

As Ohio schools head into summer, they also enter the crunch of licensure renewal season. Even amidst school closures and other turmoil, central office administrators must monitor licenses and permits and ensure all staff are properly credentialed before they return to school in the fall.

The default in Ohio is that license-holders are responsible for maintaining their own licenses. Employers' efforts to assist in that, including reminders to file for renewal, are generally only courtesies. However, your collective bargaining agreements may require that your district assist in licensure renewal and, of course, Ohio law penalizes treasurers and superintendents who approve payment to improperly licensed individuals.

Treasurers and superintendents know that prior to paying a teacher for services: (1) the treasurer must receive a written statement from the superintendent (or designee) that the teacher has filed with the superintendent (or designee) all reports required by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), the school district and the superintendent; and (2) the treasurer must receive a written statement from the superintendent (or designee) that the teacher has filed with the superintendent (or designee) a legal license (or copy) to teach the subjects or grades taught and the dates of its validity. There are a few exceptions (e.g., with respect to certain teachers with permits, teachers during the initial two months of employment when certain requirements are met, substitute teachers conditionally employed in accordance with law and substitute educational assistants employed in accordance with law), but for the most part, every teacher must prove they hold the appropriate license for their position each year.

Despite this requirement, teachers and other staff with licenses or permits still slip through the cracks. These mistakes can be very costly for districts, and life altering for the staff member because authorities can require repayment of the staff member's entire salary for the year(s) they were not properly licensed. To avoid this situation, districts must put systems in place to check licenses and permits at the start of each school year, and any time a new staff member is hired or an existing staff member moves to a new position.

There is no one system that will work perfectly for all school districts, but any effective system should have the following components:

- 1. Implement Redundancies.** Do not rely on one person to monitor all licenses and permits in your district. Be sure there are back-up checks leading up to the superintendent's and treasurer's sign-offs on the hire or assignment.
- 2. Conduct Summer Reviews.** To the extent possible, review all license holders' records on ODE's website each summer and cross check those records with your district's lists. Ensure each license holder is assigned to a position covered by their license(s) for the coming school year. If they are not, or if they have a license due to expire or recently expired, notify them of the issue and remind them they cannot work without a valid license.
- 3. Involve Your Teachers Union.** Work with your union and local professional development committee to track licenses and communicate throughout each year with teachers whose licenses are coming up on their expiration dates. Send periodic reminders to affected staff members multiple times throughout the year to finish any required continuing education and apply for a license renewal. These notices should include language reminding teachers that it is their responsibility to maintain their license, and the notices are mere courtesies (unless your CBA requires the district to actively monitor licenses).
- 4. Perform Extra Checks for New Hires and Transfers.** Any time you hire a new teacher into the district or transfer a teacher from one position to another, take the time to check their licensure status on ODE's website against their new assignment. Make sure they have the appropriate licenses or fall into a permissible exception.
- 5. Remember: Permits Count, Too.** Positions that require permits (including educational aide or pupil activity permits, and bus driver licenses) are subject to the same rules requiring appropriate licensure prior to payment as teaching positions. Include your permit positions in all of your above reviews to ensure all certified and classified staff who are required to have licenses or permits are appropriately credentialed.

Even with school facilities largely closed, ODE has made clear it is still processing license applications. ODE has extended some application deadlines (currently, teachers have until September 1 to renew, rather than July 1), and may extend them further if the governor extends the current state of emergency into the summer. Regardless, ODE has indicated that licenses that currently expire on July 1, 2020, will not be extended beyond December 1, 2020.

Putting solid systems in place for verifying licensure protects the superintendent and treasurer, as well as the district as a whole and individual employees. As we approach summer, this is a good time to review your practices on verifying licenses and make sure your staff is appropriately credentialed heading into next year.

## Contacts

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