

# Solutions, Strategies, Answers

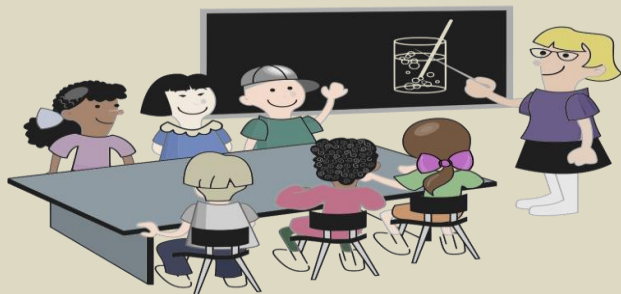
Newsletter of the 18 Social Security Administration offices in  
Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Lehigh, Monroe, Montgomery, Northampton, and Philadelphia counties



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## School Days Are Back



As the calendar wends its way toward summer's end, schools are again brimming with happy students eager for new lesson plans. Well, OK, maybe not exactly. Still, you get the point. But beyond the benefits of pure learning, there are also Social Security benefits that are connected to a young person's student status.

**Social Security ...** Children of retired or disabled beneficiaries are entitled up to age 18, regardless of student status. Those who remain in school past 18 are entitled to benefits until they reach age 19 or complete their secondary (*grade 12 or below*) education, whichever occurs first. (In some limited situations, entitlement continues through age 19 and 2 months.) These rules also apply to children with a deceased parent who worked long enough.

Benefits will stop before reaching age 19 if the young adult either stops attending school or reduces attendance below full-time. Benefits also stop if the student marries. [Students \(ssa.gov\)](https://www.ssa.gov/students)

**SSI ...** Under this needs-based program, any income (*such as from work*) normally reduces a recipient's benefit. However, the Student Earned Income Exclusion allows a disability recipient to have some of their earnings excluded from countable income if the recipient is under age 22 and regularly attending school. In 2025, up to \$9,460 of gross earnings can be excluded. The allowable amount increases each year.

[SSI Spotlight on Student Earned Income Exclusion \(ssa.gov\)](https://www.ssa.gov/ssi-spotlight-on-student-earned-income-exclusion)



## With Social Security, Labors Are Never Lost

One of William Shakespeare's comedies is *Love's Labour's Lost*. Well, I'm not certain why the title is such, but it got me thinking that with the Social Security program, you always get credit for your earnings; nothing is ever "lost." And with Labor Day just past, there's no better time to reflect on one's lifetime of work and how it results in your retirement benefit.

**Qualifying for Retirement ...** When you work and pay Social Security (FICA) taxes, you earn "credits" that you need to be insured for benefits. Today, people need 40 credits, which equates to 10 years of work. However, be aware that in figuring your benefit, we use your 35 highest earnings years. We look at your lifetime of labor; the longer you work and the more you earn, the higher the benefit.

**Retirement Age ...** The earliest age you can collect is the first month you are 62 throughout the month. However, for an unreduced benefit, you must wait until you reach your Full Retirement Age (FRA), which is determined by your birth year. People born during 1943-54 have 66 as their FRA. After that, FRA rises gradually, with anyone born 1960 or later having 67 as their full age. Also, if you don't take your benefits until after FRA, your benefit increases at an eight percent annual rate; however, the benefit increase stops the month you turn 70. Also, keep in mind that if you want to collect while working, there is an earnings limit if you are under FRA.

**For More ...** Go to [Learn About Retirement Benefits | SSA](https://www.ssa.gov/learn/retirement)

### Some Trivia for You

*Love's Labour's Lost*  
Labor Day

written in the 1590s  
became a federal holiday in 1894



## Summer's Fade Got You Down? Chill with a COLA ... Or at Least the Thought of It

We say it every year ... *Where did the summer go?* But even though we want to squeeze out every last bit, it might be time to look ahead to the fun of autumn. And what better way to enjoy the thought of fall than by likewise thinking of a refreshing COLA? Yes, the announcement of the 2026 Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) is less than two months away!

**The COLA is based on increases in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W).** It is determined and published by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. The 2026 COLA will be based on the increase in the third quarter (July-August-September) average CPI-W for 2025 compared to the same quarter in 2024.

In January 2025 Social Security beneficiaries and SSI recipients received a 2.5 percent increase. Earlier this year Social Security's annual Trustees Report estimated the 2026 COLA would be about 2.7 percent. However, the official COLA announcement will take place on **October 15**. Nothing is definite until then, as the CPI-W numbers at the end of September will determine the actual COLA.

See more information on COLAS on our website at [CPI-W data and COLA estimates \(ssa.gov\)](https://www.ssa.gov/cpi-w)

## Autumn Begins September 22



**Want to receive our fun newsletter?**

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## The 1-Percenter to Join the 99-Percenter

Less than one percent of people who get Social Security benefits receive them in the form of paper checks. And soon, those one in a hundred will switch to an electronic delivery system.

**Beginning September 30**, SSA will stop issuing paper checks. This change is part of a broader government-wide Initiative to modernize payment systems and enhance service delivery. The shift to electronic payments has several advantages:

- **Speed and Efficiency** – Electronic Funds Transfers are processed more quickly than paper checks, helping people receive their payments on time.
- **Cost Savings** – The Treasury Department says issuing a paper check costs about 50 cents, while a EFT checks costs less than 15 cents. The changeover could save the federal government millions of dollars annually.
- **Enhanced Security** – Paper checks are 16 times more likely to be lost or stolen compared to electronic payments, thereby increasing the risk of fraud.

People who currently receive paper checks have two options for electronic payments:

- **Direct Deposit:** Enroll with your financial institution. Payments can be deposited into your checking or savings account.
- **Direct Express** – For people without a bank account, the Direct Express card is a prepaid debit card designed specifically for federal benefit payments.

**If you have a personal my Social Security account**, you can update your payment information online at any time.

For more details on everything related to electronic payments, go to [www.ssa.gov/deposit](https://www.ssa.gov/deposit)

## Do You Have an Appointment?

**Just a reminder that we conduct most in-office business by appointment. Before you just stop in, call us toll-free at 1-800-772-1213 to find out the best way to proceed.**