy of the SARA application is attached for your information.

Currently, eighteen states are approved as SARA states nationally and an additional six are moving toward approval. Of the six New England states, Connecticut introduced legislation to participate, Vermont passed legislation, New Hampshire is an approved SARA state, and Maine and Massachusetts have taken no action.

In order to participate, Rhode Island law and Postsecondary Council policy on distance education will need to be changed. In an effort to encourage the development of legislation which would allow Rhode Island to participate in SARA, the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner is speaking with the state's legislative leaders. The Council is being asked to approve a motion supporting Rhode Island's participation in SARA.

Council motion

Motion

It is recommended –

THAT – the Council on Postsecondary Education affirms its support of the State of Rhode Island and its higher education institutions joining the National Council State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (NC-SARA), recognizing the benefits afforded to Rhode Island students taking online courses and programs, and to Rhode Island institutions of higher education wishing to offer distance education nationally.