

**NUMBERED MEMO CC24-010**

**TO:** NCCCS Presidents

**FROM:** Brian S. Merritt  
Senior Vice President & Chief Academic Officer

**SUBJECT:** Guidance for New Accreditation Process

**DATE:** April 9, 2024

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Session Law 2023-132 prohibits NCCCS constituent institutions from receiving accreditation by an accrediting agency for consecutive accreditation cycles unless the institution does not receive candidacy status at least three years prior to the expiration of its current accreditation. This law, coupled with U.S. Department of Education regulatory changes that removed geographic boundaries of regional accreditors, creates an opportunity for institutions to seek accreditation from agencies aligned with their mission and goals.

As such, the NCCCS System Office, in conjunction with the UNC System Office, issued a joint [Request for Information \(RFI\)](#) to regional accrediting agencies to determine whether these agencies are willing to accredit North Carolina's institutions of higher education at this time.

This memo, along with the accreditation toolkit that has been created for NCCCS institutions, serves to inform you of the accrediting agencies' responses. These resources are now available at the following URL:  
<https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/institutional-accreditation/>

As you will read in the Matrix of Responses to RFI located on the above website, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and Middle States Commission on Higher Education (Middle States) both indicated that they are willing to accept accreditation applications from North Carolina's institutions of higher education. Their detailed responses to our RFI are attached. The other regional accreditation agencies specified the conditions that would need to be met in order for them to consider North Carolina institutions in the future.

Before switching accrediting agencies, institutions must first submit to the U.S. Department of Education all materials relating to the prior accreditation and materials demonstrating reasonable cause for the change. Institutions must also indicate the proposed new accrediting agency and include a rationale for their selection. Institutions must receive approval from the United States Department of Education prior to submitting an application to the new accrediting agency. Included on the NCCCS Institutional Accreditation webpage, please find the following documents that will assist with that process:

- ED letter to accreditors regarding voluntary requirements
- ED letter (GEN-22-10) Guidance for Institutions Seeking to Change or Add Accrediting Agencies
- ED letter (GEN-22-11) Procedures for Institutions Seeking Approval of a Request to Change or Add Accrediting Agencies (Updated Sept. 26, 2022)
- Summary matrix of responses to the RFI
- Accreditation Slide Deck that may be helpful to present to your local boards, employees, etc.
- Link to Session Law 2023-132

#### Next Steps:

- Review the RFI responses and begin to identify which agency best aligns with institutional missions and goals.
  - o In order to monitor statutory compliance, we request you provide a status update by June 30, 2024 by [completing this form](#). For this status update, we are asking colleges to indicate if your institution has identified a preferred agency and, if so, the name of the agency and your timeline for requesting approval from U.S. Department of Education. When applicable, please provide copies of this correspondence.
- Please submit applications no later than 60 months prior to the end of your institution's current reaffirmation cycle and provide me with a copy of your application for documentation.

As always, please let me know if you need any assistance or have any questions.