



This Bill Analysis reflects the contents of the bill as it was presented in committee.

SENATE BILL 279: Amend Qualifications/Practice of Counseling

2015-2016 General Assembly

Committee:	Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House	Date:	September 9, 2015
Introduced by:	Sen. Barefoot	Prepared by:	Denise Adams
Analysis of:	PCS to Second Edition S279-CSTB-27		Legislative Analyst

SUMMARY: Senate Bill 279 would require that counseling programs in North Carolina be regionally accredited or accredited by an organization recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

The PCS to Senate Bill 279 would (i) change the requirements applicants must meet when applying for licensure as a licensed professional counselor associate and (ii) require local boards of education to address sex trafficking prevention and awareness.

CURRENT LAW and BILL ANALYSIS:

Section 1

Under current law, the Board of Licensed Professional Counselors issues licenses for the practice of counseling to applicants seeking to be a licensed professional counselor associate, a licensed professional counselor, or a licensed professional counselor supervisor. Applicants seeking to be a licensed professional counselor associate must have (i) earned a specified minimum of credit hours of graduate training including a master's degree in counseling or a related field from a regionally accredited institution of higher education and (ii) passed an examination in accordance with rules adopted by the Board.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a higher education membership organization in the United States, with approximately 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities. CHEA is not an accreditation agency, but an organization that recognizes 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is an accreditation agency that accredits master's and doctoral degree programs in counseling and its specialties that are offered by colleges and universities in the United States. Applicants seeking to be a licensed professional counselor associate in North Carolina do not currently have to earn a master's degree from an institution of higher education that is accredited by an organization recognized by CHEA or accredited by CACREP.

Section 1 would divide the licensing requirements for a licensed professional counselor associate into three broad categories, depending upon when an applicant applies for licensure:

1. Applicants who apply for a license on or before March 1, 2016, must have (i) a master's degree from a regionally accredited school or from one accredited by an organization that is recognized by CHEA, (ii) a minimum number of hours as determined by when one enters school, and (iii) passed an exam.

O. Walker Reagan
Director



Research Division
(919) 733-2578

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2. Applicants who apply after March 1, 2016 through June 30, 2022, must have (i) a master's from a regionally accredited school or from one accredited by an organization both recognized by CHEA and accredited by CACREP, (ii) a minimum number of hours as determined by when one enters school, and (ii) passed an exam.
3. Applicants who apply on or after July 1, 2022, must have (i) a master's from an institution accredited by CACREP, (ii) a minimum number of hours, and (iii) passed an exam.

Section 2 would make a conforming change.

Sections 3 and 4

Under current law, each local school administrative unit (LEA) is required to provide a reproductive health and safety education program beginning in the seventh grade. The program covers a variety of instruction, including factual information related to the human reproductive system, the benefits of abstinence until marriage, the risks of sexually transmitted diseases, and awareness of sexual assault and sexual abuse. Materials used in this instruction must be age appropriate for use with students and information conveyed during the instruction must be objective and based on scientific research that is peer reviewed and accepted by professionals and credentialed experts in the field of sexual health education.

Sections 3 and 4 would remove the requirement that information conveyed in instruction must be approved by credentialed experts *in the field of sexual health education*. Section 4 would also require that the reproductive health and safety education program include instruction on sex trafficking prevention and awareness. Each LEA would have to collaborate with outside consultants, including law enforcement with expertise in sex trafficking, to address the threats of sex trafficking and referral protocol for high-risk pupils. Law enforcement agencies, criminal justice agencies, and non-governmental organizations with expertise in sex trafficking would be permitted to provide materials and information.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Sections 1 and 2 become effective October 1, 2015. Sections 3 and 4 are effective when they become law and apply beginning with the 2016-2017 school year.