Teacher Pension Policy in Rhode Island

A report card on the sustainability, flexibility and fairness of state teacher pension systems

Rhode Island’s pension system ratings

Sustainability
Pension system is stable and well-funded.

Flexibility
Pension system is flexible and fair to all teachers.

Neutrality
Retiree benefits to teachers accrue uniformly with each additional year of work.

YES

Snapshot of Rhode Island’s pension system

Teacher pension system is well-funded (at least 90%).

NO

Teachers have the option of a fully portable primary pension plan.

NO

Teachers vest in three years or less.

NO

Teachers leaving early can take at least a partial employer contribution with them.

NO

Teacher and employer contribution rates are reasonable.

NO

Retirement eligibility is based on age only.

YES

Pension benefits accrue in a way that treats each year of work uniformly.

YES

Rhode Island’s pension system characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of plan</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfunded liabilities (percent of system funded)*</td>
<td>$1,439,612,019 (58.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vesting period</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher contribution rate (percent of salary)</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer contribution rate (percent of salary)</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis for retirement eligibility</td>
<td>Age only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of living adjustments</td>
<td>Tied to funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Social Security</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions teachers may withdraw from plans if they leave after 5 years</td>
<td>Own, without interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy for purchasing time for prior teaching or approved leave</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per teacher of allowing retirement before age 65</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For states in which teachers are part of a larger public employee system, the liabilities were adjusted to reflect an estimate of the percentage of teachers in the system.
Teacher pension trends in the U.S.

Just seven states offer a fully or nearly fully portable primary pension plan for teachers.

Teacher pension system debt has reached a half trillion dollars.

Other indicators also reflect worrisome trends.

- Number of states where pension funding ratios have decreased since 2008: 45 states
- Number of states that require excessive contributions of teachers, employers or both: 43 states
- Number of states that have increased teacher contribution rates since 2008: 29 states
- Number of states that have ten-year teacher vesting periods: 15 states