

279.24 Contract with administrators — automatic continuation or termination.

1. An administrator's contract shall remain in force and effect for the period stated in the contract. The contract shall be automatically continued in force and effect for additional one-year periods beyond the end of its original term, except and until the contract is modified or terminated by mutual agreement of the board of directors and the administrator, or until terminated as provided by this section.

2. If the board of directors is considering termination of an administrator's contract, prior to any formal action, the board may arrange to meet in closed session, in accordance with the provisions of section 21.5, with the administrator and the administrator's representative. The board shall review the administrator's evaluation, review the reasons for nonrenewal, and give the administrator an opportunity to respond. If, following the closed session, the board of directors and the administrator are unable to mutually agree to a modification or termination of the administrator's contract, or the board of directors and the administrator are unable to mutually agree to enter into a one-year nonrenewable contract, the board of directors shall follow the procedures in this section.

3. An administrator may file a written resignation with the secretary of the school board on or before May 1 of each year or the date specified by the school board for return of the contract, whichever date occurs first.

4. Administrators employed in a school district for less than two consecutive years are probationary administrators. However, a school board may waive the probationary period for any administrator who has previously served a probationary period in another school district and the school board may extend the probationary period for an additional year with the consent of the administrator. If a school board determines that it should terminate a probationary administrator's contract, the school board shall notify the administrator not later than May 15 that the contract will not be renewed beyond the current year. The notice shall be in writing by letter, personally delivered, or mailed by certified mail. The notification shall be complete when received by the administrator. Within ten days after receiving the notice, the administrator may request a private conference with the school board to discuss the reasons for termination. The school board's decision to terminate a probationary administrator's contract shall be final unless the termination was based upon an alleged violation of a constitutionally guaranteed right of the administrator.

5. The school board may, by majority vote of the membership of the school board, cause the contract of an administrator to be terminated. If the school board determines that it should consider the termination of a nonprobationary administrator's contract, the following procedure shall apply:

a. On or before May 15, the administrator shall be notified in writing by a letter personally delivered or mailed by certified mail that the school board has voted to consider termination of the contract. The notification shall be complete when received by the administrator.

b. The notice shall state the specific reasons to be used by the school board for considering termination which for all administrators except superintendents shall be for just cause.

c. Within five days after receipt of the written notice that the school board has voted to consider termination of the contract, the administrator may request in writing to the secretary of the school board that the notification be forwarded to the board of educational examiners along with a request that the board of educational examiners submit a list of five qualified administrative law judges to the parties. Within three days from receipt of the list the parties shall select an administrative law judge by alternately removing a name from the list until only one name remains. The person whose name remains shall be the administrative law judge. The parties shall determine by lot which party shall remove the first name from the list. The hearing shall be held no sooner than ten days and not later than thirty days following the administrator's request unless the parties otherwise agree. If the administrator does not request a hearing, the school board, not later than May 31, may determine the continuance or discontinuance of the contract and, if the board determines to continue the administrator's contract, whether to suspend the administrator with or without pay for a period specified by the board. School board action shall be by majority roll call vote entered on the minutes of the meeting. Notice of school board action shall be personally delivered or mailed to the administrator.

d. The administrative law judge selected shall notify the secretary of the school board and the administrator in writing concerning the date, time, and location of the hearing. The school board may be represented by a legal representative, if any, and the administrator shall appear and may be represented by counsel or by representative, if any. A transcript or recording shall be made of the proceedings at the hearing. A school board member or administrator is not liable for any damage to an administrator or school board member if a statement made at the hearing is determined to be erroneous as long as the statement was made in good faith.

e. The administrative law judge shall, within ten days following the date of the hearing, make a proposed decision as to whether or not the administrator should be dismissed, and shall give a copy of the proposed decision to the administrator and the school board. Findings of fact shall be prepared by the administrative law judge. The proposed decision of the administrative law judge shall become the final decision of the school board unless within ten days after the filing of the decision the administrator files a written notice of appeal with the school board, or the school board on its own motion determines to review the decision.

f. If the administrator appeals to the school board, or if the school board determines on its own motion to review the proposed decision of the administrative law judge, a private hearing shall be held before the school board within five days after the petition for review, or motion for review, has been made or at such other time as the parties agree. The private hearing is not subject to chapter 21. The school board may hear the case de novo upon the record as submitted before the administrative law judge. In cases where there is an appeal from a proposed decision or where a proposed decision is reviewed on motion of the school board, an opportunity shall be afforded to each party to file exceptions, present briefs, and present oral arguments to the school board which is to render the final decision. The secretary of the school board shall give the administrator written notice of the time, place, and date of the hearing. The school board shall meet within five days after the hearing to determine the question of continuance or discontinuance of the contract and, if the board determines to continue the administrator's contract, whether to suspend the administrator with or without pay for a period specified by the board. The school board shall make findings of fact which shall be based solely on the evidence in the record and on matters officially noticed in the record.

g. The decision of the school board shall be in writing and shall include findings of fact and conclusions of law, separately stated. Findings of fact, if set forth in statutory language, shall be accompanied by a concise and explicit statement of the underlying facts supporting the findings. Each conclusion of law shall be supported by cited authority or by reasoned opinion.

h. When the school board has reached a decision, opinion, or conclusion, it shall convene in open meeting and by roll call vote determine the continuance or discontinuance of the administrator's contract and, if the board votes to continue the administrator's contract, whether to suspend the administrator with or without pay for a period specified by the board. The record of the private conference and findings of fact and exceptions shall be exempt from the provisions of chapter 22. The secretary of the school board shall immediately personally deliver or mail notice of the school board's action to the administrator.

i. The administrator may within thirty days after notification by the school board of discontinuance of the contract appeal to the district court of the county in which the administrative office of the school district is located.

6. The court may affirm the school board's action. The court shall reverse, modify, or grant any other appropriate relief from the school board's action, equitable or legal, and including declaratory relief, if substantial rights of the administrator have been prejudiced because the school board's action is any of the following:

- a. In violation of constitutional or statutory provisions.
- b. In excess of the statutory authority of the school board.
- c. In violation of school board policy or rule.
- d. Made upon unlawful procedure.
- e. Affected by other error of law.

f. Unsupported by a preponderance of the evidence in the record made before the school board when that record is reviewed as a whole.

g. Unreasonable, arbitrary, or capricious, or characterized by an abuse of discretion or clearly unwarranted exercise of discretion.

[C77, 79, 81, §279.24]

87 Acts, ch 39, §1; 88 Acts, ch 1109, §21; 90 Acts, ch 1249, §13; 92 Acts, ch 1009, §1; 92 Acts, ch 1227, §20; 93 Acts, ch 32, §3, 4; 2001 Acts, ch 62, §2