

# COVID-19 AND YOUR RETIREMENT

As schools reopen, many CEA members are considering whether returning to work is a viable option for them. This guidance is intended to answer key questions about how certain decisions you make impact your pension benefits provided through the Teachers' Retirement Board (TRB).



## HOW DOES TAKING A LEAVE OF ABSENCE (LOA) IMPACT MY RETIREMENT?

The answer depends on what specific type of leave you will be taking and whether it is paid or unpaid.

### If you are using Accumulated Sick Days:

You will receive regular retirement credit while on paid sick days. Note: Any salary earned while on an LOA does not count towards your highest three-year average.

### Taking an Unpaid Leave of Absence:

With only a few exceptions, you receive no retirement credit if you are on an unpaid leave. The TRB looks at whether you were on unpaid leave as of the first school day of each month. So, for example, if the unpaid LOA starts on May 10, you will get credit for May, since you were working on the first school day of May, but you will not get credit starting in June.

However, there are two ways to get retirement credit for unpaid LOA time:

- 1. Current Leave of Absence:** You can pay in the mandatory contributions that you would have paid if you were working (8.25% of salary). This is called a Current Leave of Absence and has very strict rules (e.g., payment is made directly to TRB; you have to submit the form before the leave starts; if you miss any payments, you cannot pay for any more months; you can only do this for up to 10 school months in your entire career). A Current Leave of Absence does not require you to actually return to work after the leave is over, so this can allow you to get retirement credit for what could end up being your terminal year. That is not true with a Previous Leave of Absence, described below, in which you must return for a year before you are permitted to buy back the LOA time. Here is the form for that: [portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI\\_CurrentLOA53X.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI_CurrentLOA53X.pdf)
- 2. Previous Leave of Absence:** If you did not utilize the Current Leave of Absence option while on leave, you can purchase that time back as a Previous Leave of Absence after the leave is over, once you have returned to teaching for one full school year and as long as you have at least five full-time years of Connecticut service. The cost is based on an actuarial formula utilized in the Additional Service Credit Cost Estimator (on the TRB website). Here is the form for that: [portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI\\_PreviousLOA53.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI_PreviousLOA53.pdf)

## Taking Emergency Family and Medical Leave Act (EFMLA) with a partial salary:

It is possible for you to get full retirement credit based on the salary you otherwise would have earned. It can be accomplished in one of three ways:

1. Have the district withhold the full TRB contributions from your partial salary as if you were earning your regular pay; or
2. You pay in the contributions directly to the TRB as a Current Leave Of Absence (described above) based on the 100% salary amount
3. Purchase later as a Previous Leave of Absence (described above) as long as you return to public school teaching for at least one school year following the leave, assuming you have at least five years of full-time Connecticut service

Here is the form [portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI\\_CurrentLOA53X.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI_CurrentLOA53X.pdf); or

Here is the form [portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI\\_PreviousLOA53.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI_PreviousLOA53.pdf)

## CAN I APPLY FOR A DISABILITY THROUGH THE TRB?

The TRB offers a long-term disability benefit for any active member who is unable to work at all due to a physical or mental impairment that is expected to last for the foreseeable future. If you have under 5 years of service, the disability must be job-related. You must file within three months of the date of your last TRB contribution. The application requires your physician(s) to submit medical reports documenting that you are currently disabled from working, in addition to other information.

The application can be found here: [portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI\\_DISAPP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI_DISAPP.pdf)

## HOW WILL MY RETIREMENT BENEFIT BE CALCULATED IF I RETIRE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SCHOOL YEAR RATHER THAN IN JUNE?

Your retirement benefit is based on your age, years of service, and salary. The TRB looks at your age and years of service as of your effective retirement date. You get retirement credit for each month that you work (the TRB looks at whether you were employed and paid as of the first school day of each month). So if you retire as of January 1, for example, you will receive four months of retirement credit for the school year, representing

September through December. Your final average salary also is part of the calculation and is defined as the average of your highest three years of salary, or your highest 30 months of salary if you do not retire at the end of the school year.

### **I THOUGHT THE TRB REQUIRES ME TO FILE THE RETIREMENT APPLICATION 4 TO 6 MONTHS IN ADVANCE. WHAT IF I DECIDE TO RETIRE AT THE LAST MINUTE AND WILL NOT BE ABLE TO FILE IT THAT FAR IN ADVANCE?**

Although it is recommended that you file the retirement application 4-6 months in advance, you legally have the right to file it up until the last day of the month before your effective retirement date. So, for example, if you plan to retire December 1, the application must be postmarked no later than November 30.

If you are retiring and are age 65 or older (or have a spouse who is), you will need to enroll in Medicare Parts A and B in addition to the TRB Medicare add-on plan. There is a separate application and timeline for the insurance application, although the TRB has allowed additional time for it to be submitted during the pandemic. Here is the link: [portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/HealthInsurance/HI\\_INSAAPP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/HealthInsurance/HI_INSAAPP.pdf)

CEA is again offering in-depth virtual retirement workshops this year, which cover everything you need to know in order to navigate the retirement process. Go to [cea.org](https://cea.org) to register.

### **I AM RETURNING TO TEACH IN PERSON. WHAT HAPPENS IF I BECOME ILL AND PASS AWAY? WILL ANY OF MY EARNED RETIREMENT BENEFITS BE PAID TO MY FAMILY?**

If you die while in active service or while receiving a disability allowance and are *not yet eligible* for a retirement benefit at the time of your death, there are benefits that will be paid to your beneficiaries. Connecticut law requires that the TRB pay monthly survivorship benefits to your statutory survivors (i.e., a spouse; child under the age of 18; dependent parent; legal guardian of the deceased member's child(ren) under the age of 18; or dependent former spouse) before any balance of your account is paid to your

designated beneficiary. If you have no statutory survivors, your account balance will be paid to your designated beneficiary in a lump sum.

Statutory Survivorship Benefits are as follows:

- \$300 monthly to each minor child under age 18
- \$300 monthly to each disabled child
- \$300-\$600 monthly to surviving spouse (\$300 plus \$25 for each year of service over 12 years, to a maximum of \$600). The maximum family survivorship benefit is \$1,500 monthly.

TRB will pay a one-time burial expense payment of up to \$2,000 (dependent on length of service) to your surviving spouse. If there is no surviving spouse, this payment will be paid to the person who paid the funeral expenses.

If you die *after* meeting the age and service requirements for a retirement benefit, your statutory survivor may choose one of the following options in the settlement of the account (unless you have signed a waiver of these benefits):

1. Monthly Survivorship Benefit (plus the one-time lump sum death payment).
2. Monthly Plan D 100% Co-participant Benefit for your spouse. This benefit is based on the retirement allowance you would have received at the time of your death, reduced by an option factor based on your age and your spouse's age for this option.
3. Lump sum refund of your account balance. If you would like your designated beneficiary to receive your account but have a surviving spouse, you must waive the co-participant option that is otherwise available to your spouse. You may do so by checking the box at the bottom of the *Active/Inactive Teacher Beneficiary Form*.

It is imperative that your beneficiary designation is up to date. Your annual TRB statement reflects who you have designated. If you need to change it, you must download the *Active/Inactive Teacher Beneficiary Form* from the TRB website and submit it directly to the TRB. You should retain a copy of the completed form for your records.

Here is the link to the form: [portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI\\_BENEFRM.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/TRB/Content/ActiveInactive/AI_BENEFRM.pdf)