



OKLAHOMA STATE
DEPARTMENT *of* EDUCATION

Teacher Signing Bonus

Background:

In FY23, the State Board of Education approved 4,437 requests for emergency certification, and 303 new alternative certificates have been issued to teachers. These numbers represent approximately 10 percent of the entire teaching force. The data highlights the teacher shortage plaguing Oklahoma public schools. To address this complex challenge, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) is developing an incentive to recruit new teachers to the profession.

One strong recruiting strategy is to offer signing bonuses to incentivize professionals to the noble profession of teaching. Thus, the OSDE commits to offering new teachers in critical shortage areas significant bonuses.

The OSDE submits an annual application to the U. S. Department of Education (DOE) to identify the teacher shortage areas in Oklahoma. Data shows that Oklahoma is facing serious teacher shortages in pre-kindergarten through third grade classrooms, and pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade special education classrooms. Young children must be provided with high-quality education to support success in later years. Students with disabilities must be provided teachers who are highly skilled in the unique disability related needs of these students to provide a free and appropriate public education.

Through this program, teachers who sign a contract to teach in a critical shortage area in school year 2023-2024 and commit to teaching for five years in an Oklahoma public school will be rewarded financially. These teachers will receive signing bonuses between \$15,000 and \$50,000 based on these criteria:

- Certified teachers new to the profession
- Certified teachers returning to the profession
- Certified teachers moving to Oklahoma from out of state

The bonus structure also includes incentives for PreK-3 and special education teachers who commit to teach in a rural or high-poverty school. Many rural areas and high poverty schools have difficulty recruiting teachers to their communities. Despite challenges these school districts may have, we know high quality teachers make a significant impact on student outcomes.



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Program Highlights:

- Signing bonuses
 - < 3 years of experience: \$15k; or
 - rural or high poverty district: \$20k
 - 3+ years of experience: \$25k; or
 - rural or high poverty district: \$30k
 - 5+ years of experience and teaching in a rural or high poverty district: \$50k
 - 5+ years of experience teaching special education: \$50k
 - Teachers moving to Oklahoma with < 5 years of experience: \$25k;
 - Teachers moving to Oklahoma with 5+ years of experience: \$50k
- Contract stipulations
 - Teachers must commit to teaching five years in a critical shortage area (grades PK-3 or PK-12 special education) in an Oklahoma public school
 - Teachers who leave their teaching position before the five-year period will be required to pay back a pro-rated amount to their districts.
- Eligible teachers
 - New to the profession teachers (with less than 3 years of experience) in grades PK-3 or special education PK-12
 - New to the profession is defined as an individual new to the profession is a certified teacher with less than 3 years of experience
 - Returning certified teachers in grades PK-3 or special education PK-12.
 - Returning certified teacher is defined as an individual who has previously retired or left the profession
 - Out-of-state certified teachers in grades PK-3 or special education PK-12
- Estimate of Impact -
 - Shortage in PreK to 3 - 1500 teachers
 - High estimate (all 50k) - 200 teacher with 10 million
 - Low estimate (all 15k) - 666 teachers with 10 million
 - Shortage in Special Education PK-12 - 400 teachers
 - High estimate (all 50K) - 120 teachers with 6 million
 - Low estimate (all 15k) - 400 teachers with 6 million
- Funding
 - American Rescue Plan federal relief funds
 - IDEA Part B, Other State Level Activities



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Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. Who is eligible?

A. Any teacher certified to teach in grades PK-3 or Special Education who did **not** teach in an Oklahoma public school in the previous school year is eligible.

Q. Is there a limit to how many teachers per district can apply?

A. Depending on the popularity of the program, OSDE may impose a cap of \$150,000 in total signing bonuses awarded per district.

Q. How do teachers apply?

A. Teachers can find a link to the application on the OSDE website.

Q. Who is considered new to the profession?

A. An individual new to the profession is a certified teacher with less than 3 years of experience.

Q. Who is considered a returning teacher?

A. A returning certified teacher is an individual who has previously retired or left the profession.

Q. Which public schools are considered rural or high poverty?

A. For purposes of this program, a high poverty school is one with a free/reduced lunch rate of 50-100%. A rural school is defined by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Q. What if a teacher is not certified to teach in grades PK-3 or Special Education?

A. Teachers will need to obtain certification to teach in grades PK-3 or a Special Education area prior to the 2023-2024 school year to be eligible for the signing bonus.

Q. Why is there a five-year commitment?

A. A five-year commitment is required to ensure long-term success and address the teacher shortage.

Q. What happens if a teacher leaves within the 5 years?

A. If a teacher leaves the profession and/or shortage area before 5 years, districts will be responsible for collecting a pro-rated portion of the funds (20% of the signing bonus per year) from the affected teacher.

Q. What happens if a teacher moves to another district during the five years?

A. If a teacher transfers districts within the five-year period, the receiving district will assume responsibility for collecting the prorated portion of the signing bonus if the teacher does not fulfill the 5-year requirement.



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Q. How does the signing bonus work?

A. After a teacher applies for a signing bonus, applications will be reviewed by the OSDE. Qualified applicants will be determined by order of application. The teacher and the employing district will receive notification from the OSDE with further instructions. Once a district confirms a teacher's employment, which means approval by their local board and a background check has been completed, the district will receive funds from OSDE to transfer to the awarded teacher.

Q. Are the bonuses taxable?

A. Yes.

Q. What types of public schools are eligible?

A. Any public school is eligible although bonus amounts are higher for teachers employed by a rural or high poverty school.

Q. How long will the program last?

A. This program is a one-time effort for the 2023-2024 school year.

Q. Can a teacher quit their current teacher job and reapply for the upcoming school year?

A. No. Current Oklahoma teachers cannot resign and reapply to an Oklahoma school district. Teachers are only eligible for the signing bonus if they did **not** teach in an Oklahoma public school during the 2022-2023 school year.

Q. If a teacher is moving from out of state, will their teaching certification be accepted?

A. If a teacher holds a full teaching credential issued by any state's Department of Education, you are eligible for certification in Oklahoma's most equivalent subject areas. (<https://sde.ok.gov/traditional-path-oklahoma-teacher-certification#otherstate>)

Q. If a teacher was employed by a public school in the 2022-2023 school year but as an emergency certified teacher, are they eligible for the signing bonus?

A. If an emergency certified general education teacher obtains a non-emergency teaching certification to teach in grades PK-3 prior to the 2023-2024 school year and meet other program requirements, then they will be eligible for the signing bonus. They would be considered new to the profession.

If an individual participates in the paraprofessional pathway or boot-camp pathway working toward a master's degree in special education and obtains a provisional special education teaching certificate prior to the 2023-2024 school year and meet the other program requirements, then they will be eligible for the signing bonus. They would be considered new to the profession.