Frequently Asked Questions: $1,000 Retention Bonus for Georgia Teachers and School-Based Staff

What is the purpose of the $1,000 retention bonus?
The bonus is being provided to all K-12 public school-level teachers and staff to support stronger recruitment and retention of teachers and school-level staff and as a gesture of gratitude for their work and sacrifices during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who is eligible for the $1,000 retention bonus?
The bonus payments are intended for all school-level faculty and staff in Georgia’s K-12 public schools, including but not limited to teachers, paraprofessionals, school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, custodians, bus drivers, school nutrition staff, media specialists, clerical staff and administrative assistants, school principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and therapists. A specific listing of eligible job codes is provided in the CP051 – ESSER Bonus for School-Based Staff report. Funding is allocated to districts based on the number of employees with eligible job codes reported in the most recent CPI count.

- Are Pre-K teachers housed in public schools eligible for the bonus? The CARES Act funding GaDOE is using to provide the bonuses is being used for initiatives in K-12 schools, but the Governor’s Office and Department of Early Care and Learning are working together to provide a $1,000 bonus for eligible Pre-K staff through a separate fund source. Information on those bonus payments will be provided by DECAL.
- Are contracted staff eligible for the bonus? No. Funding is being allocated for employees of the LEA. Contracted staff should reach out to their direct employers for bonus decisions.
- Are substitute teachers eligible for the bonus? Short-term substitutes are not eligible for the bonus; however, long-term substitutes are eligible. Any employees that are coded on the October 2020 (2021-1) CPI report with Employee Type “L” are included in the eligible employee listing for the bonus. Any long-term substitutes at the time the bonus is provided are eligible.
- Are part-time employees eligible for the bonus? Yes. School-based part-time employees will receive a $490 (49%) bonus.
- Are any former/retired educators eligible for the bonus? Educators who are not currently employed by a local school system in Georgia are not eligible for the bonus.
- If an employee that is included on the list of eligible employees has since resigned, should the LEA locate the employee and pay the bonus? No. Since a key purpose of
the bonus is employee retention, individuals who are no longer school-based employees with an LEA are not eligible.

- If an employee that is included on the list of eligible employees has since transferred to another district, should the LEA send the funds to the receiving LEA for payment through the payroll system? No. If an eligible employee has transferred to another LEA, the receiving LEA is responsible for paying the bonus for that employee for the purpose of employee retention. The receiving LEA can utilize any excess funds from the grant award that are the result of resignations, or the LEA can use local or ESSER funds to provide the bonus. The LEA that has the resigned employee can utilize those funds for the replacement hire, as long as the employee is reported in an eligible job code. Eligible job codes have been provided on the CP051 report.

- If a new employee was hired after the CPI report was submitted for October 2020 and is employed in an eligible position, should that employee receive the payment of $1,000? Yes. The LEA can use local or ESSER funding for the payment. If the LEA has an employee that has resigned, the grant allocation can be used for the new employee who is not currently funded. If an LEA has this situation, please reach out to your district CARES grant contact for guidance on how to document the individuals paid.

- If an employee’s eligibility status has changed since the October 2020 (2021-1) CPI Report, should the bonus be adjusted accordingly? Yes. The LEA should pay either the full-time or part-time allocation, or none at all, depending on the employee’s percentage of time employed in eligible job codes at the time the bonus is paid.

- At what point is eligibility determined for the bonus? While the October 2020 (2021-1) CPI report is utilized for the grant award allocation, eligibility is determined at the point in which the bonus is processed (i.e. payroll is run) by the LEA. If an employee resigns prior to the payroll processing, the LEA is not required to pay the retention bonus.

How will the LEA know which employees are eligible for the bonus? In the March 2021 CPI Report Menu for All Employees, a new report has been created. CP051 – ESSER Bonus for School-Based Staff lists each eligible employee, along with their Eligibility Status that includes the amount of payment awarded. Additionally, an Ad Hoc Query has been generated so the LEAs can view the employee details that were submitted in October. The LEA should export CP051 and maintain a reconciliation that includes the actions taken on employees listed and/or new hires that were funded. This will be necessary to document only eligible employees are paid from the grant award allocation.

How will LEAs receive the funds for the $1,000 retention bonus? Like all other CARES grants from the SEA Reserve, funds will be budgeted by the LEA in the consolidated application and districts will provide the bonus to qualifying employees in the same manner in which all other payments are made to employees.

Two new program codes for the two separate grant allocations are provided, and the LEA will draw down the funds using the same reimbursement method as with other federal grants.
What account codes should the bonus be recorded on the financial records? There are two separate funding sources utilized for the bonus. LEAs have been provided the funding source for the grant awarded to each specific LEA. The Grant Award Notifications are also included in the Consolidated Application that indicates the award for each LEA. The codes are as follows:

- CRRSA ESSER II Employee Retention Bonus – Fund 420 Program Code 4153
- ARP ESSER III Employee Retention Bonus – Fund 448 Program Code 4154

Can an LEA use the funds allocated for the $1,000 retention bonus for another purpose? No. All funds allocated for the $1,000 retention bonuses must be used for that purpose, for employees based on the eligible job codes listed. That purpose will be stated in the grant award notification each LEA receives.

Should the bonus payments be issued in the current fiscal year, or could districts provide them in FY22? Once funding for the $1,000 retention bonuses is allocated, districts should work to provide the payments to employees within the 2021 Fiscal Year. Payments should not be held until FY22. The grant period ends June 30, 2021, and the completion report is due July 30, 2021.

Can an LEA expand the bonus to additional staff using local funds? Yes. An LEA can use local funds – including LEA CARES funds – to expand the bonus to additional staff. LEAs should consult with their GaDOE CARES contact regarding use of local CARES funds, and LEAs should consult with their Local Board of Education (LBOE) Attorney to determine the allowability of other funds used to expand the bonus payments.

Will taxes be taken out of the bonus amount? The bonus is intended to support stronger recruitment and retention of teachers and school level staff. Therefore, the bonus is considered subject to FICA. GaDOE is funding the employer share of Medicare taxes (1.45%) in the allocation to the districts. Each school district should consult their tax attorney regarding specific questions about the payment of the bonus.

Will the TRS contribution be taken out of the bonus amount? No. The Teachers Retirement System of Georgia has determined that this income is not “normal” earnable compensation based on Title 47 in state law and, therefore, will not be considered earnable compensation for TRS purposes.