

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – SMALL COUNTY AND LOW WEALTH SIGNING BONUS (PRC 062)

NC SL 2021-180 Section 7A.5
(School Year 2021-22)

Overview

This document is intended to provide guidance regarding the new Low Wealth and Small County Signing Bonus funding provided in Section 7A.5 of the Appropriation Act of 2021 (NC SL 2021-180). Through the Appropriations Act of 2021, the North Carolina General Assembly created a recurring appropriation to provide funding to match signing bonuses for teachers and instructional support personnel employed by districts who receive Small County Supplemental Funding (PRC 019) or Low Wealth Counties Supplemental Funding (PRC 031).

General Requirements

Under Section 7A.5 of the Appropriations Act of 2021, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) was instructed to establish and administer a signing bonus program for teachers and instructional support personnel, with bonuses to be provided to all eligible employees who are employed by a local school administrative unit (LEA) that receives Small County Supplemental Funding (PRC 019) or Low Wealth Supplemental Funding (PRC 031), so long as the bonuses are matched on the basis of one dollar (\$1.00) in State funds for every one dollar (\$1.00) in local funds (up to \$1,000 in State funds).

A teacher or instructional support staff member is eligible for the bonus if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Accepted employment as a teacher or instructional support staff with an eligible LEA for the 2021-2022 school year;
- Was not employed by the eligible LEA in the 2020-2021 fiscal year; and
- Was employed by the eligible LEA as of October 1, 2021.

Individuals who receive a signing bonus utilizing these funds will be ineligible to receive another signing bonus funded with these funds until July 1, 2024 at the earliest. The signing bonus exclusion does not apply to any legislatively mandated bonuses received by teachers that are not signing bonuses.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Are individuals who were employed in FY 2020-2021 by our district as Teacher Assistants but who were hired as teachers for the 2021-2022 school year eligible for the bonus?*

No. The language in Section 7A.5.(a).(1) is clear that, to be eligible, an employee could not have been employed by their current employer *in any capacity* during FY 2020-2021. Eligibility for a signing bonus funded by PRC 062 is dependent on the individual's employer during FY 2020-2021 rather than the individual's position. An LEA may still

provide a signing bonus for those employees using other funds, but they would not be eligible to receive a bonus paid for in part from PRC 062 funds.

2. *Can our district use ESSER funds to satisfy the matching requirement for the Low Wealth and Small County Signing Bonus?*

No. A district cannot use ESSER, or any State or other Federal funds, to satisfy the matching requirement for the Small County and Low Wealth Signing Bonus. Only local funds can be used to satisfy the matching requirement.

3. *Who qualifies as a teacher or instructional support for the purposes of the signing bonus?*

Teachers and instructional support personnel are those who are required to be paid from the legislative certified teacher salary schedule and are typically eligible to be paid from State PRC 001 and/or State PRC 007 and are working and coded to the school level. This is consistent with the definition of teacher and instructional support used for other bonus and compensation items.

4. *Are Pre-K Teachers eligible for the signing bonus?*

No. Pre-K Teachers are not eligible to receive a signing bonus funded in part by PRC 062 funds. An LEA may utilize other funding sources to provide a similar bonus to Pre-K Teachers.

5. *Are the signing bonuses subject to retirement?*

Signing bonuses provided using PRC 062 funds are not subject to retirement.

6. *Is the Small County and Low Wealth Signing Bonus program recurring?*

Yes, the funding is a recurring item in the budget bill, at this time.

7. *Does an LEA have to receive both Small County and Low Wealth funds to be eligible for the signing bonus program?*

No. Per NC SL 2021-180 section 7A.5.(a).(2), an LEA is eligible to receive PRC 062 funds if it receives either Small County (PRC 019) or Low Wealth (PRC 031) funds.

8. *We have a teacher that joined our district in October and who was previously employed as a teacher at another eligible district. Are they eligible for the bonus?*

No. A teacher must have been employed by a district as of October 1, 2021 in order to be eligible for a bonus from the program, regardless of where they were employed prior to joining the district.

9. *We have a teacher that was hired on June 20, 2021. Are they eligible for the signing bonus?*

No. An employee must have been hired by the district after the end of FY 2021 (June 30, 2021) to be eligible for the bonus.

10. *Is an LEA required to pay all eligible employees a signing bonus?*

No. Per Section 7A.5.(b), an eligible LEA must pay signing bonuses to all eligible employees who meet the eligibility criteria so long as they are matched on the basis of one dollar (\$1.00) in State funds for every one dollar (\$1.00) in local funds, up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000) in State funds. However, under Section 7A.5.(c), a teacher who receives a signing bonus using PRC 062 funds is precluded from receiving other signing bonuses until after July 1, 2024.

As such, an eligible LEA might not be able to provide a specific employee or employees with a PRC 062 signing bonus if the district is unable or unwilling to provide matching funds for the bonus. Conversely, an eligible teacher or instructional support employee might elect not to receive a PRC 062 signing bonus in favor of preserving their eligibility for other signing bonuses in future years.

11. *Can an LEA require a teacher to accept a PRC 062 signing bonus?*

No. Because acceptance of a PRC 062 signing bonus would preclude an employee from receiving other signing bonuses from a similar signing bonus until after July 1, 2024, an employee must voluntarily agree to accepting the PRC 062 signing bonus. LEAs are recommended to ensure that employees who are recipients of PRC 062 signing bonuses understand that they will be ineligible for similar bonuses until after July 1, 2024.

12. *We have a teacher that joined our district in July but who left in December. Are we required to pay them the signing bonus?*

Whether the employee in this instance would be eligible for the bonus would likely depend on whether the local Board of Education had instituted a policy or process that would require continued employment attached to the signing bonuses provided. Absent a policy or process that would limit eligibility, however, LEAs should ensure that they provide a signing bonus to all eligible employees that agree to receive the bonus.

Please note that these funds do not carryover, as such the state portion of the signing bonus as well as the minimum local match must be executed within the fiscal year.