

What You Need to Know About Taking Leave

For specific advice about your situation, contact Staci Butts, your local UniServ Director at 547-0852

Paid Leave

If you have accumulated sick leave days or personal leave days that you wish to apply to your absence, your salary and all deductions will continue so long as you are using those days. Employees earn one day of sick leave per contract month (9 month contract = 9 sick leave days) and you can continue earning sick leave even while you're using it.

Sick leave can be used for any illness or injury of the employee or a dependent, or in cases of a death in the family. The system *may* require a doctor's statement for extended or excessive use of sick leave.

Unpaid Leave

When your absence will be longer than your accumulated leave days will cover, you have several options about unpaid leave. Look at them closely to decide exactly which is best for your situation, and to know all the details you'll need to understand. Any type of unpaid leave WILL lower the amount of your paychecks when you return to work because you will be working fewer days than your contract requires for that year. Be sure to discuss this reduced pay with the payroll department BEFORE your leave, so you will not be surprised when your paychecks resume.

Family Medical Leave

If you have been employed for at least one year, you can request an unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks under the federal Family Medical Leave Act. Even though you will not be paid, during this type of leave the employer will continue to pay their portion of your PEEHIP insurance premiums. You will have to pay the employee portion in order to keep your insurance active. You will also be responsible for directly paying any voluntary deductions you may have (any other insurance coverage, dues, credit union withholding, etc.) If you fail to make these payments, your coverage under those policies may lapse. You will need to speak with the payroll clerk to arrange how and when to make such payments. To request FMA Leave, write a letter to the Superintendent stating your reasons for the leave and stating the dates you will start the leave and return to work.

Leave of Absence

This is unpaid leave that can be used for a variety of reasons (often for maternity leaves or other medical absences). State law allows school boards to grant up to two years of unpaid leave; however an employee cannot request more than one full year at a time. Many requests are for shorter periods. During this type of leave, the employer pays nothing – the employee on leave is responsible for direct payments for all insurance (including PEEHIP), dues, and other

voluntary deductions which you may have. You can speak with the payroll clerk to determine when and how such payments are to be made during your absence. To request a leave of absence, write a letter to the Superintendent which states the reason for your absence and which gives the date your leave will begin and your expected date to return to work. If your leave needs to be extended, you can write another letter at that time and ask for the extension.

Please note that leaves of absence, except for maternity leaves, are NOT automatically granted; it is up to the school board to approve such leave. Also, leaves of absence (except for maternity) are not routinely granted to non-tenured employees.

At the end of a leave of absence, one normally returns to the same job you left; in some situations, the original job may have disappeared and the employee will be given a similar job at the previous rate of pay and without loss of status.

Maternity Leave

There is really no category of leave set aside just for maternity reasons; most employees either use their existing sick leave days (see "paid leave" above) or they take some type of unpaid leave or a combination of the two. In any case, it is necessary to inform the school system of your expected date to begin leave and to return to work, although some adjustments in those dates can be made according to your circumstances.

It is illegal to deny maternity leave to any employee, but unless the employee is using earned sick leave days, the leave will be without pay. Please refer to more detailed information given under the leave options above.

Sick Leave Bank (SLB)

Employees may join the Sick Leave Bank upon employment. Membership requires deposit of five sick leave days (can be advanced to first-time employees). Open enrollment for the SLB is in August and January. SLB members may request a loan of sick leave days if needed. Requesting up to 5 days is "automatic"; other loan requests (up to 15 additional days) are subject to approval by the SLB Committee. Loans can then be repaid to the bank as leave is earned. If that is not enough to cover the absence, the employee may be able to qualify for "catastrophic leave", making him eligible for donated sick leave from other employees who are members of the SLB. Remember, only SLB members can donate or receive days. Only those qualified for catastrophic leave may receive donated days (one must have used up all available sick leave, must have borrowed the maximum number of leave days from the SLB, and must have a doctor's statement of need to qualify).

Things to Consider...

Use your most recent paycheck stub to work through some of these issues and determine what options for leave are best for you.

How will an unpaid leave affect my salary?

Determine your daily rate of pay... total annual salary divided by number of days you are supposed to work. *Remember that any employee who works less than 12 months is not paid a full daily rate each month; a portion is held in reserve for summer pay. This must be considered when figuring the impact on one's salary.*

Daily Rate = Total annual salary divided by # of days contracted to work

Multiply that by the number of days of unpaid leave you will have... The impact of any unpaid leave is usually more than you expect. That's because missing one day reduces your monthly salary by more than 1/30 of what you see on a monthly paycheck.

Daily rate x number of unpaid leave days = total deduction from annual salary

The payroll department is often able to assist you when your check is going to be reduced by spreading that amount over a period of months. This is only an option if sufficient pay periods remain in the contract year. **You need to have a personal discussion with the payroll clerk** to see what arrangements can be made in your situation.

What about voluntary deductions?

PEEHIP – Remember that when the employee is using Family Medical Leave, the employer's portion of the premiums to PEEHIP are paid, but the employee portion must still be paid out-of-pocket. **For all other types of unpaid leave, the employee must pay BOTH parts of the premium to continue coverage.**

Other insurance – Normally, the employee must continue to make payments for any other insurance coverage during a leave without pay; failure to make payments will result in loss of coverage. Some disability insurance policies allow one to suspend premiums while out of work (see below).

Bank drafts/payments – Be sure to make arrangements with your bank or credit union to pick up payments or deposits to your account that have been automatically drawn from your paychecks. Failure to make such arrangements could lead to serious financial problems or penalties.

Other deductions – Look at your listed deductions (paycheck stub) and be sure that everything is accounted for in your planning. If you have other deductions listed, investigate to see what will happen if you do not pay these directly during your leave.

Disability Insurance - Check with your insurance provider for disability insurance to see how your leave will affect this type of insurance; policies have different requirements about when you can make claims and draw benefits and about when you can cease premiums during an absence. **Only your carrier can answer those specific questions for you, not the school system.**