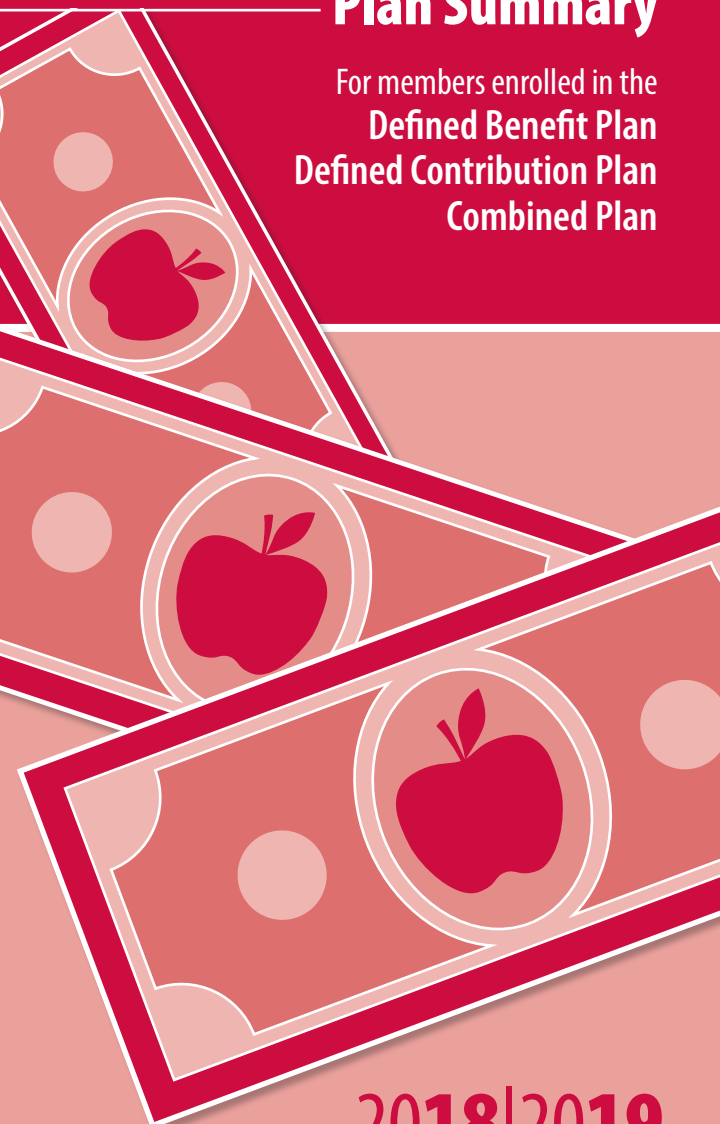




Understanding Your STRS Ohio Benefits

Plan Summary

For members enrolled in the
Defined Benefit Plan
Defined Contribution Plan
Combined Plan



2018|2019

State Teachers Retirement Board

(as of Sept. 1, 2018)

Robert Stein

Chair, Retired Teacher Member

Carol Correthers

Vice Chair, Contributing Member

Paolo DeMaria

Superintendent of Public Instruction

David Gruber

Appointed Member

Taiyia L. Hayden

Contributing Member

Yoel Mayerfeld

Appointed Member

Robert A. McFee

Contributing Member

Dale Price

Contributing Member

Jeffrey Rhodes

Contributing Member

Wade Steen

Appointed Member

Rita J. Walters

Retired Teacher Member



Michael J. Nehf

Executive Director

September 2018

Dear Member:

The mission of STRS Ohio is to partner with our members in helping to build retirement security. This brochure provides an overview of the benefits and services available to STRS Ohio members.

To make it easier to find the information specific to the retirement plan you are enrolled in, this brochure is divided into sections for each retirement plan — Defined Benefit Plan, Defined Contribution Plan and Combined Plan.

On behalf of all STRS Ohio associates, I would like to express our appreciation for being given the opportunity to serve you and thousands of other Ohio educators.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Nehf
Executive Director

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This brochure is a summary written in plain language for use by STRS Ohio members. It is not intended as a substitute for the Ohio Revised Code or the Ohio Administrative Code or for any state or federal law or regulation, nor will its interpretation prevail should a conflict arise between it and any law or regulation. More information may be obtained by contacting STRS Ohio toll-free at 888-227-7877.

Overview

The State Teachers Retirement System of Ohio (STRS Ohio) is a statewide pension plan for Ohio educators that offers a range of benefits and services to nearly 500,000 active and inactive members and retirees. STRS Ohio operates by authority of the Ohio General Assembly, and benefits are provided under Chapter 3307 of the Ohio Revised Code (R.C.) and is a qualified plan under Section 401(a) of the Internal Revenue Code. Membership in the system includes public school teachers and administrators and college and university faculty. Since April 1998, certain college and university faculty may select STRS Ohio or an alternative retirement plan.

The governance of STRS Ohio is vested in the State Teachers Retirement Board. The Retirement Board consists of five contributing members, two retired members, three appointed members and the superintendent of public instruction.

Teacher members are elected to four-year terms by members of the system. The retired teacher members are elected to four-year terms by retirees receiving benefits from STRS Ohio. The four remaining members are: an investment expert appointed by the governor (four-year term); an investment expert appointed jointly by the Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate President (four-year term); an investment expert designated by the treasurer of state (four-year term); and the superintendent of public instruction or his/her designated investment expert. Board members serve without compensation other than actual, necessary expenses.

STRS Ohio: security for Ohio educators

Since its beginning in 1920, STRS Ohio's primary goal has been to preserve and enhance retirement benefits for public educators. Services such as newsletters, an email news service, a toll-free number, a website, retirement planning seminars, individual conferences and benefit information meetings keep members informed about their benefits and services.

Investments

The Retirement Board oversees the investment of STRS Ohio funds in accordance with Section 3307.15, R.C. In keeping with this responsibility, the Retirement Board maintains a Statement of Investment Objectives and Policy, which sets specific asset allocation targets and ranges, risk factors, asset class benchmarks, time frames, total return objectives and performance evaluation guidelines. In addition, the Retirement Board maintains a Statement of Fund Governance, which summarizes the governance structure established by the board to ensure the prudent, effective and efficient management of STRS Ohio's assets.

The investment portfolio is well diversified with significant holdings in bonds, notes, mortgages, stocks, real estate and international investments. Because investment earnings provide substantial funding for benefits, the basic policy of the Retirement Board is to preserve the original investment while earning a return sufficient to meet benefit payments.

STRS Ohio publishes a *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*, copies of which are available by request. It is also posted at www.strsoh.org.

STRS Ohio Defined Benefit Plan

STRS Ohio offers a Defined Benefit Plan, in which the amount of a member's retirement benefit is derived from a defined calculation that considers age, years of service credit and final average salary. The retirement benefit is funded during employment so funds accumulate during the time the actual benefit liability is established.

The Defined Benefit Plan is also an "actuarial reserve" system — funds to pay future benefits come from employer and member contributions, as well as from investment income. Unlike many public pension plans, STRS Ohio does not depend on periodic or direct state appropriations for financing.

Members contribute 14% of annual gross earnings to the system. These contributions are held in trust in the Teachers' Savings Fund.

Employers contribute 14% of their total faculty payroll to the Employers' Trust Fund. At retirement, funds from this account are combined with the Teachers' Savings Fund; the investment yield from both provides funding for all benefits. Based on actuary recommendations, the State Teachers Retirement Board determines funding levels for the statutorily defined benefits.

When a member accepts service retirement or disability benefits, STRS Ohio transfers the individual's account, plus additional monies needed to fund the benefit, to the Annuity and Pension Reserve Fund, from which all such benefits are paid.

In lieu of retirement benefits, members may withdraw their account when they terminate employment, receiving a lump-sum amount that includes contributions and interest. Members who withdraw their contributions give up all rights to retirement benefits and possible access to health care from STRS Ohio.

Prefunding helps to ensure that benefits will be paid when due the member. The ratio of assets to accrued benefits and long-term returns on STRS Ohio investments provide this financial security for the future.

Reporting of individual accounts

Each October, Defined Benefit Plan and Combined Plan participants receive an *Annual Statement of Account* as of the preceding June 30. This statement serves as a history of earnings, deposits and retirement credit for each academic year. It reflects the total account balance, account withdrawal value and service credit.

In addition, the statement includes projected retirement benefits, estimates of survivor and disability benefits (assuming eligibility requirements for these benefits are met) and certified service credit which is eligible for purchase.

Designation of beneficiaries

It is important to identify beneficiaries in the case of the death of the member. The statutory succession of beneficiaries determines who is eligible to receive a withdrawal or monthly benefit when a member dies, unless the member completes a beneficiary designation form to designate beneficiaries by name. The statutory succession of beneficiaries is desirable for most family circumstances.

Under statutory succession, beneficiaries qualify in the following order:

1. Spouse
2. Qualified children — includes children who are under age 22 and never married or any age, never married, physically or mentally incapacitated before age 22 and have remained continuously incapacitated
3. Nonqualified children
4. Dependent parent
5. Parents (share and share alike)
6. Estate

The statutory succession of beneficiaries will apply if the member has not previously designated a beneficiary or if the member:

1. Designates statutory succession;
2. Is not survived by a named beneficiary; or

3. Has not filed a beneficiary designation form after any one of the following:
 - a. Marriage;
 - b. Birth or adoption of a child;
 - c. Divorce, marriage dissolution or legal separation;
 - d. Withdrawal of account; or
 - e. Permanent retirement plan selection if a plan change was made.

In place of the statutory succession of beneficiaries, members may designate beneficiaries by name. In some circumstances, this designation may jeopardize monthly survivor benefits to otherwise dependent survivors and may allow only a withdrawal of the account. (For example, naming a trust fund or estate as the beneficiary may allow for only a withdrawal of the account and prevent a surviving spouse from receiving monthly benefits.) Please consult STRS Ohio about beneficiary designations for unusual situations.

If a member has also made contributions to either the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or the School Employees Retirement System (SERS), STRS Ohio will pay according to the last beneficiary designation filed with any of the three retirement systems (STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS). Check with SERS and OPERS to determine what designation they will recognize.

STRS Ohio benefits under the Defined Benefit Plan

A summary of basic benefits under the Defined Benefit Plan follows.

Survivor benefits

A member's spouse, children under the age of 22, dependent parents and physically or mentally incapacitated dependents may qualify for survivor benefits when a member dies before service retirement.

STRS Ohio determines eligibility for dependent-based and service-based survivor benefits as follows:

- Existing members as of June 30, 2013, must have at least 1.50 years of qualifying service credit* before death, with .25 of a year having been earned within 30 months before death; or been receiving a disability benefit at the time of death; or received a disability benefit within the last 12 months and was contributing at the time of death.
- New members on or after July 1, 2013, must have at least 5.00 years of qualifying service credit* before death (and the date of death is no more than one year from the last date of service); or been receiving a disability benefit at the time of death; or received a disability benefit within the last 12 months and was contributing at the time of death.
- If the member leaves Ohio public service, survivor benefits extend for up to 27 months (for existing members) or 12 months (for new members, after July 1, 2013) after the last contributing service or while the member is receiving a disability benefit, provided the account is not withdrawn. A member who has eligible dependents should consider this benefit before withdrawing the account during this period.

If the member meets the eligibility requirements for more than one benefit, the amount of the benefit is the greater of a dependent-based benefit, a service-based benefit or a retirement-based benefit.

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restoration of withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

Dependent-based benefits are payable as follows:

Number of Qualified Survivors	Percentage of Final Average Salary*
1	25%
2	40%
3	50%
4	55%
5 or more	60%

Service-based benefits are payable when the member has 20 or more years of service credit.

Service-based benefits are payable as follows:

Years of Service	Percentage of Final Average Salary*
20	29%
21	33%
22	37%
23	41%
24	45%
25	48%
26	51%
27	54%
28	57%
29 or more	60%

The surviving spouse's share of the above service-based benefit is as follows:

Number of Qualified Survivors	Spouse's Share
1	100%
2	62.5%
3	50%
4	45.45%
5 or more	41.67%

*Average of the member's five highest years of earnings. If contributions were made for less than the FAS period, total compensation is divided by the total number of years of service credit in the member's account to calculate the FAS.

If there is no surviving spouse and more than one qualified survivor, the benefit is divided equally among the qualified survivors.

The **retirement-based benefit** is payable when the member dies after qualifying for service retirement (but before actually retiring with STRS Ohio) and there are no children who are qualified survivors. (See Pages 14–15 for retirement eligibility information.)

If there are one or more children who are qualified survivors, the primary beneficiary must select between the dependent-based and the service-based benefit. However, once the children no longer qualify for benefits (due to age or marital status, for example), the primary beneficiary may change to the retirement-based benefit.

If the member dies after meeting service retirement eligibility, a retirement-based benefit is payable to a qualified survivor.

Additional information about survivor benefits

An STRS Ohio member receiving disability benefits has the same survivor benefit coverage as an active teacher.

Survivor benefits to an eligible spouse are payable regardless of income from other sources. Survivor benefits may be more valuable than any other financial protection for a family.

The primary beneficiary may withdraw the deceased member's account in lieu of receiving monthly benefits if there are no children who are qualified survivors. If there are no qualified survivors or other eligibility requirements are not met, the primary beneficiary must withdraw the deceased member's account. The withdrawal amount consists of the deceased member's contributions plus interest and with 5.00 of more years of qualifying service credit, 50% matching funds, if certain criteria are met. Survivors of disability or former disability benefit recipients receive the account balance of the member's contributions; no interest or matching funds are payable.

For further information, view the *Survivor Benefits* brochure for members enrolled in the Defined Benefit Plan online at www.strsoh.org, or request a copy by calling toll-free 888-227-7877.

Disability benefits

The Defined Benefit Plan provides coverage for members whose disability from their most recent job duties is presumed to last at least 12 months from the date STRS Ohio receives the completed *Disability Benefit Application*.

There are two disability benefit programs in the Defined Benefit Plan — disability retirement and disability allowance.

- Teachers who were members of STRS Ohio on or before July 29, 1992, may participate in either the disability allowance or disability retirement program.
- Teachers who became members of STRS Ohio after July 29, 1992, participate under the disability allowance program.

The *Annual Statement of Account* indicates which disability program applies to the member.

Any applicant who is denied disability benefits may appeal the decision to the Retirement Board as provided by statute and procedures established by the board. An individual receiving service retirement benefits is ineligible to apply for disability benefits.

Disability recipients who have been receiving benefits for at least 14 months must annually complete and submit a *Statement of Employment and Earnings After Receipt of a Disability Benefit* provided by STRS Ohio each March.

Disability retirement program

To qualify for disability retirement benefits, an STRS Ohio member who earned service credit before July 1, 2013, must:

- Have 5.00 years of qualifying service credit;*
- Submit a completed application packet to STRS Ohio within two years of the last date of earned service.
- Not be receiving service retirement benefits;
- Be younger than age 60 when the disability application is filed;

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restoration of withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

- Stop teaching before reaching age 60; and
- Have the most service credit with STRS Ohio (versus OPERS or SERS). If OPERS or SERS has the most service credit, contact the system with most service credit for a Disability Application Packet.

A monthly disability retirement benefit is based on a percentage (limited to 75% and no less than 30%) of a member’s final average salary.* The percentage is determined by multiplying by 2% the member’s total number of years of Ohio service credit and projected credit to age 60.

Disability Retirement Example	
Member’s age projected to age	60
Member’s present age	-35
Projected credit	25
Actual years of Ohio service	+10
Total benefit-based service	35
Formula level	x 2%
	70%
Final average salary	x \$40,000
Annual disability retirement benefit	\$28,000
Monthly benefit	\$2,166

Disability benefits terminate:

- If the recipient performs any teaching service in a public or private setting, school or nonschool setting, on a volunteer basis or for compensation, in or outside the state of Ohio;
- If the recipient’s disability benefit was on a combined basis with OPERS and/or SERS and the recipient becomes employed in a position covered by one of these systems;
- At the request of the recipient;
- If a medical reexamination shows the member is no longer disabled;
- If the recipient is not following an agreed-upon treatment plan or does not submit required medical reports; or

*Final average salary (FAS) is the average of the member’s five highest years of Ohio public earnings.

- If the recipient has not filed the *Statement of Employment and Earnings After Receipt of a Disability Benefit* form noted on Page 10.

If disability benefits terminate, a member may apply for service retirement if eligibility requirements have been met.

Disability allowance program

To qualify for disability allowance benefits, an STRS Ohio member must:

- Meet either of the following:
 - **Existing members on June 30, 2013**, must have at least 5.00 years of qualifying service credit* on account with STRS Ohio and submit a completed application packet within two years of the last date of earned service.
 - **New members on or after July 1, 2013**, must have at least 10.00 years of qualifying service credit* on account with STRS Ohio and submit a completed application packet within one year of the last date of earned service.
- Not be receiving service retirement benefits.
- Have the most service credit with STRS Ohio (versus OPERS or SERS). If OPERS or SERS has the most service credit, contact the system with the most service credit for a Disability Application Packet.

A monthly disability allowance benefit is based on a percentage (limited to 60% and no less than 45%) of the member’s final average salary.** The percentage is determined by multiplying the member’s total years of Ohio service credit by 2.2%.

Disability Allowance Example	
Actual years of Ohio service	22
Formula level	x 2.2%
	48.4%
Final average salary	x \$50,000
Annual disability allowance benefit	\$24,200
Monthly benefit	\$2,017

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restoration of withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

**Final average salary (FAS) is the average of the member’s five highest years of Ohio public earnings.

Disability benefits terminate:

- If the recipient performs any teaching service in a public or private setting, school or nonschool setting, on a volunteer basis or for compensation, in or outside the state of Ohio;
- If the recipient’s disability benefit was on a combined basis with OPERS and/or SERS and the recipient becomes employed in a position covered by one of those systems;
- At the request of the recipient;
- If a medical reexamination shows the member is no longer disabled;
- If the recipient is not following an agreed-upon treatment plan or does not submit required medical reports;
- If the recipient has not filed the *Statement of Employment and Earnings After Receipt of a Disability Benefit* form noted on Page 10; or
- At age 65, or after a specific benefit period.

Disability benefits terminate at age 65 if the benefit began before age 60. The following chart shows how long benefits may continue for members who were age 60 or older when disability benefits began.

Age at Effective Date of Disability	Benefit Period
60 or 61	60 months
62 or 63	48 months
64 or 65	36 months
66, 67 or 68	24 months
69 or older	12 months

When disability benefits terminate, a member may apply for service retirement if eligibility requirements have been met.

Service retirement

STRS Ohio's primary purpose under the Defined Benefit Plan is to provide lifetime benefits for the retired member.

Members qualify for lifetime unreduced benefits after meeting one of the eligibility requirements indicated in the table below.

Eligibility Requirements for Unreduced Benefit	
For Retirement Dates	Minimum Age and Years of Service
Through 7/1/2015	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2015–7/1/2017	Any age and 31 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2017–7/1/2019	Any age and 32 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2019–7/1/2021	Any age and 33 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2021–7/1/2023	Any age and 34 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2023–7/1/2026	Any age and 35 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*
On or after 8/1/2026	Age 60 and 35 yrs.; or age 65 and 5 yrs.*

If a member retires before the age and years of service requirements shown on Page 14, benefits are reduced. Eligibility requirements for lifetime actuarially reduced benefits are indicated in the table below.

Eligibility Requirements for Actuarially Reduced Benefit	
For Retirement Dates	Minimum Age and Years of Service
Through 7/1/2015	Age 55 and 25 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2015–7/1/2017	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 55 and 26 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2017–7/1/2019	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 55 and 27 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2019–7/1/2021	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 55 and 28 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*
8/1/2021–7/1/2023	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 55 and 29 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*
On or after 8/1/2023	Any age and 30 yrs.; or age 60 and 5 yrs.*

A member who has at least 5.00 years of qualifying service credit* and who terminates Ohio public teaching service before the required age shown on Pages 14–15 may later qualify for a benefit. If member contributions are not withdrawn, a benefit is payable when the member attains the qualifying age.

The retirement effective date is the first day of the month following the latter of the last day of teaching or other Ohio public service, or attainment of age and service requirements. Credit which was certified before retirement may be purchased up to three months following the effective date of retirement.

A variety of payment plans are available at retirement, all providing lifetime benefits for the retiree.

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restoration of withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS); restoration of withdrawn credit with STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS; interrupted Ohio public service due to military service; and earned and restored credit that transfers from Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, Highway Patrol Retirement System or Cincinnati Retirement System.

At the retiree's death, if the amount disbursed under any payment plan is less than the retiree's contributions at retirement (no interest or matching funds included), the difference is paid to the beneficiary or estate.

Salary-related benefit

Retirement benefits are calculated using a salary-related benefit calculation which is based on the member's:

- Age at retirement,
- Total years of service credit, and
- Final average salary (FAS). The FAS is the average of the member's five highest years of Ohio public earnings. (For retirement dates July 1, 2015, and before, the FAS is the average of the member's three highest years of earnings.)

For members retiring Aug. 1, 2015, and later: The benefit is calculated by multiplying all years of service by 2.2% of a five-year FAS.

If the member retires under early retirement eligibility, as shown on Page 15, benefits are actuarially reduced to reflect the longer payout of benefits.

Members who were eligible to retire on July 1, 2015, but continue working beyond that date, will receive the greater of: (a) the benefit the member would have received if he/she had retired on July 1, 2015, (known as the "transition benefit") or (b) the benefit calculated upon retirement under the new formula, based on all service credit earned up to the date of retirement.*

For example:

- A member eligible to retire July 1, 2015, with 35 years of contributing service credit and a **three-year FAS** of \$70,000 would receive a benefit of \$5,162 ($88.5\% \times \$70,000 \div 12$).
- If this member had worked four more years and retired July 1, 2019, with no salary increase, 39 years of contributing service credit and a **five-year FAS** of \$68,000, he/she would receive a benefit of \$4,862 ($85.8\% \times \$68,000 \div 12$); however,
- Since the benefit amount the member would have received on July 1, 2015, is higher, the member will receive that higher benefit of \$5,162 per month.

*The transition benefit applies to the Single Life Annuity plan of payment. If the member chooses a plan of payment other than the Single Life Annuity, the benefit amount may be slightly lower than what it would have been had the member retired on July 1, 2015.

For members who were eligible to retire on or before July 1, 2015, the benefit is calculated by multiplying the first 30 years of contributing service credit* and all noncontributing service credit (including Ohio-valued purchased credit) by 2.2% of the FAS (average of the three highest years).

The 31st year of contributing service credit is multiplied by 2.5% of the FAS. An additional one-tenth of a percent is added to the calculation for every year of contributing service over 31 years (2.6% for the 32nd year, 2.7% for the 33rd year and so on) until 100% of the FAS is reached.

For STRS Ohio members with 35 or more years of contributing service credit, the benefit is calculated by multiplying the first 31 years of contributing service by 2.5% of the FAS. All noncontributing service is multiplied by 2.2% of the FAS. Contributing service credit over 31 years continues to be calculated at the escalating formula noted previously. A member with 35 years of contributing service credit will receive 88.5% of the FAS.

Benefits are reduced for members who retire with less than 30 years of service credit and before age 65. The reduction is based on the total years of service credit and age at retirement.

Life annuity

Members participating in the Defined Benefit Plan have several payment options — once they end their teaching career. Participants have the flexibility of taking a life annuity for their lifetime and the lifetime of their beneficiary. Upon the member's death, all annuity payments stop unless a Joint and Survivor Annuity plan was selected. Single Life Annuity payments are based on the participant's life expectancy, while a Joint and Survivor Annuity also takes into account the life expectancy of the beneficiary.

Partial Lump-Sum Option Plan

Under the Partial Lump-Sum Option Plan (PLOP), new retirees can take an amount from six to 36 times the monthly Single Life Annuity benefit in a lump sum

*Contributing service credit includes contributing service (for which contributions were made to STRS Ohio, OPERS or SERS at the time of employment) and withdrawn service that has been restored in one of those systems. Also included is credit purchased for public teaching in Ohio after July 1978; military service; police, fire or highway patrol service; leaves of absence pursuant to Section 3307.77, R.C.; Cincinnati Retirement System service acquired under 3307.763, R.C.; and service purchased as a result of resignation due to pregnancy.

at retirement. The PLOP must be elected in \$1,000 increments, unless the minimum or maximum amount is selected. Lifetime monthly benefit payments begin with the member's retirement date but are reduced to reflect the amount taken up front in a single payment.

Cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)

Ohio law gives the State Teachers Retirement Board the authority to grant a COLA to benefit recipients. New benefit recipients are eligible to receive a COLA beginning on the fifth anniversary of their retirement date. All cost-of-living increases granted on or after July 1, 2017, are currently set at 0%. No later than the next actuarial experience review, anticipated to be completed in 2022, the Retirement Board will evaluate whether an upward adjustment to the cost-of-living increase is payable without materially impairing the fiscal integrity of the retirement system.

Death benefit options and eligibility

After retirement, an automatic \$1,000 death benefit is payable to the named beneficiary upon the member's death. This is treated as a nontaxable life insurance payment, and no federal taxes are withheld when the payment is made. **This benefit is automatic to members who are enrolled in the STRS Ohio Defined Benefit Plan.**

Service retirement and disability benefit recipients may purchase an additional death benefit of \$1,000 or \$2,000. This taxable benefit is optional and is funded by the benefit recipient through deductions from the regular monthly STRS Ohio benefit payment. If the member is under age 65 when retiring, there will be a second opportunity to increase the death benefit within the three months immediately preceding age 65.

Purchasing service credit

Service credit is one of the primary factors in determining a benefit amount for both service and disability retirement. Ohio law allows a significant amount of credit to be purchased by virtue of past employment as long as this credit is not being used in the calculation of another benefit or annuity (excluding Social Security). Service credit for each fiscal year is limited to one year.

Types of past employment that may qualify as purchasable service include:

1. Military and prisoner-of-war service or American Red Cross service in a combat zone;
2. Ohio National Guard and reserve military service;
3. Teaching in a public educational institution in another state or teaching in a school operated by or for the U.S. government;
4. Private teaching in Ohio or in another state;
5. Federal civilian service;
6. Other public employment in another state;
7. Ohio service canceled by previous withdrawal of account;
8. Other Ohio public service for which contributions would have been made to SERS, OPERS, Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund, the Highway Patrol Retirement System or the City of Cincinnati Retirement System;
9. Service as a public teacher in Ohio for which no contributions were made;
10. Current and past Ohio absence or leave of absence;
11. Service as an Ohio public school board member (cannot be purchased if contributions were made to Social Security);
12. Previously exempted or waived Ohio public service; and
13. Absence due to pregnancy or adoption.

Some types of purchasable credit limit the amount of credit eligible to purchase. Members should certify purchasable service credit as soon as possible. An individual may purchase service as soon as eligibility requirements are met. These requirements vary depending on the service to be purchased.

All service must be certified before the retirement date and paid in full within three months following the retirement effective date, unless the retirement has become final. Although the cost of credit may increase because of interest rates or a change in the liability factor, it is not always best to buy credit early.

For more detailed information, view the *Purchasing Service Credit* brochure online at www.strsoh.org, or request a copy by calling toll-free 888-227-7877.

Payroll deduction available: Members may purchase service credit via monthly payroll deduction on either a pretax or after-tax basis. Leave of absence credit, school board credit, credit for interrupted teaching due to military service and restored service with Cincinnati Retirement System cannot be purchased through payroll deduction. Contact STRS Ohio for details.

Pretax rollovers accepted: Members may purchase service credit in a lump-sum payment by rolling over tax-deferred funds from any qualified employer plan including 401(a), 401(k), 403(b), 457(b) governmental plan, traditional IRA, SEP-IRA or SIMPLE IRA, excluding Roth and certain inherited IRAs.

Partial Lump-Sum Option Plan (PLOP)

payment: At retirement, members have the option of electing a PLOP payment and a permanent reduction of the monthly benefit amount. A member can use a PLOP payment to replenish funds that were used to purchase service credit. The monthly reduction for the PLOP payment may be less than the increase resulting from the purchase.

All purchasable service credit must be certified and a cost statement issued before the member's retirement date and purchased within three months after the retirement date. PLOP payments will be paid 91 days after the member's benefit effective date or the date all necessary information is received and the retirement benefit is finalized, whichever is later.

Because credit must be purchased before the PLOP payment is issued, a member must use funds from some other source to purchase credit and use the PLOP payment to replenish those funds.

Members who plan to purchase credit should review the *Purchasing Service Credit* brochure and talk to an STRS Ohio benefits counselor for further details on purchasing service credit, certification of credit and payment options.

Joint retirement

Joint retirement with OPERS and SERS is possible for members with service credit in those Ohio retirement systems. Service credit in any one system, or in all three systems combined, cannot equal more than one year for each fiscal year.

Returning to Ohio public employment

A return to public service is allowed after two months of retirement if the member is employed by one public employer at the time of retirement. Public employment during the first two months will result in the loss of one or two months of retirement benefits.

A member who is employed at the time of retirement by more than one employer covered by STRS Ohio, Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) or School Employees Retirement System (SERS) may retire with the highest paying (primary employer and continue to work with one or all of the lower paying (secondary) employers with no waiting period. The secondary position must have been held for at least 12 consecutive months prior to retirement to be eligible to continue working with the secondary employer with no waiting period. For example, a member with a retirement date of July 1, 2019, must be working in the secondary position in July 2018 and continue to work in each of the next 12 months into July 2019.

Ohio law may require public notice if the member is returning to a position with his/her former employer.

Access to health care coverage through STRS Ohio is restricted for some employed retirees. See the "Access to health care coverage" section on Pages 22–23 for details.

Members continuing public employment after retirement and their employers contribute to the applicable Ohio public retirement system. These contributions fund a benefit that may be collected as a lump-sum payment the first of the month following the last day of service or 12 months after the payment of a previous reemployed retiree benefit payment, whichever is later. Before benefits are payable, the member must terminate employment.

The following rules apply to a member employed in an STRS Ohio-covered position after retirement:

- **If electing a benefit before age 65**, the member will receive the member contributions and interest on those contributions. This benefit is paid as a lump sum. (Interest rates are subject to change.)
- **If electing a benefit at age 65 or after**, STRS Ohio will pay the member contributions and interest on those contributions, and possibly a matching amount and interest depending on when the work was performed. Member contributions made before July 1, 2005, are matched at 100%. Member contributions made July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2013, are matched at 50%. Member contributions made July 1, 2013, and after are not matched. Members may elect to receive the benefit as a lump-sum payment or a monthly annuity, provided the monthly annuity is \$25 or greater. (The matching amount and interest rates are subject to change.)
- Before benefits are payable, employment must be terminated.
- Upon the member's death, survivors receive a lump-sum payment of any unpaid funds.
- Individuals continuing employment after retirement are not eligible for any other benefits.

Account withdrawal

Account withdrawal is available for members who terminate Ohio public service. The withdrawal amount consists of member contributions plus interest and, with 5.00 or more years of qualifying service credit,* 50% matching funds. Account withdrawal will cancel STRS Ohio membership, accumulated service credit and eligibility to qualify for STRS Ohio retirement benefits, including access to health care coverage, if eligible.

Access to health care coverage

The laws that create and govern STRS Ohio neither promise nor fund health care. STRS Ohio's primary obligation is to provide a monthly pension to eligible retirees. Currently, STRS Ohio offers access to health care coverage, including prescription drug coverage, at

retirement to eligible retirees. Members must have at least 15 years of service credit, or 20 years of service credit for retirement on or after Aug. 1, 2023, to have access to the STRS Ohio Health Care Program. Beginning Jan. 1, 2019, the individual's permanent residence must be in one of the U.S. 50 states or U.S. territories to be eligible for health care coverage. Retirees are required to pay a portion of the total cost for enrollment under all health care plans. Premiums are based on the health plan selected, years of service credit and Medicare status. Health plan coverage and costs are subject to change.

Members can also enroll eligible dependents, but will pay the full cost of their monthly health care premium.

Disability benefit recipients are eligible to enroll in an STRS Ohio health care plan. Most survivor benefit recipients and their eligible dependents have access to health care coverage (medical, dental and vision) provided the member had at least 15 years of service credit, or 20 years beginning Aug. 1, 2023.

STRS Ohio provides only secondary health care coverage to retirees not eligible for Medicare who are employed in a public or private position, regardless of their hire date, if they:

- Are eligible for medical and prescription drug coverage through their employer, or
- Hold a position for which other similarly situated employees are eligible for medical and prescription drug coverage at the same cost as full-time employees.

The STRS Ohio Health Care Program

The STRS Ohio Health Care Program currently offers a number of health care plans. The plans differ in costs, levels of coverage, medical facilities and providers that can be used. Not all STRS Ohio health care plans are available to every benefit recipient. Eligible plans for enrollees are determined by their Medicare status and the geographic location of their permanent residence.

As a general guideline, STRS Ohio health care plans include hospital, medical and prescription drug coverage and other services, such as skilled care, home health care and hospice care.

*When referring to withdrawals, "qualifying service credit" refers to Ohio teaching service, restored withdrawn credit, purchased service for Ohio public teaching from which no STRS Ohio contributions were withheld, and credit obtained for leaves of absence under Section 3307.77 of the Revised Code.

Medicare and STRS Ohio coverage

STRS Ohio requires all medical plan participants to enroll in Medicare Parts A & B at age 65 or whenever eligible. If Medicare Part A is not premium-free, you do not need to enroll in Part A. However, Medicare Part B is required. If you decline Medicare coverage, you will not be eligible for an STRS Ohio medical plan.

After participants have enrolled in Medicare, they must submit their Medicare information through their Online Personal Account or send STRS Ohio a copy of their Medicare card with the benefit recipient's STRS Ohio account number noted. Enrollment in Medicare determines eligibility for plans offered by STRS Ohio. Members and their spouses who are still employed and covered by a group health plan through the employer may choose to delay enrollment in Medicare.

STRS Ohio provides partial reimbursement of Medicare Part B premiums to certain benefit recipients enrolled in an STRS Ohio medical plan. Medicare Part B enrollment must be confirmed before reimbursement begins. Beginning in 2020, a Medicare Part B premium reimbursement will no longer be provided.

All of the health care plans STRS Ohio offers for enrollees with Medicare Parts A & B or Part B-only include Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage. Benefit recipients and their dependents enrolled in an STRS Ohio plan should not enroll in another Medicare Part D plan. Medicare does not allow enrollment in more than one Medicare Part D plan. For those who enroll in another Medicare Part D plan, their STRS Ohio hospital/medical and prescription drug coverage will be canceled.

Dental and vision coverage

STRS Ohio offers dental and vision coverage to benefit recipients (who have at least 15 years of service credit) and eligible dependents. (Members retiring on or after Aug. 1, 2023, must have at least 20 years of service credit.) The premiums for the plans are deducted from the monthly STRS Ohio benefit payment.

STRS Ohio Defined Contribution Plan

STRS Ohio offers a Defined Contribution Plan to eligible members. New members may select this plan upon employment and have the option to remain in the plan or to select the Defined Benefit Plan or Combined Plan in their fifth year of membership.

Under the Defined Contribution Plan, a member's retirement income is based on contributions to the member's account, the performance of the investment choices selected by the member and the annuity rates (or interest rate environment) at retirement. Participating members may allocate contributions among various investment options managed by STRS Ohio. Disability and survivor benefits while teaching and access to health care coverage in retirement are not provided by STRS Ohio.

Members contribute 14% of annual gross earnings to the defined contribution account, while employers contribute an additional 9.53%,* meaning that 23.53% of a member's salary goes directly into the defined contribution account. These contribution rates are established by the Retirement Board and are subject to change.

Reporting of individual accounts

Members receive a quarterly statement of their account following each quarter which includes:

- Current allocation of deposits
- Account balance
- Vested balance
- Account activity during the quarter, including payroll deposits
- Gains and losses

*A portion of employer contributions is set aside to pay for the existing unfunded liability of the retirement system and does not go into the member's defined contribution account.

Designation of beneficiaries

It is important to identify beneficiaries in the case of the death of the member. The succession of beneficiaries outlined in the plan document determines who is eligible to receive an account withdrawal when a member dies, unless the member completes a beneficiary designation form to designate beneficiaries by name. The succession of beneficiaries is desirable for most family circumstances.

Under the succession outlined in the plan document, beneficiaries qualify in the following order:

A. A qualified beneficiary in the following order:

1. Surviving spouse
2. Children
3. Parents
4. Estate

B. Person who paid the member's burial expenses

The succession of beneficiaries will apply if the member has not previously designated a beneficiary or if the member:

1. Designates succession of beneficiaries;
2. Is not survived by a named beneficiary; or
3. Has not filed a beneficiary designation form after any one of the following:
 - a. Marriage;
 - b. Birth or adoption of a child;
 - c. Divorce, marriage dissolution or legal separation;
 - d. Withdrawal of account; or
 - e. Permanent retirement plan selection if a plan change was made.

In place of the succession of beneficiaries outlined in the plan document, members may designate beneficiaries by name.

STRS Ohio benefits under the Defined Contribution Plan

A summary of basic benefits under the Defined Contribution Plan follows.

Managing the retirement account

Members may allocate contributions among 18 investment choices, each managed by the same STRS Ohio professionals who are managing the system's defined benefit investments.

All the choices represent the same diversification that is a hallmark of STRS Ohio's total investment portfolio. They are:

- STRS Money Market Choice
- STRS Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Universal Bond Index Choice
- STRS Large-Cap Core Choice
- STRS Russell 1000 Index Choice (Large-cap)
- STRS Russell Midcap Index Choice
- STRS Russell 2000 Index Choice (Small-cap)
- STRS MSCI World ex USA Index Choice (International)
- STRS MSCI ACWI ex USA Index Choice (International)
- STRS REIT Index Choice (Real Estate)
- STRS Target Choice 2020
- STRS Target Choice 2025
- STRS Target Choice 2030
- STRS Target Choice 2035
- STRS Target Choice 2040
- STRS Target Choice 2045
- STRS Target Choice 2050
- STRS Target Choice 2055
- STRS Target Choice 2060

Members allocate the contributions upon enrolling in the plan and have considerable flexibility in transferring among the choices on Page 27. Investment gains or losses are posted daily to their accounts. Asset management fees are deducted from investment returns of the individual options; a \$10 quarterly account fee is also charged. Members with account balances below \$5,000 who have also made no contributions for at least 120 days are charged a \$10 monthly fee. (Members are not charged the quarterly account fee if a low balance fee was charged during the quarter.)

The STRS Target Choice allocation options target a year in the future that would roughly match a participant's expected retirement date. The closer to the target date, the more conservative the investment mix becomes.

Portability of retirement benefits

Members participating in the Defined Contribution Plan can roll the assets of their account into a traditional IRA, eligible employer plan or qualified plan if they leave public employment before retirement. Account withdrawal amounts consist of member contributions plus any gains or losses on those contributions and vested employer contributions. Members vest 20% per year in employer contributions and all gains and losses on those contributions.

Additions to the member's account

Members may continue contributions to their account when teaching service is interrupted by military service.

Members who had STRS Ohio service credit before July 1, 2001, can roll over pretax funds from a traditional IRA, or an eligible employer or qualified plan. If membership began on July 1, 2001, or after, funds can be rolled over if the member chooses the Defined Contribution Plan or Combined Plan as the permanent plan during the fifth anniversary year of membership.

Survivor benefits

In the event of the member's death, a survivor may withdraw the account.

Disability benefits

Disability benefits are not provided by STRS Ohio. Members may withdraw their accounts after terminating employment. At age 50, other payment options are available, but only after employment terminates.

Service retirement benefits

Retirement benefits are based on contributions to the member's account, the performance of investment choices the member selects for contributions and annuity rates at retirement.

Life annuity

Members have the flexibility of taking a life annuity for the entire account for their lifetime and the lifetime of their beneficiary. Upon death, all annuity payments stop unless a Joint and Survivor Annuity plan was selected. Single Life Annuity payments are based on the participant's life expectancy, while a Joint and Survivor Annuity also takes into account the life expectancy of the beneficiary.

Lump-sum withdrawal

Under this option, the total account balance is paid in one payment. This is the only option for participants under age 50.

A member may also leave the account with STRS Ohio for an annuity or withdrawal at a later date.

Death benefit options and eligibility

Service retirees may purchase a death benefit of \$1,000 or \$2,000. This taxable benefit is optional and is funded by the benefit recipient through deductions from the regular monthly STRS Ohio benefit payment. Members who are under age 65 when retiring, have a second opportunity to purchase or increase the death benefit within the three months immediately preceding age 65.

Returning to Ohio public employment

A return to public service is allowed after two months of retirement. Public employment during the first two months will result in the loss of one or two months of retirement benefits.

Members continuing public employment after retirement and their employers contribute to the applicable Ohio public retirement system. These contributions fund a benefit that the member may collect as a lump-sum payment the first of the month following the last day of service or 12 months after the payment of a previous reemployed retiree benefit payment, whichever is later. Before benefits are payable, the member must terminate employment.

The following rules apply to a member employed in an STRS Ohio-covered position after retirement:

- **If electing a benefit before age 65**, the member will receive the member contributions and interest on those contributions. This benefit is paid as a lump sum. (Interest rates are subject to change.)
- **If electing a benefit at age 65 or after**, the member will receive the member contributions and interest on those contributions, and possibly a matching amount and interest depending on when the work was performed. Member contributions made before July 1, 2005, are matched at 100%. Contributions made July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2013, are matched at 50%. Contributions made July 1, 2013, and after are not matched. The member may elect to receive the benefit as a lump-sum payment or a monthly annuity, provided the monthly annuity is \$25 or greater. (The matching amount and interest rates are subject to change.)
- Before benefits are payable, employment must be terminated.
- Upon the member's death, survivors receive a lump-sum payment of any unpaid funds.
- Individuals continuing employment after retirement are not eligible for any other benefits.

STRS Ohio Combined Plan

STRS Ohio offers a Combined Plan to eligible members. New members may select this plan upon employment and have the option to remain in the plan or to select the Defined Benefit Plan or Defined Contribution Plan in their fifth year of membership.

The STRS Ohio Combined Plan includes features of the Defined Benefit and the Defined Contribution Plans. From the member's contribution of 14% of annual salary, 12% goes into a defined contribution account. However, 2% of that contribution and the 14%* employer contributions fund a defined benefit portion of the plan — invested by STRS Ohio investment professionals — to pay for service retirement, disability and survivor benefits.

Reporting of individual accounts

Members receive a quarterly statement of the defined contribution portion of their account following each quarter which includes:

- Current allocation of deposits
- Account balance
- Vested balance
- Account activity during the quarter, including payroll deposits
- Gains and losses

STRS Ohio also sends members an *Annual Statement of Account* each October for the defined benefit portion of the account. This statement serves as a history of the member's earnings and retirement credit for each academic year. It reflects the defined benefit account withdrawal value and service credit.

In addition, the statement includes projected retirement benefits, as well as estimates of survivor and disability benefits, assuming eligibility requirements for these benefits are met.

*A portion of employer contributions is set aside to pay for the existing unfunded liability of the retirement system and does not go directly into the defined benefit portion of the member's account.

Designation of beneficiaries

It is important to identify beneficiaries in the case of the death of the member. The succession of beneficiaries outlined in the plan document determines who is eligible to receive a withdrawal or monthly benefit when a member dies, unless the member completes a beneficiary designation form to designate beneficiaries by name. The succession of beneficiaries is desirable for most family circumstances.

Under the succession outlined in the plan document, beneficiaries qualify in the following order:

A. A qualified beneficiary in the following order:

1. Surviving spouse
2. Children
3. Parents
4. Estate

B. Person who paid the member's burial expenses

The succession of beneficiaries will apply if the member has not previously designated a beneficiary or if the member:

1. Designates succession of beneficiaries;
2. Is not survived by a named beneficiary; or
3. Has not filed a beneficiary designation form after any one of the following:
 - a. Marriage;
 - b. Birth or adoption of a child;
 - c. Divorce, marriage dissolution or legal separation;
 - d. Withdrawal of account; or
 - e. Permanent retirement plan selection if a plan change was made.

In place of the succession of beneficiaries outlined in the plan document, members may designate beneficiaries by name. In some circumstances, this designation may jeopardize monthly survivor benefits to qualified survivors and may allow only an account withdrawal (naming a trust fund or estate as beneficiary allows for only a withdrawal, for example).

STRS Ohio benefits under the Combined Plan

A summary of basic benefits under the Combined Plan follows.

Managing the defined contribution account allocations

Participants may allocate contributions among 18 investment choices, each managed by the same STRS Ohio professionals who are managing the system's defined benefit investments.

All the choices represent the same diversification that is a hallmark of STRS Ohio's total investment portfolio. They are:

- STRS Money Market Choice
- STRS Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Universal Bond Index Choice
- STRS Large-Cap Core Choice
- STRS Russell 1000 Index Choice (Large-cap)
- STRS Russell Midcap Index Choice
- STRS Russell 2000 Index Choice (Small-cap)
- STRS MSCI World ex USA Index Choice (International)
- STRS MSCI ACWI ex USA Index Choice (International)
- STRS REIT Index Choice (Real Estate)
- STRS Target Choice 2020
- STRS Target Choice 2025
- STRS Target Choice 2030
- STRS Target Choice 2035
- STRS Target Choice 2040
- STRS Target Choice 2045
- STRS Target Choice 2050
- STRS Target Choice 2055
- STRS Target Choice 2060

Members allocate the contributions upon enrolling in the plan and have considerable flexibility in transferring among the choices on Page 33. Investment gains or losses are posted daily to their accounts. Asset management fees are deducted from investment returns of the individual options; a \$10 quarterly account fee is also charged. Members with account balances below \$5,000 who have also made no contributions for at least 120 days are charged a \$10 monthly fee. (Members are not charged the quarterly account fee if a low balance fee was charged during the quarter.)

The STRS Target Choice allocation options target a year in the future that would roughly match a participant's expected retirement date. The closer to the target date, the more conservative the investment mix becomes.

Portability of retirement benefits

Members can roll the assets of their Combined Plan into a traditional IRA, eligible employer plan or qualified plan if they leave public employment before retirement.

Additions to the member's account

Members may continue contributions to their account when teaching service is interrupted by military service and most leaves of absence.

Members who had STRS Ohio service credit before July 1, 2001, can roll over pretax funds from a traditional IRA, or an eligible employer or qualified plan. If membership began on July 1, 2001, or after, funds can be rolled over if the participant chooses the Defined Contribution Plan or Combined Plan as the permanent plan during the fifth anniversary of membership.

Survivor benefits

Upon the member's death, qualified survivors may elect to:

1. Withdraw the defined benefit and defined contribution portions of the account; or
2. Withdraw the defined contribution account and, provided the member *had 5.00 years of service*, maintain the defined benefit account to receive a

monthly benefit beginning when the member would have reached age 60. (The benefit is equal to the maximum joint and survivor benefit to the qualified survivor.) A surviving spouse may continue to manage the defined contribution account for payment at a later date; or

If the member *had less than 5.00 years of service* credit, a sole survivor can withdraw both the defined contribution and defined benefit portions of the account or annuitize the defined contribution portion of the account and withdraw the defined benefit portion of the account (The annuity must pay a minimum of \$100 per month.); or

3. Combine the defined benefit and defined contribution portions of the account for monthly survivor benefits as outlined on the following pages.

A member's spouse, children under the age of 22, dependent parents, and physically or mentally incapacitated dependents may qualify for survivor benefits.

STRS Ohio determines eligibility for dependent-based and service-based survivor benefits as follows:

- Existing members as of June 30, 2013, must have 1.50 years or more of service credit, with .25 of a year having been earned within 30 months before death; or been receiving a disability benefit at the time of death; or received a disability benefit within the last 12 months and was contributing at the time of death.
- New members on or after July 1, 2013, must have at least 5.00 years of service credit before death (and the date of death is no more than one year from the last date of service); or been receiving a disability benefit at the time of death; or received a disability benefit within the last 12 months and was contributing at the time of death.
- If the member leaves Ohio public service, survivor benefits extend for up to 27 months (for existing members) or 12 months (for new members after July 1, 2013) after the last contributing service or while the member is receiving a disability benefit, provided the account is not withdrawn. A member who has eligible dependents should consider this benefit before withdrawing the account during this period.

If the member meets the eligibility requirements for more than one benefit, the amount of the benefit is the greater of a dependent-based benefit, a service-based benefit or a retirement-based benefit.

Dependent-based benefits are payable as follows:

Number of Qualified Survivors	Percentage of Final Average Salary*
1	25%
2	40%
3	50%
4	55%
5 or more	60%

The **service-based benefit** is payable when the member has 20 or more years of service credit.

Service-based benefits are payable as follows:

Years of Service	Percentage of Final Average Salary*
20	29%
21	33%
22	37%
23	41%
24	45%
25	48%
26	51%
27	54%
28	57%
29 or more	60%

The spouse's share of the above service-based benefit is as follows:

Number of Qualified Survivors	Spouse's Share
1	100%
2	62.5%
3	50%
4	45.45%
5 or more	41.67%

*Average of the member's five highest years of earnings. If contributions were made for less than the FAS period, total compensation is divided by the total number of years of service credit in the member's account to calculate the FAS.

If there is no surviving spouse and more than one qualified survivor, the benefit is divided equally among the qualified survivors.

The **retirement-based benefit** is payable to a surviving spouse or a named financially dependent beneficiary if the member dies before retirement but after meeting retirement eligibility of the Defined Benefit Plan (see Pages 14–15). The defined benefit and defined contribution portions of the account are combined to fund this benefit. These benefits are payable for the survivor's lifetime regardless of remarriage.

Additional information about survivor benefits

A Combined Plan participant receiving disability benefits has the same survivor benefit coverage as an active teacher.

Survivor benefits to an eligible spouse are payable regardless of income from other sources. Survivor benefits may be more valuable than any other financial protection for a family.

The primary beneficiary may withdraw the deceased member's account in lieu of receiving monthly benefits. See the account withdrawal section on Page 41 for more information.

For further information, view the *Survivor Benefits* brochure for members enrolled in the Combined Plan online at www.strsoh.org, or request a copy by calling toll-free 888-227-7877.

Disability benefits

Members may combine the defined benefit and defined contribution portions of their account for a disability benefit.

The Combined Plan provides coverage for members whose disability from their most recent job duties is presumed to last at least 12 months from the date STRS Ohio receives the completed *Disability Benefit Application*.

To qualify for disability benefits, an STRS Ohio member must:

- Meet either of the following:
 - **Existing members on June 30, 2013**, must have at least 5.00 years of qualifying service credit* on account with STRS Ohio and submit a completed application packet within two years of the last date of earned service.
 - **New members on or after July 1, 2013**, must have at least 10.00 years of qualifying service credit* on account with STRS Ohio and submit a completed application packet within one year of the last date of earned service.

The one- or two-year deadline to file an application does not apply if the State Teachers Retirement Board determines the member’s medical records demonstrate conclusively that at the time the one- or two-year period expired, the member was physically or mentally incapacitated from their most recent job duties and unable to apply for disability.

- Have not withdrawn any portion of the account.
- Not be receiving service retirement benefits.

A monthly disability benefit is based on a percentage (limited to a maximum of 60% and no less than 45%) of the member’s final average salary. The percentage is determined by multiplying the member’s total years of Ohio service credit by 2.2%.

Disability Benefit Example	
Actual years of Ohio service	22
Formula level	<u>x 2.2%</u>
	48.4%
Final average salary	<u>x \$50,000</u>
Annual disability allowance benefit	\$24,200
Monthly benefit	\$2,017

Disability benefits terminate:

- If the recipient performs any teaching service in a public or private setting, school or nonschool setting, on a volunteer basis or for compensation, in or outside the state of Ohio;

- At the request of the recipient;
- If a medical reexamination shows the member is no longer disabled;
- If the recipient is not following an agreed-upon treatment plan or does not submit required medical reports;
- If the recipient has not filed the *Statement of Employment and Earnings After Receipt of a Disability Benefit* form; or
- At age 65, or after a specific benefit period.

Disability benefits terminate at age 65 if the benefit began before age 60. Once a disability benefit terminates, a member has the right to apply for service retirement if eligible.

Any applicant who is denied disability benefits may appeal the decision to the Retirement Board as provided by statute and procedures established by the board. An individual receiving service retirement benefits is ineligible to apply for disability benefits. Members may also withdraw their accounts. For information on account withdrawals, see Page 41.

Disability recipients who have been receiving benefits for at least 14 months must annually complete and submit a *Statement of Employment and Earnings After Receipt of a Disability Benefit* provided by STRS Ohio each March.

Service retirement benefits

Separate benefits are paid from the defined benefit and defined contribution portions of the member’s account.

Defined benefit

The retirement benefit is based on the member’s:

- Total years of service credit, and
- Final average salary (FAS). The FAS is currently the average of the five highest years of Ohio public earnings. For retirement dates July 1, 2015, and before, the FAS is the average of the three highest years of earnings.

Upon retirement at age 60 or later, the annual benefit is calculated by multiplying the member’s years of service by 1% of FAS. For example, members who retire with

*Qualifying service credit includes earned credit with STRS Ohio and interrupted teaching due to military service.

30 years of service credit will receive 30% of their FAS from the defined benefit portion of their account. The defined benefit calculation must be large enough to provide at least a \$100 monthly benefit for the plan of payment chosen.

Life annuity

Members participating in the Combined Plan have several payment options — once they end their teaching career. Participants have the flexibility of taking a life annuity for their lifetime and the lifetime of their beneficiary. Upon the member's death, all annuity payments stop unless a Joint and Survivor Annuity plan was selected. Single Life Annuity payments are based on the participant's life expectancy, while a Joint and Survivor Annuity also takes into account the life expectancy of the beneficiary.

Partial Lump-Sum Option Plan

Under the Partial Lump-Sum Option Plan (PLOP), new retirees can take an amount from six to 36 times the monthly Single Life Annuity benefit based on the defined benefit portion of the account in a lump sum at retirement. The PLOP must be elected in \$1,000 increments, unless the minimum or maximum amount is selected. Lifetime monthly benefit payments begin with the member's retirement date but are reduced to reflect the amount taken up front in a single payment.

Defined contribution

For the defined contribution portion of the account, income is based on contributions to the member's account, the performance of investment choices the member selects for contributions and annuity rates at retirement.

Life annuity

Members participating in the Combined Plan have several payment options — once they end their teaching career. Participants have the flexibility of taking a life annuity for their lifetime and the lifetime of their beneficiary. Upon the member's death, all annuity payments stop unless a Joint and Survivor Annuity plan was selected. Single Life Annuity payments are based on the participant's life expectancy, while a Joint and Survivor Annuity also takes into account the life expectancy of the beneficiary.

Death benefit options and eligibility

Service retirement and disability benefit recipients may purchase a death benefit of \$1,000 or \$2,000. This taxable benefit is optional and is funded by the benefit recipient through deductions from the regular monthly STRS Ohio benefit payment. Members who are under age 65 when retiring, have a second opportunity to purchase or increase the death benefit within the three months immediately preceding age 65.

Account withdrawal

Upon termination of employment before age 50, a withdrawal must include both the defined benefit and defined contribution portions of the account. At age 50 or after, the member may withdraw the defined contribution portion upon termination of employment and leave the defined benefit portion on account for monthly benefits at the latter of age 60 or termination of employment, withdraw the value of the defined benefit portion and begin receiving monthly benefits from the defined contribution portion of the account, or withdraw both the defined benefit and defined contribution accounts.

Defined contribution withdrawal amount

Members are eligible for their contributions and the gains or losses on those contributions.

Defined benefit withdrawal amount

For the defined benefit portion of the account, members with 5.00 or more years of service credit are eligible for the greater of: (1) the present value of the future benefits or (2) the member's total contributions to the defined benefit portion of the account.

The defined benefit portion of the account consists of the member's total contributions to the defined benefit portion of the account if the member withdraws before accumulating 5.00 years of service credit.

Purchasing service credit

Members participating in the Combined Plan are eligible to purchase service credit for leaves of absence and for periods of teaching that were interrupted by military service.

Returning to Ohio public employment

A return to public service is allowed after two months of retirement. Public employment during the first two months will result in the loss of one or two months of retirement benefits.

Members continuing public employment after retirement and their employers contribute to the applicable Ohio public retirement system. These contributions fund a benefit that the member may collect as a lump-sum payment the first of the month following the last day of service or 12 months after the payment of a previous reemployed retiree benefit payment, whichever is later. Before benefits are payable, the member must terminate employment.

The following rules apply to a member employed in an STRS Ohio-covered position after retirement:

- **If electing a benefit before age 65**, STRS Ohio will pay member contributions and interest on those contributions. This benefit is paid as a lump sum. (Interest rates are subject to change.)
- **If electing a benefit at age 65 or after**, STRS Ohio will pay member contributions and interest on those contributions, and possibly a matching amount and interest depending on when the work was performed. Member contributions made before July 1, 2005, are matched at 100%. Member contributions made July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2013, are matched at 50%. Member contributions made July 1, 2013, and after are not matched. The member may elect to receive the benefit as a lump-sum payment or a monthly annuity, provided the monthly annuity is \$25 or greater. (The matching amount and interest rates are subject to change.)
- Before benefits are payable, employment must be terminated.
- Upon the member's death, survivors receive a lump-sum payment of any unpaid funds.
- Individuals continuing employment after retirement are not eligible for any other benefits.

Access to health care coverage through STRS Ohio is restricted for some employed retirees. See the following "Access to health care coverage" section.

Access to health care coverage

The laws that create and govern STRS Ohio neither promise nor fund health care. STRS Ohio's primary obligation is to provide a monthly pension to eligible retirees. Currently, STRS Ohio offers access to health care coverage, including prescription drug coverage, at retirement to eligible retirees. Members must have at least 15 years of service credit, or 20 years of service credit for retirement on or after Aug. 1, 2023, to have access to the STRS Ohio Health Care Program. Beginning Jan. 1, 2019, the individual's permanent residence must be in one of the U.S. 50 states or U.S. territories to be eligible for health care coverage. Retirees are required to pay a portion of the total cost for enrollment under all health care plans. Premiums are based on the health plan selected, years of service credit and Medicare status. Health plan coverage and costs are subject to change.

Members can also enroll eligible dependents, but will pay the full cost of their monthly health care premium.

Disability benefit recipients are eligible to enroll in an STRS Ohio health care plan. Most survivor benefit recipients and their eligible dependents have access to health care coverage (medical, dental and vision) provided the member had at least 15 years of service credit, or 20 years beginning Aug. 1, 2023.

STRS Ohio provides only secondary health care coverage to retirees not eligible for Medicare who are employed in a public or private position, regardless of their hire date, if they:

- Are eligible for medical and prescription drug coverage through their employer, or
- Hold a position for which similarly situated employees are eligible for medical and prescription coverage at the same cost as full-time employees.

The STRS Ohio Health Care Program

The STRS Ohio Health Care Program currently offers a number of health care plans. The plans differ in costs, levels of coverage, medical facilities and providers that can be used. Not all STRS Ohio health care plans are available to every benefit recipient. Eligible plans for enrollees are determined by their Medicare status and the geographic location of their permanent residence.

As a general guideline, STRS Ohio health care plans include hospital, medical and prescription drug coverage and other services, such as skilled care, home health care and hospice care.

Medicare and STRS Ohio coverage

STRS Ohio requires all medical plan participants to enroll in Medicare Parts A & B at age 65 or whenever eligible. If Medicare Part A is not premium-free, you do not need to enroll in Part A. However, Medicare Part B is required. If you decline Medicare coverage, you will not be eligible for an STRS Ohio medical plan.

After participants have enrolled in Medicare, they must submit their Medicare information through their Online Personal Account or send STRS Ohio a copy of their Medicare card with the benefit recipient's STRS Ohio account number noted. Enrollment in Medicare determines eligibility for plans offered by STRS Ohio. Members and their spouses who are still employed and covered by a group health plan through the employer may choose to delay enrollment in Medicare.

STRS Ohio provides partial reimbursement of Medicare Part B premiums to certain benefit recipients enrolled in an STRS Ohio medical plan. Medicare Part B enrollment must be confirmed before reimbursement begins. Beginning in 2020, a Medicare Part B premium reimbursement will no longer be provided.

All of the health care plans STRS Ohio offers for enrollees with Medicare Parts A & B or Part B-only include Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage. Benefit recipients and their dependents enrolled in an STRS Ohio plan should not enroll in another Medicare Part D plan. Medicare does not allow enrollment in more than one Medicare Part D plan. For those who enroll in another Medicare Part D plan, their STRS Ohio hospital/medical and prescription drug coverage will be canceled.

Dental and vision coverage

STRS Ohio offers dental and vision coverage to benefit recipients (who have at least 15 years of service credit) and eligible dependents. (Members retiring on or after Aug. 1, 2023, must have at least 20 years of service credit.) The premiums for the plans are deducted from the monthly STRS Ohio benefit payment.

STRS Ohio services

STRS Ohio provides numerous services to its members.

Member Services Center

The Member Services Center offers toll-free access to STRS Ohio representatives who can provide account information, answer questions about benefits and services, schedule counseling appointments or register members for seminars and workshops. Call toll-free 888-227-7877 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Website

The STRS Ohio website (www.strsoh.org) provides counseling schedules, seminar and meeting information, legislative news, board reports and information about important topics, such as health care and pension benefits.

With a password, members and benefit recipients can access their personal account information in a secure, online environment.

Newsletters

STRS Ohio publishes three member newsletters. *News for Active Members* and *News for Benefit Recipients* are sent on a periodic basis and include information about benefit changes and health care, as well as general news about STRS Ohio. *SmartTALK* is a quarterly newsletter for Defined Contribution and Combined Plan participants.

Brochures

The following STRS Ohio publications are available on the STRS Ohio website at www.strsoh.org or by calling toll-free 888-227-7877:

- *Account Withdrawal*
- *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*
- *Death Benefits*
- *Disability Allowance*
- *Disability Benefits (Combined Plan)*
- *Disability Retirement*

- *Educational Opportunities*
- *Employment After Retirement*
- *Preparing for Retirement*
- *Purchasing Service Credit*
- *Service Credit Guidelines*
- *Service Retirement and Plans of Payment*
- *Survivor Benefits*
- *Understanding Your STRS Ohio Benefits — Plan Summary*

Email news service

STRS Ohio updates members about legislation, benefits and other issues affecting the STRS Ohio membership through our email news service — *eUPDATE*. All members with an email on file receive the *eUPDATE*.

Educational programs

STRS Ohio offers a number of programs for its members.

- *Beyond the Classroom* is for members who are five to 10 years from retirement and helps attendees determine how much money they'll need at retirement.
- *Financial Fitness: Your Pathway to Retirement* is for members who want to improve their overall financial health and build a sound retirement.
- *Retirement Countdown* is targeted toward members within 12–18 months of retirement, helping them learn all of the necessary steps to ensure a smooth transition from teaching to retirement.
- The *Information Fair* offers seminars about topics such as STRS Ohio benefits, Social Security and financial planning, as well as a variety of information booths staffed by STRS Ohio representatives.
- The *Retiree Series* provides information of special interest to the retired member. Meeting topics change annually and have included estate planning, long-term care, Social Security and investing in retirement.

- *Understanding Your Health Care Plan* meetings provide information to retired members about how to use health care and prescription drug coverage.

Further information, including online registration and directions, are available at www.strsoh.org or by calling toll-free 888-227-7877.

STRS Ohio also offers webinars and online presentations on topics such as retirement plan options, Medicare enrollment and retirement benefits. For more details, go to www.strsoh.org.

Individual benefits counseling sessions

Members are encouraged to attend a benefits counseling session at least three years before retirement and again six to 12 months before retirement. Three options are offered:

Columbus office

Individual counseling sessions are available at the STRS Ohio Building in Columbus.

Field counseling

Individual counseling sessions are also offered at nearly 50 locations in Ohio throughout the year.

Teleconference

Teleconferences provide in-depth, personal benefit information by phone at the member's convenience.

To schedule an appointment for a counseling session, call the Member Services Center toll-free at 888-227-7877. Appointments for field counseling can also be made online at www.strsoh.org.

Contacting STRS Ohio

By phone: 888-227-7877

By email: contactus@strsoh.org

By mail: STRS Ohio
275 E. Broad St.
Columbus, OH 43215-3771

Nationwide Retirement Solutions

Defined Contribution and Combined Plan members are encouraged to review the allocation of their investment choices as they near retirement. STRS Ohio has partnered with Nationwide Retirement Solutions (NRS) to provide assistance with investment choices. For additional information, call NRS toll-free at 866-332-3342 or visit their website at www.nrsforu.com.

Social Security

Many STRS Ohio retirees have potential benefits as the spouse of a Social Security wage earner or on the basis of their own employment under Social Security. Social Security may reduce or eliminate its benefits to an individual because of eligibility for STRS Ohio benefits. We cannot calculate Social Security benefits or predict future federal legislative changes regarding Social Security. For more information, contact Social Security toll-free at 800-772-1213 or go to www.ssa.gov.



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