



OKLAHOMA STATE
DEPARTMENT *of* EDUCATION

Teacher Signing Bonus

Updated 08/22/23

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.

Through this signing bonus 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. **Eligible teachers are those who have not been teaching in an Oklahoma public school during the 2022-2023 school year.** Teachers will be eligible to receive signing bonuses between \$15,000 and \$50,000 based on these criteria:

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

The bonus structure also includes incentives for general education teachers of grades PK-3 and special education teachers of grades PK-12 who commit to teaching in a **rural or high-poverty school**. Many rural areas and high poverty schools have difficulty recruiting teachers to their communities. We know high quality teachers in all schools make a significant impact on student outcomes.



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Program Highlights

Eligible Teachers	Years of Experience	Standard Signing Bonus	Elevated Signing Bonus for Teaching in a Rural or High Poverty District
PK-3 rd grade or PK-12 SPED	Less than three years	\$15,000	\$20,000
PK-3 rd grade or PK-12 SPED	Three to four years	\$25,000	\$30,000
PK-3 rd grade	Five or more years	NA	\$50,000
PK-12 th special education	Five or more years	\$50,000	NA
PK – 3 rd grade or PK-12 SPED teachers moving to OK	Less than five years	\$25,000	NA
PK – 3 rd grade or PK-12 SPED teachers moving to OK	Five or more years	\$50,000	NA

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 prorated amount - 20% of the signing bonus per year.

Eligibility

Eligible teachers are those who have *not* been teaching in an Oklahoma public school during the 2022-2023 school year. Eligible teachers must meet one of these criteria:

- New to the teaching profession (with less than 3 years of experience) in grades PK-3 or special education PK-12;
- Returning certified teachers (previously retired or left the profession) in grades PK-3 or special education PK-12; or
- 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) - 160 teachers (10.6% of the 1550-teacher shortage)
 - Low estimate (all 15k) - 533 teachers (35.5% of the 1550-teacher shortage)
- Shortage in Special Education PK-12 - 400 teachers
 - High estimate (all 50K) - 160 teachers (40% of the 400-teacher shortage)
 - Low estimate (all 25k) - 533 teachers (+100% of the 400-teacher shortage)



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Funding

The signing bonus program will be funded with American Rescue Plan federal relief funds and IDEA Part B, Other State Level Activities

Frequently Asked Questions

Eligibility and Definitions

Q. Who is eligible?

A. Any teacher certified to teach in grades PK-3 or Special Education grades PK-12 who did **not** teach in an Oklahoma public school in the 2022-2023 school year is eligible.

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 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. A rural designation for the purposes of the signing bonus program, is based on the percentage of rural school sites within a district. The threshold to be considered “rural” is 75% or more school sites being designated as a rural locale. This data comes from census data that can be found on the following webpage:
<https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/>.

The low income/poverty data comes from the Low-Income report produced by Child Nutrition located here: <https://sde.ok.gov/child-nutrition-documents>. To qualify as low income/high poverty for the purposes of the signing bonus program, the school site must have a ratio of 50%-100% low income.



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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. Can a teacher quit their current teaching position 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](#).

Q. If a teacher worked as a substitute teacher or tutor in a public school during the 2023-2023 school year, are they eligible for the signing bonus if they are certified in general education PK-3 or special education PK-12?

A. Yes. The OSDE encourages certified substitute teachers or tutors to teach full-time in the critical shortage areas.

Q. How long will the program last?

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

Five Year Commitment

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 5 years?

A. If a teacher leaves the profession and/or shortage area before 5 years, they will be required to payback a prorated portion of the signing bonus to the OSDE.

Q. Are there extraordinary circumstances under which a teacher who received a bonus and did not complete the five years of service would not be required to repay?

A. Yes. Extraordinary circumstances include, for example, a serious illness or injury that prevented the teacher from working, acts of nature that would similarly prevent the teacher from working, or military orders for the teacher or their spouse that might prevent the teacher from continuing to teach in a particular LEA.



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Q. If a teacher moves to another state in which incentives are also available prior to the end of the 5-year commitment will they be required to pay back the funds?

A. Yes

Payment

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.

Q. Are the bonuses taxable?

A. Yes.

Q. Are the signing bonuses paid directly to teachers or to the districts to pass through to teachers in payroll procedures?

A. The bonuses will be paid directly to teachers by the OSDE through OSDE payroll.

Q. Are the bonuses included in Teacher Retirement System (TRS) deductions?

A. Under OAC 715:10-13-1, stipends not given across the board to all employees are excluded from regular annual compensation. The one-time award would therefore be excluded from regular annual compensation and contributions would not be due.

Q. Are districts required to collect a portion of the bonus payment from any teacher who does not complete the 5-year commitment?

A. No. The OSDE will handle collections for this program. Districts will not be responsible for collecting funds or paying for the collection of funds from any participants who do not complete the 5-year commitment. Districts will not be required to payback any portion of the signing bonus.

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 meets other program requirements, then they will be eligible for the signing bonus. They would be considered new to the profession.



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Q. Are teachers with a provisional certification eligible for the signing bonus?

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 meets the other program requirements, then they will be eligible for the signing bonus. They would be considered new to the profession.

Questions - Email SignOnBonus@sde.ok.gov