

Position Specification
School Employees Retirement System of Ohio
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The School Employees Retirement System of Ohio (SERS or System), located in Columbus, Ohio, with over \$21 billion in net assets, is searching for an *Executive Director* to join this highly regarded statewide public retirement system.

SERS is widely recognized for its effective governance and delivery of high-quality member service. The System is financially strong, with a funding ratio of 79% and a disciplined funding policy that positions SERS on a clear path to full funding and long-term financial sustainability.

The position is available as a result of Richard Stensrud's upcoming retirement following almost nine years of service as Executive Director. In SERS' 89-year history, there have only been seven Executive Directors.

System Overview

SERS, a quasi-independent state agency, is a cost-sharing, multiple-employer defined benefit public pension plan serving over 255,000 active and retired members. Established in 1937, SERS provides retirement, disability, and survivor benefits to non-teaching employees of Ohio's public and charter school employees. A post-retirement health care program is also provided.

The Retirement Board is responsible for the general administration and management of the System. The Board comprises nine members: four elected employee members; two elected retiree members; and three appointed investment expert members. One investment expert is appointed by the Governor, a second by the State Treasurer, and a third jointly by the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate.

Several separate funds comprise the System as follows:

- The Pension Trust Fund holds the funds to pay for basic retirement, disability, and survivor benefits.
- The Medicare B Fund reimburses a portion of the Medicare Part B premiums paid by eligible benefit recipients.
- The Death Benefit Fund pays \$1,000 to a designated beneficiary of a deceased retiree or disability benefit recipient.
- The Qualified Excess Benefit Arrangement Fund pays benefits allowed by federal tax law to retirees whose SERS benefits exceed Internal Revenue Code limits.
- The Health Care Fund provides money for payment of health care expenses under SERS' health care coverage for retirees and other benefit recipients.

The annual operating budget is approved by the Retirement Board and funded from the Systems' investment returns. SERS mission is "To provide the membership with valuable lifetime pension benefit programs and services."

At fiscal year-end 2025, SERS' investment portfolio was \$20.7 billion. The time weighted investment return was 11.2% (net), compared to 9.7% (net) in FY2024, exceeding the policy benchmark by 1.1%. The 3, 5 and 10-Year returns (net) exceed the policy benchmark in each reporting period, 70 bps, 106 bps, and 100 bps, respectively.

SERS was recognized by the American Investment Council for its success in private equity investing. SERS had the second highest 10-year returns (net) in private equity in the nation of all U.S. pension plans. Their 17.2% return over the last 10 years surpassed the median return of all U.S. pension systems by 3.7%.

SERS' primary objective is to assure that at the time benefits commence, sufficient funds will be available to provide retirement, disability, and survivor benefits for its members. In addition, SERS is committed to sustaining contribution rates that remain level from generation to generation.

For FY2025, the funded status for the basic pension benefits increased from 78.99% over a 20-year period to 79.00% over a 19-year period. The funded ratio has steadily improved over the past 10 years increasing from 66.66% in 2016 to 79.00% in 2025.

The funding level for the basic health care benefits decreased from 61.6% to 54.5% over a 30-year period. The Health Care Fund is projected to remain solvent through 2064, a 39-year solvency period.

Public pensions positively impact Ohio's economy. Of the 83,327 individuals receiving pension benefits from SERS, nearly 91% live in Ohio. In FY2025, benefit payments of approximately \$1.35 billion were distributed among Ohio's 88 counties, positively impacting the state's economy.

For additional information, visit www.ohsers.org. A copy of the most recent Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) is available at <http://ohsers.org/financial-reports>.

SERS Culture

SERS is proud to foster an employee-friendly environment where mission-focused individuals thrive. The organizational culture is based on five specific values:

- Focus on Service.
- Be Accountable.
- Support Collaboration.
- Respect Differences and Practice Inclusion.
- Remain Resourceful and Embrace Change.

These values are the foundation for business operations and organizational culture – how individuals work with each other and how they provide service to our membership. SERS

appreciates the talents and abilities of all employees and cultivates an open, collaborative, and dynamic environment.

Executive Director Responsibilities

The Executive Director, reporting to the Retirement Board and to the Board Chair administratively, is the central point of responsibility and accountability for \$36.2 million administrative budget. Investment expense for FY2025 totaled \$117.7 million. The relationship between the Board and management is positive and collaborative with a high level of trust and confidence built on transparency and accountability.

With overall responsibility for a team of 185, the Executive Director has seven direct reports – Deputy Executive Director, Chief Investment Officer, General Counsel, Chief Financial Officer, Government Relations Officer, Senior Executive and Board Administrator, and administratively, the Chief Audit Officer. The Directors of Administrative Services, Member Services, Enterprise Risk Management, Information Technology, Health Care, and Building Services report to the Deputy Executive Director.

The Leadership Team is made up of highly experienced and accomplished executives, each bringing significant institutional knowledge, with an average tenure of more than 10 years.

Some of the key responsibilities are to:

- Ensure operation of the System in accordance with mission, vision, and values.
- Oversee planning, organization, and administration of all program areas for which the System is statutorily responsible.
- Support the Retirement Board by ensuring the effective implementation and administration of Board-adopted policies.
- Monitor the performance of the investment portfolio, ensure contributions and income are invested in accordance with established policies, and ensure proper controls are developed to safeguard assets.
- Advise and confer with the Board on financial, economic, and political trends and developments that affect the System.
- Maintain positive relationships with active and retired members and with advocacy groups.
- Maintain effective relations with the members of the General Assembly, make recommendations to the Legislature concerning retirement system programs, testify before legislative bodies, and act in liaison capacity to advise legislative committees on matters under consideration.
- Engage in external communication about important pension issues with editorial boards, chambers of commerce, radio outlets, and other groups.

Key Objectives

The Board has identified the following Key Objectives to measure, in part, the Executive Director's performance. A significant portion of the Executive Director's responsibilities are external, outward facing.

The System has positive relationships with their key stakeholders and policy makers. These relationships include the members, employers, and advocacy groups, such as SERO (School Employee Retirees of Ohio), OAPSE (Ohio Association of Public School Employees), AFSCME 1184 (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Retiree Chapter 1184), OASBO (Ohio Association of School Business Officials), and OEA (Ohio Education Association).

Key political relationships include elected officials, such as the Governor and staff, the State Treasurer and staff, key members of the Ohio Legislature, and members of the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC).

Key objectives include:

- Active leadership and engagement to ensure the fiscal stability and long-term financial sustainability of SERS pension and health care plans.
- Develop your relationship with each member of the Retirement Board to better understand their beliefs, values, and perspectives as they relate to the System.
- Actively support Board member transitions by ensuring effective onboarding for new trustees, promoting seamless transitions to maintain governance continuity.
- Develop your relationship with key political leaders, stakeholders, and constituents to sustain SERS' positive relationships, while furthering advocacy through continuous education regarding SERS' unique role among Ohio pension plans.
- Preserve and strengthen SERS positive and healthy organizational culture to support talent management, employee engagement, and retention.
- Promote and reinforce a culture of risk awareness and prudent risk management and decision-making across the organization.
- Provide oversight of the ongoing implementation of the FY2025-2029 Strategic Plan.
- Review the Leadership Team's succession planning program and adjust as needed to ensure continuity in the event of an unexpected vacancy.
- Provide oversight of the ongoing evaluation of the technology infrastructure to implement innovative solutions to modernize the system, enhance the member experience, and strengthen security.
- Actively engage with the staff AI Committee to further explore, pilot, and implement innovative and responsible AI solutions with the potential to enhance business operations and delivery of member service.

Qualifications and Preferences

The Board is seeking an executive with strategic vision dedicated to the mission of public service and to defending defined benefit plans. The Retirement Board is seeking a leader who is committed to a "member-first" approach to service and who will lead in alignment with SERS' mission, vision, and values.

Experience developing and maintaining positive relationships with members, stakeholders and policy makers is important and desired. An executive with relevant operational experience, along with a general knowledge of investments, is an important skill set.

Other requirements and preferences include:

- Bachelor's degree required (advanced degree preferred) in business or public administration, public finance, or a related field.
- Advocate of defined benefit plans is required.
- Public pension plan or public sector experience are preferred.
- Knowledge of federal and state pension laws is preferred.
- Executive experience dealing with corporate, private, or public boards is preferred.

Leadership Competencies and Characteristics

The Executive Director must be a confident, optimistic, and inspiring leader experienced leading a team of high-performing executives. As the chief executive, the Executive Director is expected to be a culture champion who is fully committed to the seven SERS Leadership Pillars.

A leader with the conviction and courage to make difficult decisions, along with the emotional intelligence to drive positive change within a high-performing culture, are critical to success. The Executive Director must be a leader who values transparency and strong governance and has the confidence to effectively advise and guide the Board.

Important skills and attributes to achieve success are:

- A participative and collaborative management approach with high expectations supported by accountability.
- The poise, executive presence, and versatile communication skills to interact with a wide range of audiences.
- The political savvy to interact with a diverse group of stakeholders and constituents.

Other key traits and attributes include Trustworthiness, being Respectful, Calmness, Humility, Diplomatic, and being an Active Listener.

Compensation

The Executive Director is an exempt position and an "at will" employee. Compensation is designed to attract the best-qualified executive and includes base salary, deferred compensation, retirement benefits (24% annual contribution – 14% employer paid, and 10% employee paid, employee pays no social security) and an attractive benefits package. Relocation assistance is also provided.

Remote Work Policy

The Executive Director is required to establish permanent residency in the greater Columbus area or within a reasonable commuting distance of the office. SERS' remote staff work policy allows for an employee to request a work schedule that includes up to two regularly scheduled remote workdays a week. Approval is at the Board's discretion.

For additional information or to apply, please contact Hudepohl & Associates, info@hudepohl.com or (614) 854-7300.