SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING RETIREMENT

The purpose of this information sheet is to ensure that you are aware of your retirement rights.

At any time, you have the right to join the State Teacher's Retirement System (STRS). When you do, you contribute 8% of your gross earnings to the retirement program and the District contributes 8.25%. You become fully vested in the system after you serve 5 years of full-time equivalent certificated service. Service may be combined with service at other K-12 and CCD Districts. If you teach one .20 FTE class each fall and each spring, it will take you 25 years to complete the 5 years of full-time equivalent service.

If you leave the District before the five full years of service credit is achieved, you will get your contributions, plus interest, returned to you. The District doesn't get their share back; the money just stays in the plan for others to use. You receive annual statements near the end of the fall semester which summarizes your contributions to STRS. It's important that you reconcile these statements every year. If there's a discrepancy, report this to the Payroll Supervisor as soon as possible. Corrections may take up to months to be resolved due to the complex nature of reporting.

Also, for people who work at multiple Districts, once you select STRS at one site, you become a STRS member at all sites. Sometimes it takes several months for one District to report to STRS and then for STRS to notify every District of the membership selection. Then, the District is required to collect back contributions for all certificated service after the membership date. You are responsible for your portion, while the District is responsible for the employer's portion.

As an option, the District offers an Alternative Retirement System (ARS) as defined under the IRS regulations. The ARS used for SWCCD is called the APPLE Plan. When you are in this plan, 3.75% of your earnings are deducted from your gross monthly pay towards the contributions. The District matches these contributions at 3.75% as well. There is no minimum service credit required for the plan. If you teach one class, or work only one month, when you leave the District, APPLE will return to you all your contributions, plus interest, and all the District's contributions, plus interest. If you are participating in the APPLE Program now, you may transfer to STRS at any time and it will be effective the first of the month following your request. However, once you select STRS as your retirement system, you may never leave that program and return to APPLE, unless you leave the District's employment and refund via STRS.

You may wish additional information about your STRS options and responsibilities. The website www.calstrs.ca.gov has excellent information. It even contains a video regarding a Social Security offset condition, if you've been contributing to SSA elsewhere during your career. You may also call 1-585-292-3565 and set up an appointment with a STRS counselor to discuss the details of your membership and estimated expense. The regulation for the defined benefit retirement system is defined in the Education Code (www.legalinfo.ca.gov). Ed Code section 22455 describes benefit information and section 22515/22901 shows that the District is responsible for making the payments to STRS for contributions, but the members are responsible for their respective portions. This has been the District's consistent procedure and past practice for any retirement adjustments.