

Teacher Signing Bonus 2025-2026

Overview

Oklahoma faces a persistent shortage of Special Education Classroom Teachers certified in Mild/Moderate or Severe/Profound Special Education, which impacts districts' ability to provide quality services to students with disabilities. In response to the growing demand for Certified Special Education Classroom Teachers in Oklahoma, the OSDE proposes a targeted recruitment initiative to attract new or out-of-state certified Special Education Classroom Teachers.

The initiative offers a \$20,000 signing bonus for Special Education Classroom Teachers certified in Mild/Moderate or Severe/Profound who taught out of state and a \$10,000 signing bonus for Special Education Classroom Teachers certified in Mild/Moderate or Severe/Profound who will be starting their first year of teaching in the Special Education classroom during the 2025-2026 school year. In addition, 2025-2026 out-of-state program participants will receive a \$5,000 retention bonus and new teacher program participants will receive a \$2,500 retention bonus during the 2026-2027 school year (if they continue in a Special Education Classroom) to ensure immediate staffing needs and retention. This strategic approach will strengthen Oklahoma's Special Education workforce and improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Financial Incentive

- **\$20,000 Signing Bonus:** Awarded to out-of-state Special Education Classroom Teachers certified in Mild/Moderate or Severe/Profound Special Education who taught out of state upon successful hiring and contract completion with an Oklahoma Public School.
- **\$10,000 Signing Bonus:** Awarded to Special Education Classroom Teachers certified in Mild/Moderate or Severe/Profound Special Education, entering their first year of teaching upon successful hiring and contract completion with an Oklahoma Public School.



- **\$5,000 Retention Bonus:** Eligible participants approved for the 2025–2026 out-of-state signing bonus will receive a \$5,000 retention bonus during their second year of teaching in a Special Education classroom within the same district.
- **\$2,500 Retention Bonus:** Eligible participants approved for the 2025–2026 new teacher signing bonus will receive a \$2,500 retention bonus during their second year of teaching in a Special Education classroom within the same district

Frequently Asked Questions

Application

- Qualifying teachers will receive a link to the application through OSDE Single Sign-On under ***Teacher Signing Bonus***. If you do not see the link under Single Sign-On, then you do not qualify.

Approved certification areas

- Mild/Moderate
- Severe/Profound

Additional Requirements for Recipients to Receive the Bonus

- Educators must be contracted with an Oklahoma Public School District for the 2025-2026 school year, working in a full-time Special Education (SPED) classroom teaching position for a minimum of four hours each school day during the contracted school year.
- To be eligible, applicants must have no prior teaching experience in an Oklahoma public school before the 2025–2026 school year. Years of service will be verified through the OSDE School Personnel Record System and District Administration.
- **Out-of-state** applicants must have no prior teaching experience in an Oklahoma public school before the 2025–2026 school year. They must have years of experience in SPED out-of-state. Years of service will be verified through the OSDE School Personnel Record System and District Administration.

Signing Bonus Payment

The OSDE will communicate directly with the contracted Special Education teacher's Oklahoma Public School District to verify their employment and position. Upon verification and final approval, the OSDE will send an invoice to the approved recipient's district for payment. OSDE will process funds to the district (including the cost of payroll taxes), and the school district will then disburse the funds to the teacher. Bonuses are taxable.



Bonuses are not included in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) deductions. 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.

Retention Bonus Payment

The retention bonus will be paid during the 2026-2027 school year to those teachers who received the 2025-2026 bonus and continue working in the same district. To qualify for this payment, recipients must still be employed as Special Education teachers.

- **New Teacher:** The OSDE will communicate with the district to verify employment and process payment.
- **Out-of-state:** The OSDE will communicate with the district to verify employment and process payment.

Eligibility and Definitions

Q. Who is eligible?

A. Educators certified in Mild/Moderate or Severe/Profound special education, who have never taught in an Oklahoma public school at any time prior to the 2025-2026 school year.

Q. I am a first-year provisional certified SPED teacher; do I qualify for the bonus?

A. Yes, if you have never taught as a certified teacher in an Oklahoma public school at any time prior to the 2025-2026 school year.

Q. What types of public schools are eligible?

A. Any accredited Oklahoma public school is eligible for the bonus.

Q. Is there a limit to the number of teachers per district that may apply?

A. No, applications that meet the requirement will be approved until funds are exhausted.

Q. How do teachers apply?

A. Qualifying teachers will see a link to the application through OSDE Single Sign-On under **Teacher Signing Bonus**. If you do not see the link under Single Sign-On, then you do not qualify.

Q. When will OSDE stop taking applications?



A. The application window closes on September 1, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. or once funds are exhausted. Bonuses will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

Q. Who is considered a New Teacher for the bonus program?

A. A New Teacher is defined as someone who has never taught in an Oklahoma public school **and** did not teach SPED in any other state before the 2025–2026 school year.

Q. What if a teacher is not certified to teach special education?

A. They do not qualify for the bonus.

Q. If a teacher moves to Oklahoma from out of state, will their teaching certification be accepted?

A. Yes, as long as the certification meets the OSDE certification standards for Special Education.

Q. If a certified teacher worked as a substitute teacher or tutor in a public school during the 2024-2025 school year, are they eligible for the signing bonus if they are certified in special education?

A. If the teacher were paid as a certified teacher, they would not qualify. If the teacher was paid as support staff and they did not have any years of service in the OSDE school personnel system, then they would qualify.

Q. I'm interested in becoming certified. How can I do that?

A. Click [HERE](#) to be redirected to the OSDE certification site.

Q. How long will the program last?

A. This incentive program is only available for the 2025-2026 school year; the initial signing bonus will not be offered in future years. There will be a secondary bonus for those retained by their contracted district for a second year.

Q. What is the bonus commitment?

A. The initial bonus amount is for the 2025-2026 school year. The retention bonus will be paid if the educator is retained by the contracted district during the 2026-2027 school year.

Q. What happens if a teacher leaves during year one?

A. If a teacher leaves the profession and/or shortage area before the end of the first year, they will not be eligible for the retention bonus during the second year.



Q. What happens if a teacher moves to another district after the first year?

A. They will not be eligible for the retention bonus.

Payment

Q. Are the bonuses taxable?

A. Yes, bonuses are considered taxable income.

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 the districts to pass through to the teachers in the payroll procedures

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 1-year commitment?

A. No, districts will not be responsible for collecting funds or paying for the collection of funds from any participants. Districts will not be required to pay back any portion of the signing bonus.

Q. How will the OSDE track teachers receiving bonuses to determine if they are meeting their teaching commitments?

A. The OSDE will track teachers through School Personnel Reporting.

Q. I am a first-year provisional certified SPED teacher; do I qualify for the bonus?

A. Yes, if you have never taught in an Oklahoma public school at any time prior to the 2025-2026 school year.

