

FAQ

CLASSIFIED SCHOOL EMPLOYEE SUMMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR K-12 DISTRICTS

Who is eligible to enroll in the Summer Assistance Program?

Classified employees who are employed with the school district for 11 months or fewer, who earn less than \$62,400 per year in their district job, and who do not work the summer session are eligible to participate.

You must also have been working with your district for at least one year to participate in the program. Please note charter schools that cannot participate in the program. This program requires the district to opt-in. Your district must notify every classified employee regarding their intent to participate in the program by January 1 of each year. It is up to your local union to push the district to participate in the program.

What are the costs to participate in the program?

There are no costs to an employee. Each employee will decide on their own whether to participate and how much of their monthly pay to save (up to 10 percent).

The district must bear the costs to administratively facilitate the notice to employees and notice to the California Department of Education, managing a separate bank account for these savings, and sending the checks to each employee that participates during the summer.

Districts already facilitate withholdings from paychecks for various reasons, send payroll



checks during the summer, and conduct standard banking practices regularly. The added costs to implement this program should be absorbable by the district; however, it will require classified local unions to push their districts to participate.

When can we start enrolling in the program?

First, your district must choose to participate in the program. If your local union wants your district to participate in the program, it is important to advocate for that with district administrators during the fall. Local unions are not required to bargain over the district's participation, but should use any leverage necessary to urge the

CHANGES DUE TO COVID-19

The 2021 budget bill authorized a K-12 district classified employee to be eligible to participate in the program if the employee is employed by the LEA in the employee's regular assignment for **11 months or fewer** out of a 12-month period. For purposes of determining an employee's total months employed by the LEA, the bill requires the LEA to exclude any hours worked by the classified employee as a result of an extension of the academic year, for specified school years, directly related to the pandemic.

For the 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23 school years, the employing LEA shall exclude any hours worked by the classified employee as a result of an extension of the academic school year directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic, if the hours are in addition to the employee's regular assignment and would prevent the employee from being eligible for this program.

district to participate. The district must notify employees of its participation in the program by January 1 of each year.

Every eligible classified employee who wishes to participate in the Summer Assistance Fund must complete and return the enrollment form to their district by March 1 of each year. (For more details please see the Program Timeline in our online toolkit.)

How much money can I withhold every month?

You can have up to 10% of your monthly paycheck withheld during the school year.

How will we receive our funds during the summer recess?

Employees can opt to receive money in one lump sum at the beginning of summer recess or have it distributed in two payments over the recess.

Is the Summer Bridge Fund going to lead to a withholding of part of my paycheck?

The enactment of the program will not lead to a mandatory withholding on your paycheck in the same way that taxes, like Social Security and Medicare, are currently withheld. You will elect, on the California Department of Education form, the percentage of funds you would like withheld. You can contribute up to 10% of your monthly paycheck to the Summer Fund.

Think of the Summer Fund as an employer-matched 401(k) retirement account to which you voluntarily contribute.

Am I eligible to contribute to the fund if I work for the district during the summer?

If you work for the school district during the summer session, you will only be able to access the money you have banked. You will not receive matching contributions from the state. Because this program was created as a safety net to help school workers who are unemployed during the summer break, if you accept a summer session assignment with the school district you will not be eligible for the program.

If you work during the summer break at a job outside of the district, you are eligible to enroll in the program and receive matching contributions.

Why am I not eligible for the program if I work summer school?

The Summer Bridge Fund was created to address the problem of unemployment that many classified employees face during the summer recess. It is a safety net to help classified employees make it through the summer months when there is no work available.

It is not meant to replace summer session work. While the decision to work during the summer session is up to each member, keep in mind that if you accept a summer assignment with the school district, you will earn more than if you contribute to the Summer Bridge Fund.

It is also important to note that if you have a job outside of the district during the summer, this does not affect your eligibility for the program. Additionally, if you work for a limited time for the district during the months of June, July, and August as part of your regular school-year assignment (not summer session) you are still eligible to participate in the program.

Can I choose to withdraw from the program after I sign up?

You may withdraw from the program due to economic or personal hardship. You will need to request that the district stop withholding contributions from your check and pay you any funds that have been set aside for your summer fund. Keep in mind, however, that if you withdraw from the program, you will not receive any matching funds from the state.

How does a matching fund work?

Your contributions to the fund will be matched by the state. Participating employees will be notified by June 1 of each year as to how much they will receive from the state.

How much funding is available for this program?

Gov. Jerry Brown budgeted \$50 million for the 2019-20 summer break when he initially approved

the program. Gov. Gavin Newsom added \$36 million to this amount. In June 2020, the Legislature appropriated \$60 million in one-time funds, which will be available through June 30, 2024.

In June 2022, the Legislature appropriated \$35 million in one-time funds plus \$90 million ongoing, *and* established a similar program (still to be implemented) for community colleges with \$10 million ongoing funds.

If more employees participate than the funding can cover, the amount participating employees receive will be pro-rated. If and when the fund is exhausted, we can ask the Legislature for additional funding.

What information will my district share with the California Department of Education?

The district or county office of education must share with the CDE their intention to participate in the Summer Fund, the number of classified employees participating, and an estimation of the total amount of funds to be withheld from those employees' paychecks.

Will my summer funds contribute to my retirement savings?

No. Funds from the state match for classified employees will not be considered compensation for retirement benefits in the California Public Employees' Retirement System.

What happened to our fight for summer unemployment insurance benefits?

During the past decade, several bills have been introduced in Sacramento to change the current law so that classified employees could be eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits during the summer break. Unfortunately, those bills have not become law.

During the process, however, we educated legislators about the problem. Many of them agreed that dedicated school workers should not have to suffer during the summer. Their main concern has been that the state cannot afford the cost of paying benefits out of the current unemployment insurance fund. That is why we've come up with a different solution through the Summer Assistance Fund.

Don't we already pay into the state's unemployment benefits fund? Can't we access the benefits we're already paying into?

A common misconception is that classified employees are paying into the state's unemployment insurance fund, but are denied access to unemployment benefits.

Actually, classified workers *do not* pay into the state's unemployment insurance fund. No money is deducted from their paychecks for this purpose. The reason they don't pay into the fund is because — unlike other employees that do pay into the fund — classified workers are currently excluded from accessing unemployment benefits.

We have fought to change that through legislation and influencing the state budget. The Summer Bridge Fund is part of the solution to addressing the summer unemployment issue.

Why are classified workers excluded from access? School workers are not considered by the state and school district to be unemployed during the summer recess. This is the reason why school workers, under normal circumstances, are denied when they try to apply for unemployment benefits.

This does not mean school workers are completely ineligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. There are some ways a school worker could be eligible:

- **Permanent layoffs:** School districts pay into the state's School Employees Fund (SEF). This is a voluntary fund managed by the EDD that is used to cover unemployment insurance benefits to school workers in cases of permanent layoffs. Note that a school district's participation in the SEF has no effect on the pay of school workers.
- **Cancelled summer assignment:** If a school worker was offered a summer school assignment and that assignment was subsequently cancelled.
- **No reasonable assurance:** If a school worker does not have reasonable assurance to return to the same or similar position at the end of the recess or did not receive proper notification of reasonable assurance.

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cft.org/summer-assistance-fund