

Does the district really know you?

Double-check personal information on district documents to protect yourself

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The Oklahoma school code requires that a teacher's contract contain specific information regarding the individual teacher, the teacher's salary and the teacher's benefits. You should take the opportunity each year to ensure that the information your school district has about you is accurate.

The law requires that your contract include the following information about you: your name, the degree you hold, your years of teaching credit and your step on the salary schedule. The required salary information is your base pay, any district salary supplement, any extra duty or extracurricular salary amounts, any other salary, your total salary and the amount of salary divided into cash versus fringe benefits, with the benefits itemized.

Benefit information must include your flexible benefit allowance amount, district-paid retirement contributions, district-paid health insurance (in excess of any amount paid as part of salary), any other itemized benefits (both district-paid and employee-paid), and a total of the district-paid benefits.

As of the 2016-17 school year, school districts have also been required to annually provide an employee information worksheet containing all of the information required to be in a contract before the first payroll in November. Also, there must be a person designated to review the worksheet with any teacher who requests it.

We recommend that you take this opportunity to carefully review your information and ensure its accuracy. Each year we see a number of cases of teachers having been underpaid. However, at best, it is a lengthy process, because prior-year obligations cannot be paid out of current year funds, which means that any payment from previous school years must be reduced to a court judgement against the school district.

In a number of cases, school districts have taken the position that, if they paid the individual teacher accurately according to records held by the State Department of Education, they are not liable for any underpayment.

Moreover, since the statute now requires that you be provided a worksheet, it is possible that in the future a district might take the position that a teacher's failure to point out inaccurate information absolves the district from any past underpayment liability. If the mistake goes uncorrected for long enough, you may never recover the underpayment, due to statutes of limitations which impose time limits on recovering old debts.

On the other hand, we have also seen cases where an individual is inadvertently overpaid. This can result in the uncomfortable situation in which an employee owes the employer a large sum.

OEA recommends that you take the time to carefully review your statement of salary and benefits each year to catch any mistakes. You should also check your cumulative retirement benefits with the Oklahoma Teachers' Retirement System, for all the same reasons.

If you have questions or concerns about the information your district provides, contact your regional Advocacy UniServ Specialist.