Arkansas Teacher Retirement System

July 1, 2014

Teacher Deferred Retirement Option Plan (T-DROP)

FAQ'S

Q What is the **T**eacher **D**eferred **R**etirement **O**ption **P**lan (**T-DROP**)?

T-DROP *is an optional deferred "retirement" plan for ATRS members. Active members who meet eligibility requirements may elect to participate in* ***T-DROP*** *in* ***lieu of retiring*** *and accepting a service retirement benefit.*

Q How does **T-DROP** work?

Once ***T-DROP*** *participation begins**,** ATRS processes retirement accounts as if members are retiring. ATRS will determine years of service credit, both contributory and noncontributory, a final average salary, and use current multipliers to calculate a monthly benefit amount. The monthly benefit stipend that may be payable will not be added to the member's benefit until the member leaves T-DROP participation and begins drawing a monthly retirement benefit.*

Members will continue to work for an ATRS employer, but ***will not*** *accrue any additional service credit. Any increase in salary after entering T-DROP will not increase the final average salary determined at the time T-DROP participation begins.*

The monthly deposit for ***T-DROP*** *is calculated by multiplying the regular monthly benefit determined at the time T-DROP participation begins by 1% for each year of ATRS and reciprocal service credit, then subtracting the product from the regular monthly benefit. Entry into* ***T-DROP*** *with at least 28 but less than 30 years of service credit further reduces the T-DROP deposit by 6% for each year less than 30 years of service credit.*

In lieu of receiving a monthly benefit, the T-DROP deposit will accrue each month in a tax-deferred ***T-DROP*** *account for up to ten (10) consecutive calendar years. An annual interest rate will be adopted by the ATRS Board of Trustees to be credited to the T-DROP balance each June 30, and applied to the mean balance of the annual T-DROP deposits.*

Q So, in layman terms, how does **T-DROP** benefit me?

*The intent of **T-DROP** is to recruit, retain, and reward career educators in Arkansas schools. Prior to **T-DROP**, members had a tendency to retire with 28-30 years of service credit. **T-DROP** allows members to continue to work in the public schools and also build a savings account for later when they are ready to leave the workforce.*

*Contributory members prior to **T-DROP** will no longer contribute employee contributions of 6% of salary. The regular benefit amount upon which the monthly T-DROP deposit is calculated accrues an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). Indirectly, the T-DROP account builds earnings from the COLA applied to the regular retirement account.*

T-DROP ACCRUAL EXAMPLES:

MEMBER'S FINAL AVERAGE SALARY	NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTORY YEARS	NUMBER OF NONCONTRIBUTORY YEARS	T-DROP LUMP SUM BALANCE @ FIVE (5) YEARS	T-DROP LUMP SUM BALANCE @ TEN (10) YEARS
$ 30,000.00	0	28	$ 41,204.82	$92,535.83
30,000.00	28	0	64,775.12	144,280.10
30,000.00	30	0	76,675.01	170,786.14
60,000.00	0	28	88,296.15	198,290.95
60,000.00	28	0	128,549.98	288,560.05
60,000.00	30	0	153,350.02	341,572.40
100,000.00	0	28	147,160.20	330,484.86
100,000.00	28	0	215,887.97	480,869.55
100,000.00	30	0	255,583.28	569,287.12

***These estimates are based on a fixed annual interest rate of 2% on the mean balance. Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) are 3% and are based on the regular retirement benefit computed at the time of entry into **T-DROP**. Both rates are subject to change by future laws and Board policy. A typical member would receive a higher T-DROP account balance than reflected in the table since ATRS often pays 6% interest on annual balances versus the 2% minimum interest rate always assumed in the table.*

Q You mentioned interest accrual on my **T-DROP** balance above, how does that work?

*The **T-DROP** account earns interest, compounded annually on each June 30. In addition, interest is* *applied to the mean balance of the annual T-DROP deposits. The **T-DROP** interest rate is adopted by the ATRS Board of Trustees each fiscal year for the following year. The interest rate varies from a minimum of 2% and a maximum of 6%, dependent upon the System's investment rate of return. For instance, the last three interest rates were set as follows:*

2012 – 6%
2013 – 2%
2014 – 6%

Q Are there any other financial incentives with **T-DROP?**

*Contributory members prior to entering **T-DROP** will no longer be required to contribute employee contributions of 6% of salary. The **T-DROP** account benefits by a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) applied to the regular retirement benefit. The regular retirement benefit keeps pace with inflation by continuing to accrue COLAs.*

Q Is there a "down side" to **T-DROP**?

*A member's retirement benefit is based upon years of service credit, final average salary, and the benefit multipliers in effect at the time of entry into T-DROP. Like all decisions concerning retirement, the decision to participate in **T-DROP** should be made very carefully – **T-DROP is irrevocable**. The election to enter **T-DROP** freezes retirement benefits, subject only to COLA increases. Any additional years worked will not add service credit and any salary increases will not enhance the final average salary.*

Points to Consider:

- *An "early" entry into **T-DROP** may not optimize years of service credit if employment with an ATRS employer extends beyond the maximum 10 years of T-DROP deposit participation. So members should target T-DROP entry to match your most likely retirement date. ATRS does pay interest on T-DROP account balances after 10 years of participation in T-DROP, but does not add more monthly deposits.*
- *Large increases in salary after **T-DROP** entry does not increase retirement benefits, since entry into T-DROP freezes final average salary for retirement.*

Q What are the eligibility requirements for **T-DROP**?

*In order to participate in **T-DROP**, active members of ATRS or a qualified state reciprocal plan must* *have at least thirty (30) years of ATRS and reciprocal service credit for full participation. Active members may elect to participate with at least twenty-eight (28) and less than thirty (30) years of ATRS and reciprocal service credit, with an early entry penalty of 6% for each year earlier than 30 years of service credit, up to a 12% reduction.*

Q What must I do to participate in **T-DROP**?

T-DROP *participation begins only on the first day of a fiscal year,* ***July 1****. A* ***T-DROP*** *application must be received by ATRS* ***no later than May 31*** *to be able to participate on the following July 1. An application for* ***T-DROP*** *received by the System after May 31 cannot become effective until July 1 of the* ***following*** *fiscal year. So to begin T-DROP on July 1, 2014, ATRS must have the completed T-DROP application on or before May 31, 2014.*

Q What if I change my mind after I apply and begin **T-DROP**?

The T-DROP application may be withdrawn with a written notice to ATRS no later than two (2) calendar months after the ***T-DROP*** *effective date, which is always July 1. After the initial two month period,* ***T-DROP*** *is irrevocable.*

Q I understand that I can participate in **T-DROP** for ten (10) years – am I required to stay for the full ten (10) years or can I get out at any time?

The consecutive ten (10) year period is the maximum amount of time a member can receive monthly deposits in T-DROP. A ***T-DROP*** *participant may retire at any time before reaching 10 years of T-DROP participation and stay in T-DROP beyond 10 years with interest payments only.*

Q If I am in **T-DROP,** do not retire, and stop working for an ATRS employer, do I automatically receive 10 years of monthly deposits?

Employment by an ATRS employer is required to accrue uninterrupted monthly T-DROP deposits.
Receipt of 5 days of service in the first fiscal quarter (July, August, September);
15 days of service in the second fiscal quarter (October, November, December);
15 days of service in the third fiscal quarter (January, February, March); and,
5 service days in the fourth fiscal quarter (April, May, June) is the minimum days of service required to accrue 12 months of T-DROP deposits in a fiscal year.

If one of the following occurs, then the monthly T-DROP deposits stop:

- *The T-DROP participant separates from employment by an ATRS employer and is granted monthly retirement benefits.*
- *The T-DROP participant separates from employment by an ATRS but does not apply for monthly benefits.*
- *The T-DROP participant dies and deposits become payable to designated beneficiaries.*

Q May I withdraw or "take a loan" from the money in my **T-DROP** account?

The funds in T-DROP may not be accessed for any reason by a T-DROP participant until the participant exits the plan.

Q May I change jobs while in **T-DROP**?

*T-DROP deposits and participation continues as long as members continue to work for an ATRS employer or an employer of a qualified state reciprocal retirement plan. The reciprocal service must have been established with ATRS **prior to** entry into T-DROP. T-DROP deposits are not accrued during a break in service for the months not employed by an ATRS employer or an employer of a qualified state reciprocal retirement plan. However, even with a break in service, additional T-DROP deposits may accrue until 10 years from the participant's date in T-DROP has elapsed so long as the participant has not actually retired from ATRS.*

Q What happens after I have participated for ten (10) years in **T-DROP** and I decide not to retire?

*After completion of ten (10) consecutive calendar years in **T-DROP**, ATRS pays annual interest on the **T-DROP** balance each June 30. The ATRS Board of Trustees sets the post 10-year T-DROP interest rate each fiscal year for the following year. The interest rate varies from a minimum of 4% and a maximum of 6%.*

Q Once I decide to retire, how do I get my **T-DROP** balance?

*To retire from **T-DROP**, members must submit a retirement application, and a **T-DROP Account Distribution Request** form. ATRS will provide members retiring from T-DROP several options on how to distribute the T-DROP balance.*

Q How do I know I am eligible for retirement if I have not completed 10 yrs in T-DROP?

*All **T-DROP** participants have already met the retirement eligibility requirements in order to participate in the T-DROP plan. A retirement application and a T-DROP account distribution form must be completed in order to file for retirement with ATRS. The System's termination separation period must be adhered to if the retiree is under age 65 on the effective date of retirement. Once retired, the **stipend** is applied to the regular retirement benefit. The stipend is currently set at the legally maximum rate of **$75 per month**.* In addition, the stipend accrues the simple 3% COLA raise at the appropriate time.

Preretirement counselors travel the state and are available to assist individual members and answer questions in group settings or one-on-one. The ATRS office also has a Benefits and Counseling Department for those members who prefer to meet one-on-one with a counselor who can spend more time with individual members. Plus, if members schedule early enough, the ATRS director and deputy director will meet with members during the retirement season to assist members. Retirement laws and rules change from time-to-time and may affect benefits. Individual or special circumstances may also affect retirement decisions. Members may also want to consult with financial planners before making a final decision to retire. ATRS is happy to work with members' financial consultants. Any member who faces special circumstances, should always feel free to call the executive director at (501) 682-1820.

To find out more or to schedule an appointment, please call ATRS at 1-800-666-ATRS (1-800-666-2877) to meet with a Preretirement counselor at your place of employment or schedule an appointment with a counselor in the Little Rock office. Although appointments are not required to visit with counselors at the Little Rock office, it does allow ATRS counselors time to thoroughly review individual retirement records and reduce waiting time.

You can also keep up-to-date on ATRS law, policy, and other important member information through our Executive Director Updates posted regularly on the ATRS website: www.artrs.gov. You can sign up on the ATRS homepage to receive the Executive Director Updates directly into your work or home email account.

Q What is a **T-DROP** distribution election?

*A **T-DROP** distribution form is required to notify ATRS how the **T-DROP** account balance will be distributed at the time of retirement.*

The options are as follows: the two options are lump sum distribution and annuitization (using the balance to increase the monthly retirement benefit check). ATRS now allows a combination of lump sum and annuitization of the T-DROP account balance.

LUMP SUM DISTRIBUTION:

A. The T-DROP account balance may be paid to the member as a lump sum at retirement. This type of distribution is immediately taxable. Mandatory tax withholdings are deducted from the payment by ATRS, and an additional tax penalty may be applied by IRS if the distribution is made before the IRS age requirement for this type of distribution, currently age 59½.

*B. The T-DROP account balance may rolled over to ATRS in a **T-DROP Cash Balance Account (CBA)**. The funds are not taxed until withdrawals are made.*

C. The T-DROP account balance is also rollover eligible into another qualified plan such as an IRA. Rollovers are generally taxed upon withdrawal from the rollover institution and not at the time of rollover from ATRS to the institution receiving the funds.

ANNUITIZED:

*The **T-DROP** account balance may be annuitized and added to the regular monthly retirement benefit. This increase to the regular retirement benefit is calculated using actuarial tables and becomes a lifetime benefit. The **T-DROP** benefit will receive a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) after retirement just like the regular retirement benefit does.*

COMBINATION OF LUMP SUM & ANNUITY DISTRIBUTION:

*The **T-DROP** balance may be divided by annuitizing 75%, 50%, or 25% as an addition to the ATRS monthly benefit, and receiving the balance as a taxable lump sum payment, or rolling the remaining balance to ATRS' CBA or another eligible retirement plan.*

EXAMPLE:

*A T-DROP participant who retires at age 62 and annuitizes all or a portion of the **T-DROP** account balance increases the regular retirement benefit according to the chart below and receives a 3% COLA annually on the annuitized balance:*

AMOUNT OF T-DROP LUMP SUM ANNUITIZED AT AGE 62	MONTHLY AMOUNT ADDED TO REGULAR RETIREMENT BENEFIT	ANNUAL AMOUNT ADDED TO YOUR REGULAR RETIREMENT BENEFIT
$ 30,000.00	$ 199.66	$ 2,395.97
60,000.00	399.33	4,791.95
100,000.00	665.55	7,986.58
200,000.00	1,331.10	15,973.17
300,000.00	1,996.65	23,959.75
400,000.00	2,662.19	31,946.33

Q What happens to my **T-DROP** balance if I <u>die **prior** to retirement</u>?

*Monthly T-DROP deposits cease immediately upon a participant's death. The **T-DROP** participant's surviving spouse, if designated as the residue beneficiary and married to the participant for at least two years immediately preceding the participant's death, shall receive survivor benefits as if the participant had retired under annuity Option A to provide 100% lifetime benefits to the surviving spouse. The surviving spouse may choose to receive the **T-DROP** account balance in a lump sum or as an annuitized monthly benefit added to the surviving spouse's regular monthly retirement benefit. The monthly benefits are payable for the surviving spouse's lifetime.*

*If no survivor benefits are payable, ATRS will pay the higher of the deceased member's **T-DROP** account balance or the deceased member's accumulated member contributions to the T-DROP participant's designated residue beneficiary.*

Q What happens if I annuitize all or part of my **T-DROP** balance and <u>die **after** retirement</u>?

*If a retiree has selected Straight Life Annuity, and dies **<u>within the first year of retirement</u>**, the surviving spouse, if designated as the residue beneficiary and married to the participant for at least one year immediately preceding the retiree's death, may elect to cancel the Straight Life Annuity choice and elect Option A, 100% Survivor Annuity, for the remainder of his or her lifetime.*

*If a retiree dies **<u>after the first year of retirement</u>**, and has selected **<u>Straight Life Annuity</u>**, the eligible beneficiary shall receive the greater of the **T-DROP** Lump Sum amount that was annuitized, less the **T-DROP** benefit payments paid to the retiree (typically a residual balance from an annuitized T-DROP account will continue to exist for approximately 10 years); or the accumulated member contributions less <u>all</u> benefits paid to the deceased retiree.*

*Retirees who select Option A or Option B and have annuitized part or all of their **T-DROP** account balance, have provided payments upon their death to an Option Beneficiary for the remainder of the Option Beneficiary's lifetime. The **T-DROP** annuity will continue to be paid as designated by the retiree.*

Q What is a **T-DROP C**ash **B**alance **A**ccount **(CBA)**?

*The **CBA** allows T-DROP participants to leave all or a portion of the T-DROP balance in an interest bearing cash account with ATRS. The interest rate starts at 2% and grows to 4% over time. The CBA account is tax deferred until withdrawals are made. This account will never lose the principal amount initially deposited, unlike private investments that may rely heavily upon stock market fluctuations.*

Q Do I gain interest on my **CBA**?

*As of July 1, 2014, your **CBA** will receive interest according to the following schedule:*

After one (1) complete fiscal year:	*2.00% interest.*
After two (2) complete fiscal years:	*2.25% interest.*
After three (3) complete fiscal years:	*2.50% interest.*
After four (4) complete fiscal years:	*2.75% interest.*
After five (5) complete fiscal years:	*3.00% interest.*
After six (6) complete fiscal years:	*3.25% interest.*
After seven (7) complete fiscal years:	*3.50% interest.*
After more than eight (8) complete fiscal years:	*4.00% interest.*

The ATRS Board of Trustees may adopt, by Resolution, an interest rate increase based upon current interest rates and financial market conditions. Once a member rolls all or a portion of their T-DROP balance into the CBA, the interest rates in effect at that time can never be lowered but may be increased.

Q May I withdraw funds from my **CBA**?

*After the **CBA** participant's account has been established on the ATRS' membership system, the participant may withdraw funds from the account **one time per quarter**. The System, with a written request, may allow the participant to make an additional withdrawal within a quarter for a manifest emergency.*

*The **CBA** interest is based upon the weighted-average principal of the CBA account. Any withdrawal through the fiscal year will reduce the weighted average interest accrual.*

Q Once I've established a **CBA,** may I make additional deposits from another administrator, personal bank account, etc.?

*No. Since the **CBA** is part of a defined benefit plan, ATRS cannot accept additional deposits.*

Q May I borrow against my **CBA**?

*The answer is **NO**. The CBA is not subject to a member loan of any type.*

Q May I replace funds already withdrawn from my **CBA**?

*The answer is **NO**. Any CBA withdrawal is permanent. Once money is withdrawn, it cannot be returned to the CBA plan.*

Q Once I've established my **CBA** may I decide later to annuitize the all or part of the balance?

*The answer is **NO**. Once a **CBA** is established, it cannot be annuitized**.** The CBA is the same as a lump sum **T-DROP** balance that has been rolled over to an outside administrator. The ATRS actuaries have told ATRS that allowing a CBA to be annuitized after retirement creates too much complexity in the calculation.*