

1 STATE OF OKLAHOMA

2 1st Session of the 60th Legislature (2025)

3 HOUSE BILL 1281

By: Caldwell (Chad)

6 AS INTRODUCED

7 An Act relating to teachers; creating the Return to
8 Teach Signing Bonus Act; establishing a signing bonus
9 program for certain teachers; subjecting program to
10 availability of funds; listing requirements for
11 program participants; providing for payment of bonus;
12 directing State Department of Education to verify
applicant information; requiring return of bonus
under certain circumstances; excluding bonus from
being included in certain calculations; providing for
promulgation of rules; providing for codification;
and declaring an emergency.

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14 BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

15 SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified

16 in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 6-451 of Title 70, unless there
17 is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

18 A. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Return to
19 Teach Signing Bonus Act".

20 B. Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year and subject to the
21 availability of funding, the State Department of Education shall
22 establish and administer a signing bonus program for teachers who
23 return to teaching in Oklahoma public schools.

C. To participate in the signing bonus program, the applicant shall:

1. Be a teacher with at least three (3) years of prior teaching experience and a valid or expired teaching certificate issued by:

- a. the State Board of Education,
- b. the education certification entity of another state,
- c. the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, or

d. the education certification entity of another country;

2. Have not been employed by an Oklahoma public school district within the past year at the time of applying;

3. Agree to be a full-time public school teacher in the state for a minimum of five (5) years;

4. Submit proof of his or her most recent teaching employment which may include a paystub or letter from the school district superintendent or board of education;

5. Submit proof provided by the school district where the applicant will be employed as a full-time teacher;

6. Attest that the information in the application is factual to the best of his or her knowledge; and

7. Any additional requirements established by the State Board of Education.

D. The signing bonus shall be Thirty-five Thousand Dollars (\$35,000.00) per participant. Upon verification required by

1 subsection E of this section, the signing bonus shall be paid to
2 participants no later than October 31 of each year or within thirty
3 (30) days of the first day of school, whichever is earlier.

4 E. 1. Prior to payment of any signing bonuses, the Department
5 shall verify all of the information submitted by the applicant
6 pursuant to subsection C of this section is accurate and confirm the
7 applicant is eligible to participate in the signing bonus program.

8 2. Prior to the beginning of each school year after the
9 teacher's first year participating in the signing bonus program, the
10 teacher shall provide verification to the Department that the
11 teacher continues to be eligible for the signing bonus program,
12 including documentation from the Oklahoma school district where the
13 teacher is employed full time.

14 3. If, after the payment of any signing bonus, the Department
15 discovers the information contained in the application is false, the
16 participant shall be required to return all payments to the
17 Department.

18 4. If, after the payment of any signing bonus, the participant
19 is not employed as a full-time public school teacher in the state
20 during the agreed to five-year period, the participant shall be
21 required to return to the Department a pro rata amount based on the
22 unfulfilled portion of the five-year agreement period.

23 F. Any signing bonus paid pursuant to the Return to Teach
24 Signing Bonus Act shall not be included in the calculation of salary

1 for purposes of meeting the district or statutory minimum salary
2 schedule or for purposes of calculating Teachers' Retirement System
3 of Oklahoma contributions or benefits.

4 G. The State Board of Education shall adopt rules to implement
5 the provisions of the Return to Teach Signing Bonus Act.

6 SECTION 2. It being immediately necessary for the preservation
7 of the public peace, health or safety, an emergency is hereby
8 declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and
9 be in full force from and after its passage and approval.

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