

## TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM of TEXAS

# UPDATE

## COVID-19 VACCINATIONS WILL BE COVERED AT 100%

All TRS health plans will cover FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccinations at no cost to participants. The vaccination is part of preventive health care.

State and federal guidelines determine when different groups of people are eligible to receive the vaccine. [We've created a resource hub on our website](#) where participants can find information about vaccine distribution, access and frequently asked questions. We'll update this page as developments are communicated to TRS.

### Important Information to Note

- Texas is currently only administering vaccines to the [Phase 1A](#) and [Phase 1B](#) populations.
- **TRS-ActiveCare participants** should bring both their Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas and CVS Caremark ID cards to appointments.
- There's a limited supply of vaccines during the initial release. After a [local clinic or provider is identified](#), participants should call ahead to ask about availability.

If participants have further questions, we encourage them to visit the [Texas Department of State Health Services \(DSHS\) FAQ page](#). **TRS does not administer vaccines so calling the provider with more specific questions will be the fastest way to receive answers.**

If a participant needs help finding a provider in Texas, they can visit [the Texas COVID-19 Vaccine Provider Locations map](#) or call 2-1-1 and select option 6.

## HOW TO HANDLE ONE-TIME INCREASES IN LIEU OF INCREASES IN CONTRACT RATES

TRS is receiving questions from Reporting Employers (REs) regarding whether compensation should be reported and member contributions withheld for compensation paid in the form of a one-time pay increase. The payments appear to be approved by the local board of trustees and are intended to provide employees with a pay increase for the current school year, but are not intended to bind the REs to continue to pay the increase in years to come. Some districts are calling these one-time payment increases "stipends."

In order for the one-time pay increases to be TRS-eligible compensation, the pay must be for service rendered and the right to receive it must accrue proportionately as the employee renders service. For example, if the board of trustees approves a one-time payment in the amount of \$1,500 for all teachers and agrees to pay the stipend in June 2021, the right to receive the payment must accrue proportionately each month as the employee works. So, an employee terminating employment in December will have accrued the right to receive approximately 84/187 of the \$1,500 payment (assuming the teacher began working on Aug. 20, 2020 and terminated employment effective Dec. 31, 2020). In this example, the proportionate share of the \$1,500 payment is creditable for TRS purposes.

However, if the board of trustees requires that in order to receive the one-time pay increase, an employee must be employed on the date the payment is made, the compensation does not accrue proportionately as service is rendered and is not creditable for TRS purposes. The payment in this example is more of a payment for the employee continuing employment with the RE rather than a payment for services rendered. Retention bonuses are expressly excluded from creditable compensation by [TRS Rule 25.21\(d\)\(5\)](#). Even though the payment was approved by the board of trustees, that does not automatically make the payment eligible for TRS.

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*continued from page 1*

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### **HOW TO HANDLE ONE-TIME INCREASES IN LIEU OF INCREASES IN CONTRACT RATES** *continued from page 1*

REs considering one-time pay increases must approve the increase in advance of the school year and before employees begin work. One-time pay increases approved after the employees have rendered the service required of them are not creditable for TRS purposes and should not be reported to TRS. Please contact your Reporting Coach if you have questions regarding one-time pay increases.

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## **HOW TO PROPERLY REPORT REMOTE INSTRUCTION**

As we approach the milestone of living and working during a pandemic for a full year, TRS recognizes that many REs have had to find creative solutions to provide education for students while preserving the health and safety of employees.

One solution many REs have adopted is to have a teacher work remotely, instructing students via virtual means, and hire a second employee to work in-person to monitor students in the classroom. The second employee is now the employee of record for that in-person position. Since the second employee is not serving in place of an absent employee, that person is not a substitute and cannot be reported as a substitute.

This also applies to TRS retirees. A retiree who accepts a position in the classroom when the teacher of record is teaching remotely is not a substitute since there is an employee of record and they are not taking the place of a current employee who is absent. The retiree and employer are subject to Employment after Retirement limits and surcharges when applicable.

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## **REPORTING EMPLOYER SATISFACTION SURVEY**

We need your help. TRS commissioned the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M University to conduct our annual survey of REs. The survey is designed to provide TRS with feedback so we can continue to improve on the services we provide.

The survey should be completed by the individual who submits reports to TRS. As such, all RE Payroll Contacts should expect to receive an email with the survey invite in February. If a Payroll Contact has not been designated, the survey will be sent to the RE's Web Administrator. Please note that if any survey recipient is not the individual that submits reports to TRS, the email will ask for the survey to be forwarded to the appropriate contact or for the recipient to provide the appropriate individual's contact information.

If you or a colleague receives the survey, please take a few minutes to complete it. If you think you should have received a survey but did not, please check your spam folders or contact [Kirby Goidel at kgoidel@tamu.edu](mailto:kgoidel@tamu.edu) or 979-458-3231.

The survey will be confidential, so feel free to provide your honest feedback. We look forward to sharing the results with you and working to improve our customer service. If you have any questions about the survey, feel free to email [Nick Ballard \(nick.ballard@trs.texas.gov\)](mailto:nick.ballard@trs.texas.gov) at TRS or [Kirby Goidel](mailto:kgoidel@ppri.org) at PPRI.

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## **WATCH AND LEARN: TRS MEMBER EDUCATION VIDEO SERIES**

Learn all about your TRS pension benefits by watching our [Member Education Videos](#)! Help us spread the word about the series by downloading a [poster](#) from our website and displaying it at your school.