

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

2nd Session of the 60th Legislature (2026)

SENATE BILL 1546

By: Pugh

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to teachers; amending 70 O.S. 2021, Section 698.1, as last amended by Section 1, Chapter 249, O.S.L. 2023 (70 O.S. Supp. 2025, Section 698.1), which relates to the Inspired to Teach Program; renaming the program; increasing scholarship amounts available for eligible students; updating statutory language; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

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

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 70 O.S. 2021, Section 698.1, as last amended by Section 1, Chapter 249, O.S.L. 2023 (70 O.S. Supp. 2025, Section 698.1), is amended to read as follows:

Section 698.1. A. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education shall establish and maintain an incentive scholarship program and teacher employment incentive program, as funding is available, to encourage the preparation of public school teachers for prekindergarten through twelfth grade, including minority teachers, at all ~~state public higher education~~ institutions of higher education within The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education or private higher education institutions accredited

1 pursuant to Section 4103 of this title and incentivize employment as
2 public school teachers for prekindergarten through twelfth grade in
3 the state for at least five (5) years, to be known as the ~~Inspired~~
4 ~~to Teach Program~~ New Educators for Excellence in Teaching and
5 Education (NEXT-ED) Program. Prospective teachers planning to
6 pursue an undergraduate teacher education program at an accredited
7 ~~Oklahoma~~ teacher preparation program in this state shall be
8 considered if they graduated from high school, completed high-school
9 level instruction at home, or completed General Educational
10 Development (GED) test requirements; meet the ~~higher education~~
11 admission standards of the institution of higher education; and
12 declare a pre-education major or major in an approved ~~Oklahoma~~
13 teacher preparation degree program in this state leading to a
14 standard teaching certificate.

15 B. To the extent that funds are available, scholarships,
16 renewable for up to three (3) additional years for qualified
17 students meeting satisfactory academic progress standards in
18 completing a teacher preparation degree program leading to a
19 standard teaching certificate, shall be awarded to cover costs of
20 tuition, general enrollment and other fees, ~~other fees~~, books,
21 materials, and services provided by the institution, including room
22 and board, in the following manner:

23 1. ~~One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00)~~ Two Thousand Dollars
24 (\$2,000.00) per academic year for up to three (3) academic years for

1 full-time students who have earned ~~less~~ fewer than ninety (90)
2 credit hours; and

3 2. ~~Two Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$2,500.00)~~ Five Thousand
4 Dollars (\$5,000.00) for the final academic year for full-time
5 students who have earned ninety (90) or more credit hours.

6 The maximum amount of scholarship funds awarded as provided in this
7 subsection to any qualified student shall not exceed ~~Five Thousand~~
8 ~~Five Hundred Dollars (\$5,500.00)~~ Eleven Thousand Dollars
9 (\$11,000.00).

10 C. As used in this section, "full-time student" means:

11 1. An undergraduate student enrolled in twelve (12) or more
12 semester credits toward teacher education degree requirements;

13 2. An undergraduate student who is a teacher education major
14 who is enrolled in or has completed an internship or student
15 teaching credit hours in order to complete the degree program prior
16 to certification and who has been approved to take ~~less~~ fewer than
17 twelve (12) credit hours; or

18 3. An undergraduate student who is a teacher education major
19 with an approved reasonable accommodation from ~~Student Accessibility~~
20 ~~Services~~ student accessibility services at the institution due to a
21 documented disability and who has been approved to take ~~less~~ fewer
22 than twelve (12) credit hours.

23 D. It is the intent of the ~~Oklahoma~~ Legislature that the
24 Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education create a committee

1 composed of educators, teacher educators from the participating
2 institutions, and representatives of the public schools in this
3 state and the State Department of Education to provide
4 recommendations to the State Regents to improve effectiveness of the
5 ~~Inspired to Teach Program~~ NEXT-ED Program. The committee shall
6 prepare and electronically deliver a report on the program to the
7 Legislature on or before July 1 of each year.

8 E. Each scholarship participant, prior to entry into the
9 ~~Inspired to Teach Program~~ NEXT-ED Program, shall have agreed to
10 teach in ~~an Oklahoma~~ a public prekindergarten through twelfth grade
11 school in this state for a minimum of five (5) consecutive years
12 upon graduation and licensure as a teacher. Any scholarship
13 participant failing to maintain a 2.5 grade point average throughout
14 matriculation, changing to an ineligible area of study, failing to
15 meet satisfactory academic progress standards, withdrawing or
16 otherwise leaving school, or failing to meet requirements for
17 licensure and certification to teach as established by law shall be
18 subject to disqualification from the program.

19 F. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education are
20 authorized to make employment incentive payments pursuant to the
21 provisions of this section to ~~Inspired to Teach Program~~ NEXT-ED
22 Program participants who are employed as traditionally certified
23 teachers in ~~Oklahoma~~ public prekindergarten through twelfth grade
24 schools in this state following graduation. Incentive payments may

1 be awarded following each consecutive year of satisfactory service
2 as documented by the employing school district, up to five (5) years
3 of service for scholarship recipients as provided in subsection A of
4 this section, upon graduation from an accredited ~~Oklahoma~~ teacher
5 preparation degree program in this state. The maximum amount of
6 employment incentive payments for any qualified participant shall be
7 Four Thousand Dollars (\$4,000.00) per year for up to five (5) years,
8 not to exceed a total of Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000.00) per
9 participant.

10 G. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education shall
11 require the execution of appropriate contracts with eligible
12 ~~Inspired to Teach Program~~ NEXT-ED Program participants.

13 Participants failing to comply with the requirements of this section
14 or failing to provide current contact information shall not be
15 eligible for the employment incentive payments provided for in this
16 section. The Chancellor of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher
17 Education, with the approval of the State Regents, may contract with
18 any other appropriate organization or unit of government for the
19 administration of the provisions of this section.

20 H. If sufficient funds are not available for employment
21 incentive payments to qualified participants during any fiscal year,
22 the Chancellor may make reductions in the payments made to qualified
23 participants.

1 I. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education may, at the
2 time an award is made on behalf of the ~~Inspired to Teach Program~~
3 NEXT-ED Program, set aside funds for the full commitment made to an
4 eligible student.

5 J. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education may utilize
6 ~~Inspired to Teach Program~~ NEXT-ED Program designated funds for
7 administration of the program.

8 SECTION 2. This act shall become effective July 1, 2026.

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

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