

Brookline Educators Unionemail

June 2020 Furlough Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is a furlough? How is it different from a lay-off?

During a furlough, you stop working for the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) until the end of the furlough and PSB does not pay you. (In this case, it's until the end of this school year.) A furlough is essentially a temporary lay-off.

2. Who is getting furloughed now?

PSB is asking members who they think, in these unprecedented times, the district can operate without for the last few weeks of the school year. You can choose to take the furlough or not. Also, you can offer to be furloughed if you don't get such a letter and PSB is free to accept your offer or not - we think probably not since PSB didn't send you the letter to begin with, but one never knows.

3. Do I still get benefits if I choose to be furloughed?

Yes! You continue to earn and use benefits as if you were still working. If you decide to take the furlough, the subsequent letter should tell you how to make your last portion of your health insurance premium.

4. I feel like PSB doesn't value my work. Why are they doing this?

They are running out of money because of a combination of fiscal mismanagement and the reduction in revenues due to the coronavirus. This will help the district balance their budget.

While it seems the central office does not completely understand or appreciate the work in the schools, they assure us that this is not a reflection of you or your work but needed to ask for this out of necessity. You should absolutely know that you are valued by your students, your colleagues, the BEU and your school administrators.

5. I thought we had an MOA that had us be paid all school year. So what's this?

Yes, we do have such an MOA and it says PSB is required to pay you through the end of the year. That is why this furlough is voluntary. The BEU negotiated this voluntary furlough option in exchange for implementing seniority based lay-offs for paraprofessionals in the next two years (within job title). We have been trying since the paraprofessionals first joined the BEU to get this standard provision in our contract - and now we have moved the needle in that fight just a bit, as they will see that such a rule is not as limiting as they fear, and in fact is good for the schools and students. The agreement for this voluntary furlough this year in exchange for seniority-based lay-offs for paraprofessionals in the next two years can be found here.

6. Why would I or wouldn't I take the furlough?

There are two possible advantages to taking the furlough:

- You may actually make MORE money. Because of the crisis created by the coronavirus, unemployment assistance has been increased by \$600 per month on top of the normal approximate 50% of normal salary. So, if you make less than \$1200 per week, you will likely make more in unemployment assistance than from your usual salary. You will see below how to determine your current pay and what you could collect in unemployment.

- You can choose to stop working and take care of yourself and your family.

There are two possible disadvantages to taking the furlough:

- This could adversely affect your pension. If you plan to retire within the next three years, taking the furlough could have a large negative impact on your pension; if you plan to retire after that, it would have a smaller impact. See below for a more detailed explanation and calculation.
- You won't be able to work, help your students and colleagues.

7. How do I figure out what my unemployment benefit will be?

- See the salary scales here. Find the amount on the correct salary scale (by job title), column (by educational level, if any) and step.
- If you don't know your scale or step, look for a letter that you should have received in the fall from Human Resources that contained this information. You can also call the payroll department at 617-730-2405.
- With this information, you can go to the Department of Unemployment Assistance benefit page, [here](#), and click on the **Unemployment benefits determination calculator**.
- Because of the pandemic, you get \$600 added to this weekly benefit (this lasts until the end of July, well past your furlough)

8. What if I have another job for which I'm still getting paid?

The calculator will tell you how that will play out for your situation.

9. What if I have another job that I have been furloughed or laid-off from?

You add both salaries when using the calculator. You should do it once with your other job (and add the \$600), then do it again with both jobs (adding in the same \$600, but just once). Then compare the two amounts. We doubt that you would bring in more benefits than your PSB wages because the \$600 does not come into play in this situation.

10. What if I also am getting laid off for next year?

These are independent actions: your lay-off status for next year does not impact your furlough for this year. However, you will only need to apply for unemployment assistance one time (instructions for that are below). There are other documents that we have created to answer questions about next year's lay-off

11. Will taking the furlough (or not) my possibility of being laid off next year?

No, these are independent actions and one has no effect on the other.

12. Is there more detailed information about unemployment assistance available?

Yes, you can find more information in two places:

- [MTA's COVID-19 Unemployment FAQs](#)
- [The Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance \(Mass DUA\)](#)

13. How will this impact my pension?

First, realize that your pension is based on three factors:

- your years of service (in the public sector, not just at PSB);
- your age (at your last birthday before you retire); and

- an average of your salary (if you started in public service before April 2, 2012, it is the average your last three years' salaries OR your three highest consecutive years' salaries, whichever is greater; if you started in public service after April 2, 2012, it's 5 years using the above formula)

When you are on furlough, your pension may be impacted in two ways:

1. The time on furlough does not count as years of service, so you'd take a small reduction (in proportion to the weeks missed compared to the number of weeks you've worked), or you need to work the same number of weeks longer at the end of your career
2. This year will likely not be one of your years to average. This is a much greater loss than the years of service

14. If I accept this furlough, do I keep my BEU/MTA/NEA membership

Yes! During this furlough, the unions will waive your dues requirements.

15. I don't think this will work for me. Is that really OK?

Yes, you are free to forgo this offer .

16. I'm afraid that by accepting this offer, I will make my position more likely to be cut next year.

Should I be concerned about this?

We don't think so. Despite the PSB's recent action, your job is valuable and needed - that's why you were hired for the position in the first place.

17. No thanks, I'd rather keep working. What do I do?

That's absolutely fine. There is nothing to do, not responding to the letter means you won't get furloughed.

18. Yes, I'd like to be furloughed and help the District. What do I do?

First, tell the Human Resources Office as directed in the letter.

Then apply for unemployment by going [here](#), and clicking on **Apply for unemployment benefits online**. When you get to the various options of why you're applying, choose laid off (there is no furlough choice, but the furlough is a type of layoff).

19. If I need help, can the BEU help?

Absolutely, please send an email with your question(s) or concern(s) to joceejo@email.com

We want to help you during these difficult and dangerous times.