MARCH 2021 VOLUME 40 I NUMBER 3

TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM of TEXAS UPDATE

ADJUNCT EMPLOYMENT – HOURS WORKED VS HOURS SCHEDULED

Adjunct employment as defined under Rule 25.1(j) is an instructor position that is filled on a semester-by-semester basis and is compensated on a per class basis. Also, the position must include only those duties directly related to the instruction of students in a class taken by students for college credit or taken to prepare students for college level work.

Furthermore, Rule 25.1 (i) states that employment in institutions of higher education (including community and junior colleges) that is measured in terms of the number of courses (semester or course hours/credits; instructional units; or other units of time representing class or instructional time) **must be converted** to clock hours. The conversion from class or instructional time to clock hours is required to reflect instructional time, as well as preparation, grading, and other time typically associated with one hour of instruction.

Traditionally, higher education employers have *not* tracked the actual hours worked by adjunct employees. If the hours are not tracked, the clock hours must be calculated by using the minimum of two-hour conversion to determine the time worked.

However, some higher education employers have begun requiring adjuncts to track their actual time worked. In this case, you would not use the two-hour conversion method. Per TRS reporting requirements, the employers must report the employees' tracked time each month with the actual hours worked in the calendar month. Thus, if the adjunct position is considered an hourly position and **ALL** hours worked are tracked (including preparation, grading, and other time typically associated with one hour of instruction) then the conversion method does not apply. Instead, the employer must report the total actual hours worked or on paid leave in the calendar month.

Please refer to the Payroll Manual to see calculation examples for Active and TRS Retiree conversions.

THIRD-PARTY EMPLOYERS ARE SUBJECT TO EAR RULES

For purposes of Employment After Retirement (EAR), a third-party employer is a company that a TRS-covered employer hires to provide personnel to the institution. The personnel perform duties that employees of the Reporting Employer (RE) would normally perform or provide.

Recently TRS has become aware of Stride, Inc., which provides online instruction to students on behalf of an RE. TRS determined that companies such as Stride, Inc., are third-party employers by providing personnel to TRS-covered employers. As employees of a third-party employer, TRS retirees working for Stride, Inc. and other similar companies are subject to TRS Laws and Rules governing EAR and must be reported each month on the ER Report.

If an RE would like to have a determination from TRS regarding a specific arrangement with a company, please provide copies of the contract between the RE and the company to your TRS reporting coach for review, along with information regarding the duties performed and/or services provided by each retiree in question.

These reporting requirements only apply in EAR situations. If an employee of the third party is providing services to your RE but is not a TRS retiree, the RE does not report that person to TRS.

continued on page 2 >

continued from page 1

REPORTING EMPLOYEE NAMES AND NAME CHANGES TO TRS

TRS reporting requirements specify that REs must report names as shown on the employee's social security card. When reporting names to TRS, please make sure that you report an employee's name as follows on ED 20 and/or ED 25 records:

- First name
  - Maximum length of 25 characters – If the first name has more than 25 characters, please put only the first 25.
  - Hyphens, apostrophes and spaces are acceptable.
  - Please do not use non-ASCII characters like accent marks or tildes.
- Middle name(s)
  - Maximum length of 25 characters – If the middle name has more than 25 characters, please put only the first 25.
  - Hyphens, apostrophes and spaces are acceptable.
  - Please do not use non-ASCII characters like accent marks or tildes.
- Last Name
  - Maximum length of 30 characters – If the last name has more than 30 characters, please only input the first 30 characters.
  - Hyphens, apostrophes and spaces are acceptable.
  - Please do not use non-ASCII characters like accent marks or tildes.
- Generations
  - Place these in the Generation field of the ED 20 and/or ED 25 record.
  - Do not include generation in the Last Name field.
  - Max length of four characters.
  - Please do not include professional designations – i.e. MD, PHD, etc.
- Other notes
  - When the name on the social security card is on two lines, all names listed on the *second* line are the person's last name per the Social Security Administration.
  - If the entire name appears on a single line, the employee must specify which is the first, middle and last name.
  - REs must report employee name changes. Employees should not make the name change directly with TRS.
  - Do not change an employee's name with TRS to "The Estate Of."

If you receive an error reporting the name of an employee, please follow the steps below:

1. Verify the name using the employee's social security card. No other forms of identification are acceptable to determine an employee's name for TRS reporting purposes.
2. If what you have matches the social security card, submit an ED 25 with the **original** name matching what TRS currently has on file. In the **new** fields please enter only the fields that are **changing**.
3. If you do not have the social security card for the employee, you may match the name as it shows on TRS while you request the updated social security card from the employee.
4. If you need to delete a name completely, you will need to enter the name as it appears in TRS as the original name. In the new field, you will need to completely fill the field to its maximum length with 'X'. For example, if you need to delete the middle name, since the maximum length of the field is 25 characters, you would enter: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
5. Only send documentation to your coach if you receive the error stating "**This change is not allowed. Please contact your TRS Coach.**"
6. If you find that you are changing an employee's name each month, please reach out to your employee and let them know that if they are working at multiple institutions to please ensure that all employers have the most up to date social security card.

continued on page 3 >

continued from page 2

TRS CONTRACT REVIEW

Occasionally employers pay compensation amounts that are not clearly defined as eligible or not eligible under TRS' creditable compensation guidelines. In these situations, additional research and examination is needed to verify the eligibility of such compensation.

When an employer has questions about the eligibility of a compensation amount, please send the full contract along with board approved additions, amendments, or contract updates to your TRS reporting coach. Contracts will be sent to the TRS legal department for review and determination. Please be advised, due to the current volume of items under review, TRS legal department's determination may take between 6-8 weeks. Thus, sending in the documentation as timely as possible is critical.

VIRTUAL RE LEDGER TRAININGS

TRS is offering a two-hour training session on reading and reconciling RE Ledger balances. We will offer the session on two dates, with the same content being shared in both sessions.

RE Ledger Training	Tuesday, March 30, 2021	1:30–3:30 p.m.
RE Ledger Training	Tuesday, April 13, 2021	1:30–3:30 p.m.

Each attendee must register individually on the RE Portal Training page here. This will ensure that you receive the link to access the web session as well as a copy of the materials being covered.

RECONCILING YOUR MONTHLY BILL

It's critical to reconcile your TRS-ActiveCare bill each month to make sure the enrollment and billing information is correct. This process will help protect your district from unexpected premium charges or credits. It also identifies enrollment discrepancies – and we can work with you to correct them.

How Should You Report Discrepancies?
Report billing discrepancies on the template located in the bswift portal. Your bswift Benefit Administrator Advocate (BAA) will work with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas (BCBSTX) and tell you what actions to take before the next bill.

Please send billing reconciliations before the third week of the month to be sure the correction is on the next bill. It's important to make sure any updates are correct in your enrollment portal and on the electronic file too.

When Should You Report Discrepancies?
If you find an issue with your bill for an enrollment record, you should report it to your bswift BAA immediately. Your bswift BAA can help find the root cause or provide any additional information you need. TRS allows districts to submit transactions up to 45 days from the effective date of coverage.

If you're reporting anything after the 45-day administrative period, the transaction is not updated unless TRS approves it as an exception. You can find membership processing guidelines on page 40 of the TRS Administrative Guide.

The membership processing windows are located on page 41of the TRS Administrative Guide.

Did you know you can take advantage of reporting in bswift to audit your records between bills? Review the bswift user guide for reporting options or contact your bswift BAA.

TRS Exceptions and Tracker
Only TRS can make exceptions to approve requests for updates outside the 45-day membership processing guidelines and elections outside of enrollment windows. TRS only grants exceptions for a "good cause." Please consider this before submitting information.

continued on page 4 >

continued from page 3

RECONCILING YOUR MONTHLY BILL *continued from page 3*

The tracker feature in bswift is only used to submit exceptions. Please direct any other requests to your bswift BAA. These are some important reminders about exceptions:

The tracker feature in bswift is only used to submit exceptions. Please direct any other requests to your bswift BAA. These are some important reminders about exceptions:

- Use the tracker for exceptions only.
- Provide and attach all necessary documentation when you submit the request.
- Make sure your employee is aware that backdated changes could mean they owe more in premiums.
- Fill out the entire tracker form, including the exception questionnaire.
- At the time of submission, the "Assigned to User" **must** be Request, Exception.

If an employee record exists in bswift, submit exceptions from the employee record. Submit new member records from the BA level.

- Be sure to include your email address to receive notification of ticket statuses.

What about Urgent Access Issues?
Enter transactions into bswift or send transactions on the electronic file to bswift. Bswift will transfer the information to BCBSTX, Caremark and if applicable the HMOs.

We understand that timing could affect TRS participants at times. If you have an urgent need, please contact your bswift BAA for a temporary update. Your bswift BAA will need documentation of the enrollment to make an update. As a reminder, this is a temporary update. The eligibility update needs to be included on the next electronic file to be a permanent update.

Your bswift BAA team is available to assist you. They work closely with bswift and each TPA in an effort to make enrollment and eligibility run smoothly for each entity within TRS. You may contact them at 1-877-767-5254 or email at TRSBAinquiries@bswift.com.

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS NOW AVAILABLE FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

All TRS health plans will cover *FDA-authorized* 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. As of March 3, 2021, Texas vaccine providers must expand vaccine eligibility to include people who work in school and childcare operations.

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 administering vaccines to Phase 1A, Phase 1B, Phase 1C, and people who work in school and childcare operations.
- **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.

WATCH & 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.