

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 48th Legislature (2001)

SENATE BILL 342

By: Robinson

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to the Department of Rehabilitative Services; amending 10 O.S. 1991, Section 1419, as last amended by Section 1, Chapter 269, O.S.L. 1995 (10 O.S. Supp. 2000, Section 1419), which relates to the Oklahoma School for the Blind and the Oklahoma School for the Deaf; modifying employment authority of the Director of the State Department of Rehabilitation Services; defining certain professionals and other staffing; providing for powers and duties of the Director; providing for duties and compensation of employees; making certain personnel eligible for membership in the Teachers' Retirement System; providing for adoption of personnel policies; authorizing certain disciplinary action; making such action not subject to the Administrative Procedures Act; providing for notification regarding certain contracts; deleting obsolete language; specifying applicability of act; defining terms; providing certain instructional personnel with right to trial de novo; providing for notification procedures, waiver, filing of petition, service of process, trial procedure and appeal; providing for codification; and declaring an emergency.

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

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 10 O.S. 1991, Section 1419, as last amended by Section 1, Chapter 269, O.S.L. 1995 (10 O.S. Supp. 2000, Section 1419), is amended to read as follows:

Section 1419. A. The Commission for Rehabilitation Services shall establish and maintain such methods of administration, including methods relating to the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards, as are necessary for the proper and efficient administration of the Oklahoma School for the Blind and the Oklahoma School for the Deaf, and associated programs ~~thereat~~; shall maintain records and reports, shall provide a uniform accounting system; and shall incur such expenses and make such

expenditures as it deems necessary to maintain and operate such institutions.

B. 1. The Director of the State Department of Rehabilitation Services shall, ~~subject to the approval of the Commission,~~ employ or contract with qualified instructional personnel including, but not limited to, teachers, ~~principals, directors of student assessment and program development, vocational teachers, career vocational coordinators, head school librarians, school psychologists, mental health counselors, school counselors, school psychometrists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, orientation and mobility specialists (OSB), speech services supervisors and speech language pathologists,~~ and appoint or employ ~~the superintendent~~ and such other ~~personnel~~ persons serving in an instructional capacity, as the director deems necessary for the proper operation of each ~~institution,~~ school and shall fix their duties and compensation. ~~The superintendent, teachers and other employees shall be eligible for membership or participation in the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma to the same extent and on the same basis as teachers and other employees of other state educational institutions and public schools.~~

2. Instructional personnel are defined as follows:

- a. a career teacher is a member of the instructional staff who has served in an instructional capacity for three (3) or more consecutive years at the Oklahoma School for the Blind or the Oklahoma School for the Deaf, or meets the definition of a "career teacher" as provided in Section 6-101.3 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes, and
- b. a probationary teacher is a member of the instructional staff who has served in an instructional capacity for less than three (3) consecutive years at either the Oklahoma School for

the Blind or the Oklahoma School for the Deaf, or meets the definition of a "probationary teacher" as provided in Section 6-101.3 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.

C. 1. The Director of the State Department of Rehabilitation Services shall employ or appoint the superintendent of each school and shall fix their duties and compensation. The superintendents shall be in the unclassified service.

2. The Director of the State Department of Rehabilitation Services shall employ or contract with such other administrative personnel as the Director deems necessary for the proper operation of each school and shall fix their duties and compensation. The administrative personnel may include but are not limited to assistant superintendents, principals, vice principals and other persons who devote a majority of their time to service in a supervisory or administrative capacity.

D. The Director of the State Department of Rehabilitation Services shall employ or appoint such support personnel as the Director deems necessary for the proper operation of each school and shall fix their duties.

E. Instructional personnel and administrative personnel shall be eligible for membership or participation in the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma to the same extent and on the same basis as teachers and other employees of other state education institutions and public schools.

F. 1. The Commission shall ~~promulgate~~ adopt personnel rules and ~~establish~~ policies for instructional and administrative personnel except for superintendents similar to ~~those~~ the law applicable to public school district employees ~~for those employees listed in subsection B of this section~~, including but not limited to, leave and employment policies and a salary schedule. ~~The Department shall be authorized to notify teachers and other~~

~~personnel on or before April 10 of each year concerning the renewal of contracts.~~

~~D. Those personnel listed in subsection B of this section who have entered into contracts with or been employed by the Department for Rehabilitation Services on or before July 1, 1995, in positions listed in subsection B of this section shall be entitled to a salary adjustment retroactive to February 16, 1995, or their first date of employment in such positions, whichever is the later, pursuant to a salary schedule adopted by the Commission.~~

~~E. Those personnel listed in subsection B of this section~~

2. Final disciplinary action taken against a member of the instructional or administrative staff, including termination or the nonrenewal of a contract, shall not be subject to Article II of the Oklahoma Administrative Procedures Act. Such disciplinary action shall be final unless otherwise provided for by law.

3. The Department shall be authorized to notify instructional and administrative personnel on or before April 10 of each year concerning the renewal of contracts.

G. School personnel who have entered into contracts with the schools on or before July 1, 1995, shall be entitled to longevity pay as provided in Section 840-2.18 of Title 74 of the Oklahoma Statutes.

SECTION 2. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 1419.1 of Title 10, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. This act shall not apply to administrative personnel, instructional personnel serving under a temporary contract, or probationary teachers.

B. A career teacher who has been dismissed or whose contract has not been renewed shall be entitled to a trial de novo in the district court of the county in which the school is located.

C. In the event that a career teacher is dismissed or the teacher's contract is not renewed, the Director of the Department of Rehabilitation Services shall notify the teacher of the teacher's right to a trial de novo.

D. Within ten (10) days of receipt of the notification of the right to a trial de novo, the career teacher may file a petition for a trial de novo. Upon filing the petition, the court clerk shall issue a summons and cause service by mail to be made upon the Department of Rehabilitation Services by certified mail, restricted delivery with return receipt requested or substitute process as provided by law.

E. If, within the ten-day period, the career teacher fails to file a petition for a trial de novo concerning the dismissal or nonreemployment, the teacher shall be deemed to have waived the right to trial de novo and the decision of the Director to dismiss or not to renew the contract shall be final.

F. The Department shall serve its answer within twenty (20) days of the service of summons and petition upon it. The trial de novo shall be scheduled at the earliest possible date which will permit both parties adequate time to prepare for a just trial of the issues involved; however, said trial de novo shall be scheduled and held not less than ten (10) days and no later than thirty (30) days after the answer has been filed.

G. Except as otherwise provided specifically in this section, the law generally applicable to civil suits filed in district court shall apply to the proceedings for trial de novo under this section. At the trial de novo the standard of proof shall be by the preponderance of the evidence and the burden of proof shall be on the Department to establish de novo that the career teacher's dismissal or nonreemployment is warranted. The trial de novo shall proceed as nonjury trial before the court. The court shall determine de novo all issues of fact and law necessary for full

adjudication of the dispute at the trial. The court shall not, by applying principles of collateral estoppel or res adjudicata or otherwise, give preclusive effect to findings of fact of determinations of the Department with regard to the issue necessary to determine the adequacy of the dismissal or nonreemployment of the career teacher in the trial de novo. Within three (3) days following the conclusion of the trial de novo, the judge shall prepare written findings of fact and conclusions of law and shall enter judgment directing either of the following:

1. That the Department reinstate the career teacher with full employment status and benefits; or

2. That the decision of the Department for the dismissal or nonreemployment of the career teacher be sustained.

In addition, the court may enter an order awarding the prevailing party attorney fees and costs.

H. The time limits set forth in this section for the proceedings before the district court may be extended by the court upon mutual agreement of the parties or upon finding good cause for the continuation.

I. The decision of the district court shall be final and binding upon the career teacher and the Department unless the teacher or the Department appeals the decision of the district court in the manner provided by law for the appeal of civil cases from the district court.

SECTION 3. It being immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety, an emergency is hereby declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and be in full force from and after its passage and approval.