

What You Need to Know as the Survivor of an Active Member

An MTRS Q&A guide for our active and inactive members

For the MTRS member

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What You Need to Know as the Survivor of an Active Member

How to use this booklet

This booklet is intended for use by teachers and administrators who are members of the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System (MTRS), and their survivors. It is written in simple language and should answer most of the questions that you may have about benefits available to survivors of active members.

Throughout the booklet you'll find notes in the margins. These contain brief explanations or references to other questions that are related to that particular topic. Where cross-references are noted, please be sure to review those questions for additional information.

Finally, this booklet is not intended as a substitute for the Massachusetts General Laws nor will its interpretation prevail should a conflict arise between its contents and M.G.L. c. 32. Rules governing survivor benefits are subject to change periodically either by statute of the Massachusetts Legislature or by regulation of the Teachers' Retirement Board. If you have any questions about this material, please contact our office or *seek legal advice from your attorney.*

The Members and Staff of
the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System

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An introduction to active member survivor benefits

1 What types of benefits does the MTRS provide to survivors of an active member?

The MTRS provides one of two types of benefits to the survivors of active members. Generally, when a member enrolls in the MTRS, he or she completes an MTRS Beneficiary Designation Form, naming either a:

- **lump-sum beneficiary**, to receive a single, lump-sum benefit, or a
- **member-survivor beneficiary**, to receive continuing monthly member-survivor payments. The member-survivor beneficiary must be the member's parent, spouse, sibling, child or former spouse who has not married.

The member may name only one member-survivor beneficiary, but multiple lump-sum beneficiaries. In addition, the member may name a contingent lump-sum beneficiary.

The type of benefit that survivors receive depends upon:

- the particular type of beneficiary—lump-sum or member-survivor—that the member designated,
- who the member named as a beneficiary, and
- the member's relationship to the survivors.

2 Why is the survivor's relationship to the member important in determining the type of benefit that survivors receive?

Pursuant to Massachusetts law, the surviving spouse and/or dependent children have a superior right to any benefits awarded as a result of the member's death. This means that, regardless of whom the member named as a beneficiary, if the member is survived by a spouse and/or dependent children, and the spouse and/or dependent children meet certain requirements, then they will receive the survivor benefit.

Lump-sum benefits
▶ Questions 7–10

Member-survivor benefits
▶ Questions 11–20

Special spousal benefits
▶ Questions 23–31

3 Are there any instances when an individual who was designated as a beneficiary would not receive his or her benefit?

Yes. As discussed in Question 2, the surviving spouses and/or dependent children who meet certain requirements have a superior right to any benefits awarded as a result of the member's death. Therefore, if you were designated by the member as a beneficiary and you are not the member's spouse, you may not receive the survivor benefit. The survivor benefit will be paid to the spouse and/or dependent children.

4 What happens if the member designated more than one type of beneficiary?

A member may name a member-survivor beneficiary and lump-sum beneficiaries. At the time of the member's death, if there is a living, named member-survivor beneficiary and one or more living lump-sum beneficiaries, then the member-survivor beneficiary will be paid the benefit. The lump-sum beneficiaries will not receive any benefit.

5 What happens if the member failed to designate a beneficiary, or if the individual designated by the member on his or her MTRS beneficiary designation form is deceased?

If the member failed to designate a beneficiary or if the individual designated by the member is deceased and there is

- **no surviving spouse or dependent children**, then any amount that remains in the member's annuity savings account at the time of his or her death will be paid in a lump sum to the administrator or executor of the deceased member's estate. In order for the MTRS to process a payment to an estate, we must have a copy of both the member's death certificate and the administrator's or executor's Letter of Appointment. If an administrator or executor has not been appointed by the Probate Court, then the member's heirs must sign a Release of Claim form that designates the individual who will receive the lump-sum payment.
- **a surviving spouse and/or dependent children**, then these survivors will be eligible to choose to receive either a lump-sum payment or a monthly member-survivor benefit.

6 I am the survivor of a member whose death was caused by a work-related accident. What type of benefit am I entitled to?

If you are the survivor of an active member who died as a result of a work-related accident or injury, you will be eligible to receive accidental death benefits if certain requirements are met. Each request for accidental death benefits must be reviewed and approved by the Board. Please see Questions 35-38 for more information.

Lump-sum benefits

7 What is a lump-sum benefit?

A lump-sum benefit is a single, one-time payment to the beneficiary or beneficiaries and constitutes the entire survivor benefit. The amount of the benefit is the total balance of the member's annuity savings account, which contains all of the contributions and interest credited as of the member's date of death. There are no restrictions on who may be named a lump-sum beneficiary and a member may name more than one individual, or even a trust or organization, to receive a percentage of his or her account.

8 What happens if the member designated more than one lump-sum beneficiary, and one of the beneficiaries is deceased at the time of the member's death?

In the event that one or more (but not all) of the named lump-sum beneficiaries is deceased, his/her shares will be payable to each deceased beneficiary's estate. If all named lump-sum beneficiaries are deceased, then the contingent lump-sum beneficiary will receive the member's death benefit.

9 How long does it take before I receive my lump-sum benefit?

Before we can issue a lump-sum payment to a beneficiary, the deceased member's last retirement deduction must be transferred to the MTRS from the member's school district. You should receive your payment approximately two weeks after the member's last deduction has been transferred to us, provided you have returned the required forms.

10 Is my lump-sum payment taxable?

Yes. There are very specific guidelines regarding how this payment is taxed and we have addressed them in another publication, *What you need to know as the recipient of a lump-sum payment*. For a copy of that booklet, please visit our website at mass.gov/mtrs.

Member-survivor benefits

11 What is a member-survivor benefit?

A member-survivor benefit is a monthly payment made to a survivor for life. Upon the member's death, an individual named as a member-survivor beneficiary (also known as an Option D beneficiary) will receive a monthly survivor benefit for the rest of his or her life. A member may name only one person as a member-survivor beneficiary and this person must be the member's parent, spouse, sibling, child or former spouse who has not married.

12 How is the amount of my member-survivor allowance calculated?

The amount of your member-survivor allowance is equal to the amount that the member would have received under a joint and last survivor allowance (Option C allowance) if the member had retired on the date of his or her death. If the member died before reaching age 55, the benefit calculation is performed as if the

member was age 55 on the date of his or her death. In other words, for the purpose of calculating the member-survivor benefit, the member's age is advanced the number of years and months needed to reach 55; likewise, the age of the beneficiary is advanced the same number of years and months.

13 The deceased member had creditable service that he or she never bought back. Do I now have the option of purchasing this service? If so, will it increase my member-survivor benefit?

You may be able to purchase this service and, as a result, receive an increase in your monthly benefit. The formula for determining the amount of your member-survivor benefit is based on the member's years of creditable service as well as his or her age; in most cases, the more creditable service, the greater the benefit. However, it may be that during his or her life, the member had enough creditable service on account with us in order to receive the maximum allowance (no more than 80 percent of his or her average salary). In this case, you would also already be entitled to the maximum survivor benefit and your member-survivor benefit would not increase as a result of purchasing any outstanding service.

Examples of creditable service that may have been earned by the member but not purchased within our system include out-of-state teaching service; certain nonpublic school service; substitute, temporary or part-time teaching service; vocational work experience; other Massachusetts public service; military service; and, Peace Corps service.

The application for survivor benefits contains a section with questions about the member's possible outstanding creditable service. The MTRS representative who processes your claim will review this section and let you know whether you are eligible to purchase past service and what, if any, effect such purchase would have on the amount of your monthly allowance. If you are eligible and you do decide to purchase the service, you will need to document the service. We will then prepare an invoice and you will have to pay for the service within 90 days.

14 Are there any situations in which the MTRS would increase my member-survivor allowance?

Yes. Cost-of-living adjustments are granted to retirees and survivors on an ad hoc basis by a vote of the Massachusetts Legislature. Survivors of active members are eligible to receive a cost-of-living adjustment in the second calendar year following the member's date of death.

15 Are there any situations in which the MTRS would terminate my member-survivor benefit?

Possibly. If you are:

- **a surviving spouse or other member-survivor beneficiary, but not a dependent child**, the answer is no (assuming the member was never convicted of a crime related to his/her office or position). The monthly benefit that you receive from the MTRS is a lifetime benefit.
- **a dependent child**, the answer is yes, your benefit may be terminated upon reaching maximum age. Please see Question 26.

16 How long does it take before I receive my member-survivor payment?

Before a monthly member-survivor payment can be issued to a beneficiary, we must receive the deceased member's last retirement deduction as well as verification of service and salary from his or her last school district. If this information is provided promptly, you can expect your first payment within 90 days of submitting your application. Thereafter, payments are made at the end of each month.

17 Will I have to pay federal income tax on my member-survivor benefit?

Yes. Most of the member-survivor allowance that you receive will be considered taxable income by the federal government. A small portion of your benefit, representing a return of member contributions that were already taxed, may be exempt from taxation. The amount of this tax-exempt portion will depend upon your life expectancy and the amount of after-tax contributions that the member made to the Massachusetts

Teachers' Retirement System. The MTRS will issue a 1099-R to you each January reflecting what is and is not taxable.

For more information about methods of calculating the excludable portion, consult IRS Publication 575, your local office of the IRS, the IRS's website at www.irs.gov, your accountant or other expert in the area of federal taxation.

18 Can I have federal income tax withheld from my member-survivor benefit?

Yes. The MTRS is required by federal law to withhold federal taxes from all survivor allowances unless a survivor notifies us in writing that he or she does not wish to have taxes withheld. As part of our processing of your claim, we will send you IRS form W-4P, Withholding Certificate for Pension or Annuity Payments. This form asks you to indicate the amount of tax that you wish to have withheld. Before you receive your first payment, you must complete and return this form to us. If we do not receive your form W-4P, we are required to withhold taxes as if you are a married person with three exemptions.

19 Will I have to pay state income tax on my member-survivor benefit?

Not in Massachusetts. Member-survivor benefits are exempt from taxation by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; however, if you live in another state, you may be required to pay income tax on your benefit. Please contact your state's Department of Revenue for more information.

For information on RetirementPlus, visit our website at mass.gov/mtrs

20 Will the MTRS contact me to see if I am eligible to continue to receive a member-survivor benefit?

Yes. Massachusetts retirement law requires that all individuals receiving retirement, disability or survivor benefits file an affidavit verifying their eligibility to receive a benefit. Periodically, the MTRS will contact you and ask you to sign a statement, under the penalties of perjury, declaring your continued eligibility to receive your member-survivor benefit.

RetirementPlus issues

21 I am the survivor of a member who elected to participate in the alternative superannuation retirement program, otherwise known as RetirementPlus. The member died before completing payment of his/her accelerated retirement contributions.

■ **May I pay the outstanding balance and receive an enhanced survivor benefit?**

Yes, if certain conditions are met. To receive an enhanced survivor benefit:

- the member must have accrued at least 30 years of creditable service at the time of his death, 20 of which were membership service with the MTRS or the Boston Retirement System as a teacher;
- you must be eligible to receive the member-survivor benefit discussed above; and
- you must pay the member's outstanding contributions in one lump-sum payment using after-tax dollars.

The Board may only receive after tax contributions to the extent allowed by Section 415 of the Internal Revenue Code. If you cannot pay the outstanding balance due to the limitations imposed by Section 415, then you may receive an actuarially reduced benefit.

■ **May I receive a refund of the additional contributions made by the member?**

Yes, but only if the member elected into RetirementPlus and died either:

- before completing 30 years of creditable service, or
- after completing 30 years of creditable service, but before completing 20 years of "teaching" service.

22 I am the survivor of a member who was a mandatory participant in RetirementPlus. If the member died before completing 30 years, will I receive a refund of the additional contributions?

No, the mandatory RetirementPlus participants are required to contribute at 11% and are not eligible to receive a refund of additional contributions.

As the surviving spouse

23 Are there special spousal benefits available to the surviving spouse of an active member?

You may be eligible to receive a monthly member-survivor allowance. If so, the regular member-survivor benefit is equal to the amount that the member would have received under a joint and last survivor allowance (Option C allowance) if the member had retired on the date of his or her death. If the member died before reaching age 55, the benefit calculation is performed as if the member was age 55 on the date of his or her death. In other words, for the purpose of calculating the member-survivor benefit, the member's age is advanced the number of years and months needed to reach 55; likewise, the age of the beneficiary is advanced the same number of years and months.

For most survivors, the minimum member-survivor benefit is \$250 per month. There may also be supplemental dependents' benefits available to you. If you are the survivor of a non-retired member, please contact the MTRS.

24 What if my spouse named someone else as the member-survivor beneficiary?

You may still qualify for the benefit. In general, a surviving spouse will "trump" a named member-survivor beneficiary if:

- the member had at least two years of creditable service and was in active service at the time of his or her death; and,
- you were married to the member for at least one year; and,
- you were living with the member at the time of his or her death, or were living apart for justifiable cause.

25 I am the surviving spouse of an active member and I am named as the lump-sum beneficiary, but not the member-survivor beneficiary. Will I receive the lump-sum payment or the monthly spousal benefits?

You may have a choice. A spouse who is designated as a lump-sum beneficiary and who qualifies for the monthly benefit described in Question 24 will have the choice of receiving *either* a single, lump-sum payment of the balance in the member's annuity savings account *or* monthly survivor benefit payments.

26 I am the surviving spouse of an active member and I am named as the member-survivor beneficiary. Will I receive the lump-sum payment or the monthly member-survivor payment?

You will receive the monthly member-survivor benefit; you do not have a choice. If you are designated as the member-survivor beneficiary you must receive a monthly allowance. The amount of your benefit is either the amount resulting from the regular member-survivor formula or \$250 per month, whichever is greater.

27 Will my children receive any benefits?

If you choose to receive a monthly member-survivor benefit, you will receive a monthly allowance for all surviving dependent children who are:

- under age 18, or
- under age 22 and are full-time students at an accredited educational institution, or
- over age 18 and are mentally or physically incapacitated from earning.

Children's benefits are \$120 per month for one child and \$90 per month for each additional child. Benefits paid to all children will terminate upon the child's adoption, marriage or death. Benefits to children over age 18 will terminate when the child ceases to be a full-time student or when the child reaches age 22, whichever comes first. Children who are physically or mentally

incapacitated from earning on the member's date of death and are unable to be financially self-supporting will receive a lifetime benefit.

28 How will the MTRS verify that my child is eligible to receive a benefit?

Benefits paid to a surviving child will terminate when the child reaches age 18 unless the child is a full-time student in an accredited educational institution. Around your child's 18th birthday, we will mail your child a Student Verification form. If your child is a full-time student, he or she will need to take this form to the educational institution's registrar to have his or her student status confirmed by that office. Your child will then need to return the form to us. If your child's full-time status is confirmed by the school's registrar, he or she will continue to receive benefits after his or her 18th birthday.

After this initial verification, we will continue to send your child a Student Verification form periodically. Your child must complete and return this form each semester to guarantee the continuation of his or her benefits until age 22.

29 What must I do in order to receive my monthly spousal benefit?

In order for the MTRS to begin to process your claim for benefits, you must complete and submit an application form that is available from our office. You will also need to submit:

- a copy of your spouse's death certificate,
- a certified copy of your birth certificate,
- a certified copy of your spouse's birth certificate,
- a copy of your marriage certificate,
- the certified copies of birth certificates of any dependent children eligible to receive survivor benefits,
- for any dependent children who are between the ages of 18 and 22 and who are full-time students, a statement from the educational institution certifying the student's full-time status,
- for any dependent children who are over age 18 and who are mentally or physically incapacitated from earning, verification of their status, and,

- if applicable, a copy of your spouse's military discharge form (DD-214).

Approximately three weeks after we have received your application form and the required documents, you will receive a form in the mail from us. If your spouse designated you as a:

- **member-survivor beneficiary**, you will receive a form which indicates the monthly benefit payable to you and your eligible children, as well as a federal tax withholding form (IRS Form W-4P). You will need to sign and return the W-4P form to our office so that we may process your first payment.
- **lump-sum beneficiary**, and you are eligible for the monthly survivor benefit, you will receive a form designed for surviving spouses who are eligible to choose either a lump-sum benefit or the member-survivor benefit; this form will indicate the amount of each benefit available. By way of this form, you will select which benefit you want. You will need to complete, sign and return this form to our office within 90 days after you receive it. If you are not eligible for the monthly survivor benefit, you will receive a form that indicates the amount of your lump-sum payment. You will then need to complete and return a form indicating how you want us to pay the amount to you.

30 How long does it take before I receive my first payment?

If you elect to receive a:

- **lump-sum payment**, you will receive your payment approximately four weeks after we receive your completed application.
- **member-survivor benefit**, you will receive your first estimated payment approximately six weeks after we receive your completed application. Benefit checks are mailed to all retirees and survivors during the last week in each month.

31 Will I be covered under a group health insurance program?

If you are the surviving spouse of an active teacher, you may be eligible for health insurance benefits administered by the city, town or school district where your spouse was employed. Any questions about your medical insurance coverage should be directed to the school district's personnel or treasurer's office.

If you must pay an insurance premium to the city, town or school district treasurer for your health coverage, this premium can be deducted from your monthly survivor benefit. The MTRS will deduct an amount specified by your district and then transfer the funds to the city, town, or school district treasurer for payment to the insurer. If you wish to participate in the insurance withholding plan, you should contact your appropriate treasurer's office.

As the non-spousal beneficiary

32 I am named as the lump-sum beneficiary and I am not a surviving spouse; the member left no surviving spouse or dependent children. How will the MTRS determine the amount of my lump-sum payment?

If you were designated as a lump-sum beneficiary and you are not the member's surviving spouse or dependent child, you will receive a single payment of the balance in the member's annuity savings account. The member's annuity savings account is a depository of all the contributions the member made to the retirement system while he or she was teaching, plus any interest that may have accumulated on those contributions.

33 I am named as the member-survivor beneficiary and I am not a surviving spouse; the member left no surviving spouse or dependent children. How will the MTRS determine the amount of my monthly payment?

If you were designated as the member-survivor beneficiary and you are not the member's surviving spouse or dependent child, you will receive a monthly payment for the rest of your life. (You must be the member's parent, child, sibling or former spouse who has not remarried.) Please refer to Questions 11–20 for information on member-survivor benefits and how the monthly payment amount is calculated.

As the guardian of surviving children

34 The member is not survived by a spouse and I am the guardian of the surviving dependent children. What survivor benefits do the children receive?

In this case, survivor benefits will be paid to the eligible children through a legally appointed guardian. In most cases, the children's guardian will have the option of receiving either a monthly member-survivor benefit or, if the member did not designate a beneficiary, a lump-sum payment of the balance in the member's annuity savings account. The amount of the monthly member-survivor benefit is calculated in the same way as set forth in Question 23, above.

If the guardian chooses to receive the monthly member-survivor benefit, he or she will also receive a monthly allowance for all surviving dependent children who are:

- under age 18,
- under age 22 and are full-time students at an accredited educational institution, or
- are over age 18 and are mentally or physically incapacitated from earning.

Children's benefits are \$120 per month for one child and \$90 per

month for each additional child. All benefits paid to dependent children will terminate upon the child's adoption, marriage or death. Benefits to children over age 18 will terminate when the child ceases to be a full-time student or when the child reaches age 22, whichever comes first. Children who are physically or mentally incapacitated from earning on the member's date of death will receive a lifetime benefit.

How to apply for survivor benefits

35 What must I do in order to apply for survivor benefits?

In order for the MTRS to begin to process your claim for benefits, you must complete and submit the appropriate application form that is available from our office. After we have received your application form and the required supporting documents, we will review your claim and let you know what the next steps are and whether you must complete any other forms.

Please be aware that, along with your application, you must submit a copy of the member's death certificate.

Accidental death benefits

36 I am the survivor of a member whose death was caused by a work-related accident. How does the Board determine whether to grant me accidental death benefits?

In order to grant accidental death benefits, the Board must conduct a thorough investigation and find that the member died as the natural and proximate cause of a personal injury sustained or hazard undergone as a result of, and while in the performance of, his or her duties at some definite place and at some definite time, without serious and willful misconduct on his or her part.

In order to make its finding, the Board will examine hospital and medical records, statements from physicians and affidavits from individuals who witnessed your spouse's injury or accident. In addition, you may be asked to appear before the Board or a designated hearing officer at its monthly meeting. The Board will determine your eligibility for accidental death benefits.

37 I am the survivor of a member whose death was caused by a work-related injury. If I am granted accidental death benefits, how much will I receive?

You may be entitled to a return of the funds in the member's annuity savings account and/or 72% of the member's regular compensation on his or her date of death. Supplemental amounts may be available for any dependent surviving children. Please contact the MTRS for details.

38 How do I apply for accidental death benefits?

If you wish to apply for accidental death benefits, please contact the MTRS's main office. Because this is a complex process, we ask that you first speak to one of our representatives to ensure that you are aware of the issues involved and that your case is handled in the most appropriate way.

Upon request, we will send you an application for accidental death benefits, which you must complete and return to our office to initiate the claim process. Along with your application, you will be required to supply additional materials that support your claim that your spouse died of work-related injuries.

Appendix A

Estimating your member-survivor benefit

The amount of your member-survivor benefit is the amount that the member would have received as a joint and survivor retirement allowance (Option C) if he or she had retired at his or her last age or at age 55, whichever age is higher. In other words, for the purpose of calculating the member-survivor benefit, the member's age is advanced the number of years and months needed to reach 55; likewise, the age of the beneficiary is advanced the same number of years and months.

To estimate your member-survivor benefit, use the worksheet below. The example illustrates the calculations for the survivor of a member who died at age 42 with 20 years of creditable service, an average salary of \$45,000 for the last three years, and a beneficiary who is age 40. Note that even though the member was 13 years younger than age 55, the Option A Age Factor for age 55 is used. Because the member's age was advanced by 13 years, the beneficiary's age was also advanced by 13 years (to age 53) in determining the Option C Factor.

		Example	You
	Option A Age Factor (see table)	.015	<input type="text"/>
x	Years of creditable service	x 20	x <input type="text"/>
	% of salary average	30%	<input type="text"/> %
x	3-year salary average	x \$45,000	x \$ <input type="text"/>
	Option A annual allowance*	\$13,500	\$ <input type="text"/>
x	Option C Factor (see table)	x 93%	x <input type="text"/> %
	Annual member-survivor benefit	\$12,555	\$ <input type="text"/>
÷	12 months/year	÷ 12	÷ <input type="text"/> 12
	Monthly member-survivor benefit	\$1,046	\$ <input type="text"/>

* The member's total Option A annual allowance may not exceed 80% of his or her 3-year salary average.

Option A Age Factors

Use either the member's actual age on the date of his or her death or age 55, whichever is greater.

Age	Factor	Age	Factor	Age	Factor
55 or under	.015	59	.019	63	.023
56	.016	60	.020	64	.024
57	.017	61	.021	65 or over	.025
58	.018	62	.022		

Option C Factors

To obtain your Option C Factor, determine which ages to use.

- ▶ **For the member's age:** Use **either** the member's actual age on the date of his or her death **or** age 55, whichever is greater.
- ▶ **For the beneficiary's age:** If, for the member's age, you are using
 - ▷ the member's actual age (which is age 55 or above), then also use the beneficiary's actual age on the member's date of death.
 - ▷ age 55 (which is not the member's actual age), then you will need to use an advanced age for the beneficiary. To determine which age to use for the beneficiary, you need to do two calculations. First, subtract the member's actual age from age 55. Second, add this number of years to the beneficiary's age. The total is the age of the beneficiary that you should use for the purpose of determining the Option C Factor.

Find these ages on the appropriate axes and follow the row and column into the table. Your Option C Factor is the number where the row and column intersect. Please note that for the purposes of this booklet, the values in this table are rounded, approximate percentages.

67	81	81	81	82	82	83	83	84	84	85	85	86	86	87	87	88	
66	82	82	83	83	84	84	84	85	85	86	86	86	87	87	88	88	89
65	83	84	84	84	85	85	86	86	87	87	87	88	88	89	89	90	
64	84	85	85	86	86	86	87	87	88	88	88	89	89	90	90	91	
63	86	86	86	87	87	87	88	88	89	89	89	90	90	91	91	91	
62	87	87	87	88	88	88	89	89	90	90	90	91	91	91	92	92	
61	88	88	88	89	89	89	90	90	91	91	91	92	92	92	93	93	
60	89	89	89	90	90	90	91	91	91	92	92	92	93	93	93	94	
59	90	90	90	91	91	91	91	92	92	92	93	93	93	94	94	94	
58	90	91	91	91	92	92	92	93	93	93	93	94	94	94	95	95	
57	91	92	92	92	92	93	93	93	94	94	94	94	95	95	95	95	
56	92	92	93	93	93	93	94	94	94	94	95	95	95	95	96	96	
55	93	93	93	93	94	94	94	94	95	95	95	95	96	96	96	96	
	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	

Beneficiary's age

Appendix B

About the MTRS

What is the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System?

The Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System is a contributory retirement system governed by the Commonwealth's retirement law, Chapter 32 of the Massachusetts General Laws. The MTRS, which is the second largest of the Commonwealth's 106 contributory retirement systems, provides retirement, disability and survivor benefits to Massachusetts teachers, administrators and their families.

The MTRS is a defined benefit retirement plan intended to provide a meaningful retirement benefit to the employee who has chosen a career in public service. It operates as a qualified plan under section 401(a) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Who manages the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System?

The Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System administers the MTRS. The Board is composed of seven members chosen in accordance with the enabling statute of the MTRS:

- the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education, or his or her designee, who also serves as the Board's chairperson,
- the State Auditor, or his or her designee,
- the State Treasurer, or his or her designee,
- two members, elected by the active and retired members of the system,
- one member—who must be a retired teacher—appointed by the Governor, and
- one member, chosen by the vote of the other six.

Excepting the chairperson, each member serves a four-year term. The length of the chairperson's term depends upon the term of office of the Commissioner of Education.

The Board, which meets at least once a month,

- establishes the policies, rules and regulations of the agency,
- oversees the dissemination of services and information to its membership of nearly 90,000 active educators and 44,000 retirees,
- approves all benefits paid by the MTRS, and
- investigates all claims for accidental and ordinary disabilities.

The Executive Director, together with a staff of more than 70 professionals, implements the programs and policies of the Board.

What services does the System provide for its members?

Since the creation of the MTRS in 1914, the System has never strayed from its original mandate to provide a retirement system for teachers. Throughout its long history, it has adhered to its traditional role as bookkeeper—enrolling members, compiling members' annuity account statements, granting retirements and paying retirement allowances. Today, the System still conscientiously serves its members with bookkeeping services, but it has expanded its offering of programs to better serve the public school teachers and administrators of Massachusetts and prepare them both financially and emotionally for their retirement years. For example, the System now offers the following services and programs:

PROGRAMS

- **Ready for Retirement:** This is an optional, two-hour, after-work program for our soon-to-be retirees. During this nuts-and-bolts seminar, members learn exactly what to do—and expect—as they go through the retirement process. These programs are offered at a number of locations across the state during the fall, just before retirement season begins.
- **The Next Chapter:** This is a comprehensive preretirement planning program developed by the MTRS. The program is designed for educators who are five to ten years away from retirement. It helps participants examine their attitudes, concerns and goals as they prepare for their retirement years.

- **Your MTRS Benefits Seminar:** This an informational program for MTRS members of all ages and career stages. The program, held at various locations across the Commonwealth, focuses on retirement formulas, creditable service and purchasing credit for past service, the option selection process, health insurance and other post-retirement issues. Our staff also offers this program on a regular basis in our main and Springfield offices.

SERVICES

- **Retirement Counseling Services:** Our Counselors work to prepare our constituents for retirement and offers individual and group retirement counseling to all members across the Commonwealth. Counselors are available to meet with members in our Main and Springfield offices; appointments are necessary, however, so members should be sure to call ahead (see inside back cover for our phone numbers).
- **MTRS M@il:** We send updates via e-mail to any member who wants to receive our periodic messages. Active and retired members alike are encouraged to complete our simple registration form, available on our website at mass.gov/mtrs.

PUBLICATIONS

- **The Advisor:** This is our periodic newsletter that we distribute to all active members, retirees and colleagues of the agency. The *Advisor* reports on developments in public pension legislation, services and programs offered by the System and other subjects which are of interest to both the active and retired membership.
- **“What You Need to Know” booklets:** This series is a set of informational Q&A guides—like this one. Each is of moderate length and is designed specifically for the person who is going through a particular transaction or life stage. Current titles are:
 - What You Need to Know...
 - As the Recipient of a Lump-Sum Payment
 - As a Party to a Domestic Relations Order
 - As the Survivor of an Active Member
 - As the Survivor of a Retiree
 - About Disability Retirement

Appendix C

Quick reference guide to questions

An introduction to active member survivor benefits

- 1 What types of benefits does the MTRS provide to survivors of an active member?
- 2 Why is the survivor's relationship to the member important in determining the type of benefit that survivors receive?
- 3 Are there any instances when an individual who was designated as a beneficiary would not receive his or her benefit?
- 4 What happens if the member designated more than one type of beneficiary?
- 5 What happens if the member failed to designate a beneficiary or if the individual designated by the member on his or her MTRS Beneficiary Designation form is deceased?
- 6 I am the survivor of a member whose death was caused by a work-related accident. What type of benefit am I entitled to?

Lump-sum benefits

- 7 What is a lump-sum benefit?
- 8 What happens if the member designated more than one lump-sum beneficiary, and one of the beneficiaries is deceased at the time of the member's death?
- 9 How long does it take before I receive my lump-sum benefit?
- 10 Is my lump-sum payment taxable?

Member-survivor benefits

- 11 What is a member-survivor benefit?
- 12 How is the amount of my member-survivor allowance calculated?
- 13 The deceased member had creditable service that he or she never bought back. Do I now have the option of purchasing this service? If so, will it increase my member-survivor benefit?
- 14 Are there any situations in which the MTRS would increase my member-survivor allowance?
- 15 Are there any situations in which the MTRS would terminate my member-survivor benefit?
- 16 How long does it take before I receive my member-survivor payment?

- 17 Will I have to pay federal income tax on my member-survivor benefit?
- 18 Can I have federal income tax withheld from my member-survivor benefit?
- 19 Will I have to pay state income tax on my member-survivor benefit?
- 20 Will the MTRS contact me to see if I am eligible to continue to receive a member-survivor benefit?

RetirementPlus issues

- 21 I am the survivor of a member who elected to participate in the alternative superannuation retirement program, otherwise known as Retirement Plus. The member died before completing payment of his/her accelerated retirement contributions.
 - May I pay the outstanding balance and receive an enhanced survivor benefit?
 - May I receive a refund of the additional contributions made by the member?
- 22 I am the survivor of a member who was a mandatory participant in RetirementPlus. If the member died before completing 30 years, will I receive a refund of the additional contributions?

As the surviving spouse

- 23 Are there special benefits available to the surviving spouse of an active member?
- 24 What if my spouse named someone else as the member-survivor beneficiary?
- 25 I am the surviving spouse of an active member and I am named as the lump-sum beneficiary, but not the member-survivor beneficiary. Will I receive the lump-sum payment or the monthly spousal benefits?
- 26 I am the surviving spouse of an active member and I am named as the member-survivor beneficiary. Will I receive the lump-sum payment or the monthly member-survivor payment?
- 27 Will my children receive any benefits?
- 28 How will the MTRS verify that my child is eligible to receive a benefit?
- 29 What must I do in order to receive my monthly spousal benefit?
- 30 How long does it take before I receive my first payment?
- 31 Will I be covered under a group health insurance program?

As the non-spousal beneficiary

- 32 I am named as the lump-sum beneficiary and I am not a surviving spouse; the member left no surviving spouse or dependent children. How will the MTRS determine the amount of my lump-sum payment?
- 33 I am named as the member-survivor beneficiary and I am not a surviving spouse; the member left no surviving spouse or dependent children. How will the MTRS determine the amount of my monthly payment?

As the guardian of surviving children

- 34 The member is not survived by a spouse and I am the guardian of the surviving dependent children. What survivor benefits do the children receive?

How to apply for survivor benefits

- 35 What must I do in order to apply for survivor benefits?

Accidental death benefits

- 36 I am the survivor of a member whose death was caused by a work-related accident. How does the Board determine whether to grant me accidental death benefits?
- 37 I am the survivor of a member whose death was caused by a work-related injury. If I am granted accidental death benefits, how much will I receive?
- 38 How do I apply for accidental death benefits?

Notes



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Contact us

MAIN OFFICE

Serving our members in Middlesex, Essex, Norfolk, Bristol, Plymouth, Barnstable, Dukes, Nantucket and Suffolk (charter schools only) Counties

ADDRESS

One Charles Park
Cambridge, MA 02142-1206

PHONE

617-679-MTRS (6877)

FAX

617-679-1661

HOURS

9 a.m. – 5 p.m.,
Monday through Friday

NEARBY LANDMARKS

Located across the street from the CambridgeSide Galleria Mall and near the Lechmere T Station

NEAREST T STOP

Lechmere Station, on the Green Line

PARKING

Metered on-street parking and the CambridgeSide Galleria Parking Garage

WESTERN REGIONAL OFFICE

Serving our members in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire, Hampden and Worcester Counties

ADDRESS

101 State Street, Suite 210
Springfield, MA 01103-2066

PHONE

413-784-1711

FAX

413-784-1707

HOURS

8:45 a.m. – 5 p.m.,
Monday through Friday

NEARBY LANDMARKS

Located at the intersection of State and Main Streets, diagonally across from the Springfield Civic Center

PARKING

Metered on-street parking and the Bliss Street Parking Garage

ONLINE

WEBSITE

mass.gov/mtrs

E-MAIL

geninfo@trb.state.ma.us

