

DECEMBER 2021



RETIREE  
EDITION



# TRS NEWS



THE NEWSLETTER of the TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM of TEXAS

## Eligible Retirees to Receive One-Time Supplemental Payment

During the second called special session of the 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, lawmakers voted to grant a one-time supplemental payment for many of Texas' 445,000 retired public education employees.

The payment will go to eligible retirees and beneficiaries who retired before Dec. 31, 2020, and will be up to \$2,400, or the amount of the retiree's annuity, whichever is less.

**Payments will be issued in January 2022 in the same manner in which you receive your annuity payment. This timing will allow annuitants to make any necessary adjustments to their tax or financial planning for the 2022 tax year.**

The funds will come from the state's general fund and will be administered by TRS. TRS' Board of Trustees voted to approve the measure at the Sept. 16-17 board meeting.

Visit the [TRS website](#) for more information and [Frequently Asked Questions](#). *(continued on page 2)*



## New TRS-Care Plan Year Starts Jan. 1, 2022

### TRS-CARE STANDARD PARTICIPANTS

There are no changes to your benefits, and the administrators for your medical and pharmacy plans will stay the same for the 2022 year. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas (BCBSTX) will continue to provide you a quality network of providers, and CVS Caremark will still bring you some of the best pricing on the market for prescription drugs.

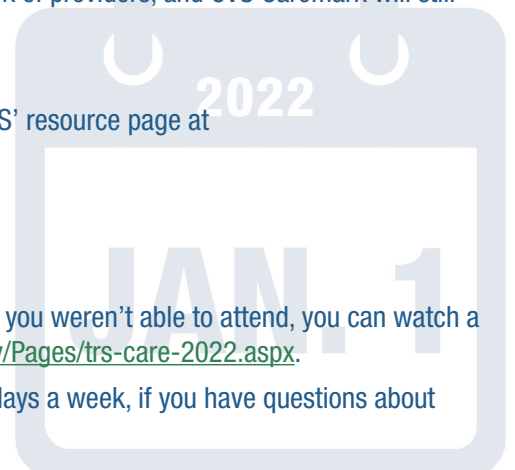
You will not receive new ID cards this year. You'll continue using your current ID card.

You have access to tools and resources to help understand your plan and benefits. Visit TRS' resource page at [www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/trs-care-2022.aspx](http://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/trs-care-2022.aspx) to access things like:

- [2022 TRS-Care Plan Highlights](#)
- [2022 TRS-Care Standard Guide](#)
- [Summaries of Benefits and Coverage](#)

TRS, BCBSTX and CVS Caremark recently held TRS-Care Standard Information Sessions. If you weren't able to attend, you can watch a recording, read a transcript or flip through the presentation materials at [www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/trs-care-2022.aspx](http://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/trs-care-2022.aspx).

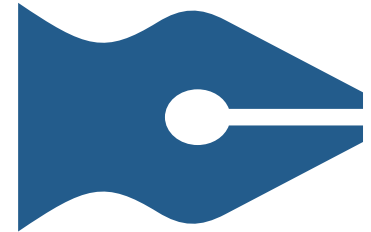
You can call a BCBSTX Personal Health Guide at **1-866-355-5999**, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, if you have questions about providers, benefits or need information about your plan. *(continued on page 3)*





# Memo to Retirees

from  
Executive Director  
Brian K. Guthrie



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The Teacher Retirement System of Texas does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services. A copy of the complete TRS plan is available at the above address during normal business hours.

### Greetings to our retirees,

We hope you find the information in the final issue of *TRS News* for the year to be informative. As we enter the winter season, I wish you and your families safe and happy holidays. I hope you're able to treat yourself to the holiday festivities you enjoy and surround yourself with the company of your family and friends.

As we enter the new year, know that we at TRS are continuing to lay the groundwork for initiatives to better serve you in the coming year. We invite you to stay current by visiting our website, reading our newsletters and following us on social media.

Until next time, wishing you happy holidays and a safe and healthy new year!

Take care,  
Brian

## Eligible Retirees to Receive One-Time Supplemental Payment

*(continued from page 1)*

### Am I Eligible to Receive the Supplemental Payment?

If you retired on or before Dec. 31, 2020 or you're a beneficiary of a retiree who died on or before Dec. 31, 2020 and meet the criteria of the legislation, including being eligible to receive an annuity payment the month before TRS issues the one-time supplemental payment, you will receive the one-time supplemental payment.

### What Monthly Benefit Types are Not Eligible for the Supplemental Payment?

The monthly benefit types that are excluded are amounts that are fixed by statute and do not vary with service or compensation:

- Disability retirement with less than 10 years of service
- Survivor \$250 and \$350 payments
- DROP payments

Also, retirees with an effective retirement date on or after Jan. 1, 2021, or beneficiaries of a retiree who died on or after Jan. 1, 2021 will not be eligible to receive the supplemental payment.

## TAX WITHHOLDING CONSIDERATIONS

### How Will TRS Determine Income Tax Withholding for the Supplemental Payment?

TRS will withhold the annuitant's preferred withholding as indicated on the most recent TRS Form 228A TRS has on file. However, if TRS does not have a Form 228A on file for an eligible annuitant, then TRS will apply the default withholding (married and claiming three withholding allowances) to the one-time supplemental payment.

### How Can I Change My Income Tax Withholding Preferences if I Wish to do so?

You can see and update your current withholding preference by visiting [MyTRS](#) and selecting Modify Withholding Preference. If you do not have a *MyTRS* account, you may download, complete and mail [Form 228A \(pdf\)](#) to TRS. Depending on when they are received, withholding changes may not be adjusted in time for the supplemental payment.

**You are not required to change your withholding preference if the current withholding meets your needs. If you are satisfied with your current withholding amount, you DO NOT need to take any action.**

## New TRS-Care Plan Year Starts Jan. 1, 2022 *continued from page 1*

### TRS-Care Medicare Advantage Participants

There are no changes to your benefits, and the administrators for your medical and pharmacy plans will stay the same for the 2022 plan year. UnitedHealthcare will continue to provide you comprehensive Medicare coverage and SilverScript will still provide Part D prescription coverage with no “donut hole.”

You will not receive new ID cards this year. You'll continue using your current ID card.

You have access to the TRS-Care Medicare Advantage Virtual Education Center at <https://uhcvirtualretiree.com/TRS-CareMA>. The Virtual Education Center is designed to be a place where you can go to learn about your benefits and services for the upcoming plan year.

The Virtual Education Center displays six information “booths” for participants to learn more about their benefits. The six booths include custom communication materials and topics specific to the TRS-Care Medicare Advantage medical plan.

TRS' resource page at [www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/trs-care-2022.aspx](http://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/trs-care-2022.aspx) can also point you to important documents, such as:

- [2022 TRS-Care Plan Highlights](#)
- [2022 TRS-Care Medicare Guide](#)

TRS, UnitedHealthcare and SilverScript recently held TRS-Care Medicare Information Sessions. If you weren't able to attend, you can watch a recording, read a transcript or flip through the presentation materials at [www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/trs-care-2022.aspx](http://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/trs-care-2022.aspx).

You can call the UHC customer service line at **1-866-347-9507**, 7 a.m.–6 p.m., Monday–Friday, if you have questions about providers, benefits or need information about your plan.

## TRS Board Approves New Headquarters Plan



At the September board meeting, TRS Board of Trustees unanimously approved a plan to purchase a new agency headquarters a few miles outside of downtown Austin. After examining all factors, trustees determined that relocating is the most financially responsible solution that will allow TRS to meet the needs of its growing membership for the coming decades.

The decision is projected to save the pension trust fund an estimated \$15 million over the next 20 years. Along with creating a new capital asset for the pension trust fund, the new headquarters will once again consolidate TRS staff into one location owned by TRS. This will eliminate the need to lease extra space and avoid costly maintenance renovations on the existing 47-year-old headquarters.

The purchase will not impact the actuarial health of the pension trust fund and therefore does not impact the ability of members to obtain a future cost-of-living increase if authorized by the legislature. It is estimated that the agency will begin moving selected divisions to the new headquarters in 2023.

For more information on the new headquarters, please see our [FAQs and the September board presentation](#).

# MyTRS Online: Looking Ahead

As you may know, we've been working to update the systems we use to administer our pension and insurance programs, better known as the TRS Enterprise Application Modernization (TEAM) Program.

This effort includes updates to TRS' business processes and technologies we use every day. As a member, you will also have improvements to customer service options to look forward to. This includes a new *MyTRS* experience that we plan to launch in 2022.

These improvements are coming to ensure we continue to provide the best possible service to our members. We look forward to sharing these new services with you over time.

Watch for more detailed information in future newsletters, on our website and TRS social media channels. Thank you for your patience as we work to develop more modern and efficient technology solutions.

## 1099-R Forms to be Mailed in Early 2022

In late January 2022, TRS will send 1099-R forms to those who have received one or more payments from TRS during calendar year 2021.

The 1099-R is an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) form that the recipient uses to report to the IRS any distributions paid by TRS during the prior calendar year. If you are not a U.S. citizen or resident alien of the U.S., TRS will provide you with and report your payment(s) to the IRS on a 1042-S form instead of on a 1099-R form.

From the time the 1099-R and 1042-S forms are distributed in January until April 15, TRS receives numerous requests for duplicate copies. Due to confidentiality requirements, TRS cannot provide the information over the phone or by fax. **The duplicate copies must be mailed.**

However, if you wish, there is a way you can access 1099-R information any time you want it – online! If you are a retiree or a beneficiary of a deceased member receiving a monthly benefit and have registered for [MyTRS](#), you can view and print an electronic copy of your 1099-R form. At this time, 1042-S forms are not available online.

Please refer to the [1099-R and 1042-S information and FAQs](#) on the TRS website for additional information.

## Check Your Mailbox for Your 1095-B

### TRS-Care Standard Participants

TRS-Care retirees and their surviving spouses who were enrolled in the TRS-Care Standard, non-Medicare plan during any part of calendar year 2021 will receive a 1095-B in the mail in January. This form verifies you and your dependents had medical coverage under TRS-Care Standard for that portion of the 2021 calendar year.

### TRS-Care Medicare Advantage Participants

If you, your spouse or your dependent were enrolled in traditional Medicare or in the TRS-Care Medicare Advantage plan at any time in 2021, you may receive a Form 1095-B from Medicare concerning the period of time you were enrolled in Medicare.

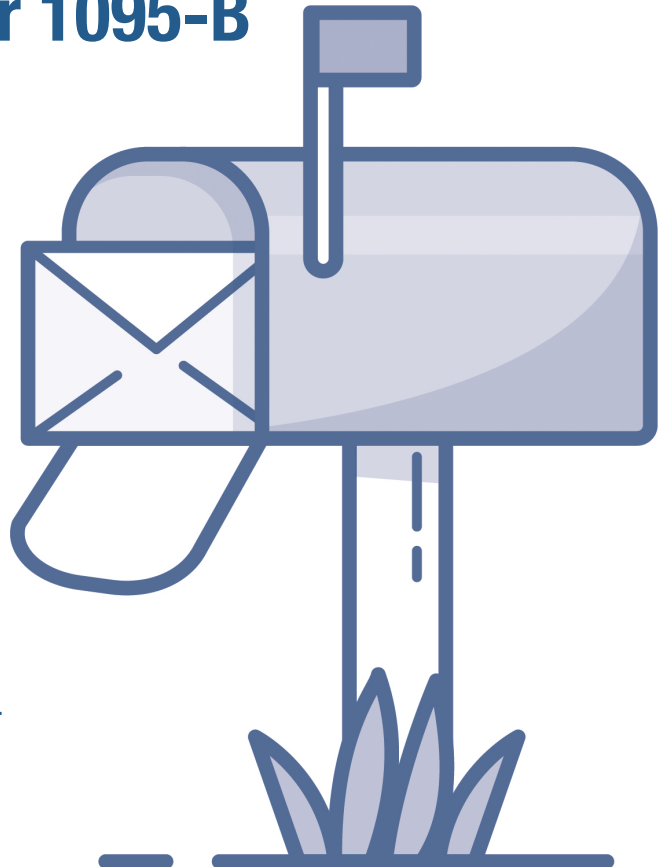
If you have Medicare Part B only, you will also receive a Form 1095-B from TRS.

### Filing Taxes

When you file your taxes, you'll need to report to the federal government that you and your eligible dependents had medical coverage for all or part of calendar year 2021. People who did not have at least a minimum level of medical coverage during a part of calendar year 2021 may have to pay a fine to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). All TRS health plans meet the minimum essential coverage requirements because they're employer-sponsored coverage.

You will not need to attach Form 1095-B to your tax return. You will only need to keep it for your records. The information on the form may help you in preparing your tax return; but you don't need to wait for it to file your taxes.

For more information, check out the [Form 1095-B FAQs](#).





# Take Care of Your Mental Health with TRS Health Plans



Treating a mental disorder is just as important as treating a physical ailment. Whether you're struggling with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or a different mental health condition, there's strength in seeking treatment and making your mental health a priority.

## Plan Benefits and Resources

There's no reason to put off getting mental health care. You can get treated for anxiety, depression and many other mental health conditions covered by your health plan.

### *TRS-ActiveCare and TRS-Care Standard Participants*

- Find an in-network therapist or other mental health provider by calling a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas (BCBSTX) Personal Health Guide at 1-866-355-5999, 24 hours a day, seven days a week or using the BCBSTX app. You can also search for an in-network provider through the [TRS-ActiveCare Provider Finder Search](#) tool or the [TRS-Care Standard Provider Finder Search](#) tool.
- You and your 18 or older covered dependents can receive confidential care from a psychiatrist, licensed therapist or psychologist through [TRS Virtual Health for TRS-ActiveCare powered by Teladoc](#) or [TRS Virtual Health for TRS-Care Standard powered by Teladoc](#) from the comfort of your home. Services are available only through video conference via a webcam-enabled device such as a computer, smart phone or tablet.
- The [Well onTarget portal](#) offers several self-management programs that can help improve your mental health including the Manage Your Stress program, Improve Your Sleep program, and Enhance Your Physical Activity program.
- The BCBSTX website for your plan has a list of comprehensive resources and tips for mental health wellness. Visit your [TRS-ActiveCare Mental Health](#) or [TRS-Care Standard Mental Health](#) site for more details.

### *TRS-Care Medicare Advantage Participants*

- Find an in-network mental health professional through the UnitedHealthcare provider search tool. To access, follow the link to <https://retiree.uhc.com/trs-carema>.
- You can also meet virtually with a mental health professional by phone or secure online video sessions through TRS Virtual Health powered by [Doctor on Demand](#) and [AmWell](#).

## Other Resources

- If you're having a mental health crisis, you should seek help right away by calling 911. You can ask if they have a designated mental health emergency specialist to send.
- If you're in danger of hurting yourself or someone else, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255, anytime, day or night.
- You can also call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) national helpline 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for mental health and substance abuse treatment referrals and information.

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## Meet Your TRS-Care Retiree Advisory Committee Members

On Sept. 16, the TRS board appointed new members to the Retiree Advisory Committee (RAC) who will begin their terms in February 2022. The RAC members focus on:

- group health coverage
- changes and recommendations to plan features
- recommendations to legislations that affect TRS-Care

To learn more about the RAC, find upcoming and past meeting materials and get to know the members, visit:

[www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/healthcare-RAC.aspx](http://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/healthcare-RAC.aspx).

# TRS Board Adopts Changes to Rules

*At the September 2021 board meeting, the board of trustees adopted several new rules and amendments to existing rules.*

The 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature made the most substantial changes to the Employment After Retirement (EAR) laws since 2011. Specifically, the legislature passed four bills that directly impacted EAR and, as a result, TRS completely revised the existing EAR rules.

In addition, the legislature passed [House Bill 2022](#) which provided a one-time reenrollment opportunity into TRS-Care for some individuals; and [Senate Bill 1444](#) which established an opportunity for employers to join and leave TRS-ActiveCare and clarified that employers participating in TRS-ActiveCare cannot offer alternative health care coverage.

A summary of the rules follows and if the description of changes is inconsistent with the rules as adopted, the adopted rules control.

## **New Rules 31.1-31.6, 31.11-31.19 and 31.31-31.33 – [Employment After Retirement \(EAR\)](#)**

- Changes the current “safe harbor” retirement date for service retirees who are exempt from EAR restrictions from Jan. 1, 2011 to Jan. 1, 2021. Based on this change, any service retiree with an effective date of retirement on or before Jan. 1, 2021 can work up to full time for a TRS-covered employer during a month without forfeiting the retiree’s annuity for that month. Unless otherwise exempt, however, these service retirees remain subject to surcharges which are to be paid by the employer.
- Establishes a “three strikes” process that must be completed before a service retiree forfeits the retiree’s full annuity for a month based on that retiree’s employment with TRS-covered employers during that month. The “three strikes” consist of a series of warnings and an alternate “dollar-for-dollar” payment option that TRS must provide a service retiree before the retiree may be subject to total forfeiture of the retiree’s annuity.
- Prohibits employers from directly or indirectly passing on the cost of either the pension or health benefit surcharge to retirees through payroll deductions, fees, or any other means designed to recover the cost.
- Creates a new EAR and surcharge exception for certain service retirees who are employed in positions dedicated to mitigating learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The positions must be in addition to normal staffing levels, funded by specific federal relief funds, and end no later than Dec. 31, 2024. **This exception does not apply to disability retirees or retirees employed with institutions of higher education.**
- Creates a new method for nonprofit organizations to establish tutoring programs in cooperation with public schools, and retirees may be employed in these programs up to full time during a month without forfeiting their annuity for that month. These retirees remain subject to surcharges which are to be paid by the employer.
- Changes TRS’ existing standard for one-half time employment from the current variable monthly limit (equal to four clock hours per workday in a given month) to a uniform monthly limit of 92 hours per month regardless of the number of workdays in that month or 11 days if the retiree combines one-half time and substitute employment in that month.
- Expands the definition of “substitute” for EAR purposes to include an employee who, on a temporary basis, monitors an in-person class while the classroom teacher temporarily instructs the class virtually.

## **Amended Rule 41.4 – [Employer Health Benefit Surcharge](#)**

Ensures the standards for determining when the health benefit surcharge is due under Rule 41.4 are consistent with the standards for determining when the return-to-work pension surcharge is due. In addition, the amendments are necessary to comply with the change that employers may not directly or indirectly pass along the expense of health care surcharges to retirees.

## **Amended Rules 43.1 and 43.45 – [Amendments to Appeals Rules](#)**

The amendments to Rules 43.1 (Administrative Review of Individual Requests) and 43.45 (Proposals for Decision, Exceptions, and Appeals to the Board of Trustees) change the deadlines for a member to appeal a decision of a department manager or a decision of the executive director. When appealing a decision of a department manager (Rule 43.1), a member or retiree now has the greater of either 45 days or the number of days it took TRS to issue the decision from the date the decision is mailed. When appealing the decision of the executive director to the Board of Trustees (Rule 43.45), a member or retiree now has the greater of either 20 days or the number of days it took the executive director to render the decision from the date the decision is served.

## **Amended TRS-ActiveCare Rules 41.30, 41.34, 41.35, 41.36, 41.37, and 41.45 – [Employers Joining/Leaving the Program and Flexibility for TRS to have Different Rates](#)**

The amendments to the TRS-ActiveCare rules codifies that employers participating in TRS-ActiveCare cannot also offer an alternative group health coverage to members. They must choose; they cannot have both. The amended rules also address a new requirement that the employers must provide notice to TRS by Dec. 31 of the year before the plan year they would like to join/leave TRS-ActiveCare and describes the process. The rules permit employers to leave TRS-ActiveCare but require them to remain out of the program for five years and, likewise, to join the program but require them to remain in for five years. This helps TRS maintain the stability and integrity of the program. *(continued on page 7)*

**TRS Board Adopts Changes to Rules** *(continued from page 6)*

If an employer terminates an alternative group plan to continue in TRS-ActiveCare, TRS-ActiveCare will not be responsible for COBRA coverage under TRS-ActiveCare; the employer will need to work that out with the alternative group plan or other plan. The amended rules also clarify that TRS has the flexibility to implement different rates and premiums based on risks, regional factors, and other underwriting considerations. This allows TRS-ActiveCare to set rates that are more competitive with the market. Member enrollment periods and effective coverage dates have been amended to be consistent with when the employer joins/leaves under the new mandatory five-year participation/exclusion periods. These rules became effective on Oct. 17, 2021.

*At the December 2021 board meeting, the board of trustees anticipates adoption of new TRS Rule 41.13, related to the implementation of HB 2022 and the One-Time Reenrollment Opportunity into TRS-Care.*

**New TRS-Care Rule 41.13 – One-Time Reenrollment Opportunity**

TRS is adopting this new rule to provide one opportunity for an otherwise eligible retiree to reenroll in TRS-Care if (1) the retiree is eligible to enroll in Medicare; (2) the retiree’s initial enrollment was voluntarily terminated between Jan. 1, 2017, and Dec. 31, 2019; and (3) the retiree reenrolls on or before Dec. 31, 2023. The new rule provides additional guidance regarding reenrollment, including enrollment of dependents and surviving spouses; and addresses the effective date of coverage. The rule was republished in the [Oct. 29, 2021 issue of the Texas Register](#) for public comment again due to a codification error (numbering error). The rule was previously misnumbered as rule 41.16 and published for comment with the rules above. TRS anticipates the rule (as rule 41.13) will become effective in December 2021.

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## What SB 8 Means for TRS Health Plans

TRS works to provide the highest value benefits possible for its members. During the COVID-19 pandemic, before vaccinations became widely available, TRS covered participants’ out-of-pocket costs for care related to COVID-19. Educators have been on the front lines of the pandemic and TRS strives to support them as much as possible.

In its third special session, the 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature passed [a law](#) appropriating an additional \$286 million in funding to the TRS health plans to help offset the costs of COVID-19. TRS will provide more information about this as details become available.

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## Stay Up to Date with Your Immunizations

TRS cares about your health and well-being, that’s why our health plans offer coverage for certain vaccinations for people of all ages. While we all know shots are no fun, they’re a critical part in preventing diseases and keeping you and your family healthy.

Whether you’re a child, an adult or even pregnant – vaccines are recommended for all ages and people in certain stages of their life. Vaccinations are important for protecting you and your family from diseases.

For instance, did you know a baby gets disease immunity from their mother during pregnancy? Conditions like whooping cough, a life-threatening illness among newborns, can be prevented if a pregnant mother receives her shot during her third trimester.

Or let’s consider older adults; shingles is a viral infection that occurs most often in people older than 50. As you age, your risk of getting shingles will increase. That’s why it’s important that older adults get this vaccine.

**COVID-19 Vaccines are Free, but Hospital Stays are Not**

COVID-19 vaccines are now more readily available than ever. With the recent [FDA approval](#) of the Pfizer vaccine, it’s now even easier to get your shot. The vaccine is the best way to protect yourself from a severe case of COVID-19 and hospitalization.

Remember: [COVID-19 vaccinations are free!](#) To find the nearest vaccination location and make an appointment, visit [GetTheVaccine.dshs.texas.gov](http://GetTheVaccine.dshs.texas.gov).

**Are Immunizations Covered Under TRS Health Plans?**

Yes, your TRS health plan pays 100% of the cost for specific immunizations! That means you pay \$0 for these immunizations, so long as you see an in-network provider. Immunizations are part of your preventive care benefits and vary by age.

Many immunizations are covered by your plan. You can check out a list of the [Covered Preventive Services](#) that your TRS health plan offers.

Remember: [Injections for allergies are not considered immunizations](#) under this benefit provision.



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**2021 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report**

In late November, TRS published its 2021 *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report* (ACFR). The report provides stakeholders with a complete picture of the system’s operations for the past year. Look for it on the What’s New and Publications pages of the TRS website at [www.trs.texas.gov](http://www.trs.texas.gov). Readers can find the “high points” by reading through the Management Discussion and Analysis (MD&A) in the financial section.

For the 31<sup>st</sup> year in a row, the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) has awarded TRS a certificate of achievement for its ACFR. The GFOA award is the highest form of recognition bestowed to a public employee retirement system for accounting and financial reporting.

**Updated Employment After Retirement Brochure Available on TRS Website**

Are you thinking about going back to work for a TRS-covered employer after you retire? If so, there are some key things you should know before returning to work. Our *Employment After Retirement* (EAR) brochure can help you navigate employment and stay up to date on the latest guidelines. It dives into the details on the required breaks in service, EAR limits, EAR exceptions, three strikes notification process, and more. The return-to-work scenarios will also help you make decisions to avoid revoking your retirement or losing any monthly annuity payments. The brochure is available in the “Find it Fast” section on the [TRS website](http://www.trs.texas.gov). Check it out today!

**Miss a TRS Board Meeting? We’ve Got You Covered**

Did you miss a previous TRS board meeting or do you want to revisit a specific discussion? We provide access to on-demand viewing of board meeting webcasts. This allows you to watch previous presentations whenever you want! Find references, website links and webcast archives that provide more information on board decisions at [https://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/board\\_meeting\\_webcasts.aspx](https://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/board_meeting_webcasts.aspx).