

## Federal Changes to Employment Insurance Benefits

The federal government recently announced changes to maternity and parental Employment Insurance (EI) benefits. The following changes will come into effect on December 3, 2017:

- New parents eligible for EI parental benefits may choose to receive parental benefits in a lesser weekly amount (33% of weekly average earnings) over a longer period of time (61 weeks)
- Mothers eligible for EI maternity benefits may apply for benefits as early as 12 weeks before the expected date, compared to 8 weeks previously.

As outlined below, these changes do **not** currently affect the collective agreements of most school districts in the province.

The changes will impact **only** those districts that provide for parental supplementary employment benefits (SEB). The affected districts are listed on page two of this bulletin. If yours is one of these listed districts, BCPSEA staff will contact you directly regarding next steps.

### No Impact on Maternity or Parental Leaves under Collective Agreement

The BC *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) has not been amended to reflect a longer period of protected maternity or parental leave. Therefore, local collective agreement provisions regarding the granting of pregnancy/maternity and parental leaves, including the length of leave, benefits, and other protections, remain unchanged. Similarly, collective agreements that provide for extended unpaid parental or parenthood leaves beyond the 12 months protected under the ESA are also unaffected by the federal changes.

We may see changes to the ESA in the future, but so far none have been announced.<sup>1</sup> BCPSEA will keep districts updated if and when amendments to the ESA are announced that would impact pregnancy/maternity or parental leaves.

### No Impact on Maternity/Pregnancy SEBs

There are no changes to the length of time and amount of federal EI maternity leave benefits. EI maternity benefits remain at their current level (55% of average weekly earnings, up to a maximum of \$543 per week in 2017) and are provided over the same 15 week period. There is therefore no impact on collective agreements that provide for maternity SEB or “top up” during pregnancy/maternity leave.

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<sup>1</sup> To date, only Alberta and Ontario have announced changes to employment standards legislation to match the extended parental leave period in the *Canada Labour Code* and reflected in the extended EI parental leave benefits.

## Potential Impact on Parental SEBs

There may be an impact for the following districts that provide parental SEB or top up for parental leave:

- 36 (Surrey),
- 51 (Boundary)
- 61 (Greater Victoria)
- 63 (Saanich)
- 69 (Qualicum)
- 70 (Alberni)
- 72 (Campbell River)
- 73 (Kamloops/Thompson)
- 75 (Mission)
- 79 (Cowichan Valley).

BCPSEA has not identified any districts with parental SEB in support staff collective agreements.

If any district believes the list above is incorrect, we request you contact your BCPSEA labour relations liaison immediately.

Effective December 3, 2017, parents may choose to receive EI parental benefits at 33% of their average weekly earnings (up to a maximum of \$326 per week in 2017) for 61 weeks, or at 55% of average weekly earnings (up to a maximum of \$543 per week in 2017) for 35 weeks.

Employees who are eligible to take an extended parental, parenthood, or other leave beyond the 52 week period protected under the ESA, and who select the longer 61 week period of EI parental benefits, will receive a lesser weekly amount of EI benefits during their parental and extended parental leaves.

BCPSEA has notified the BCTF under Article A.9 Legislative Change and will discuss the impact of the federal changes on the collective agreement. If yours is one of the districts listed above, BCPSEA staff will contact you shortly to discuss next steps. If yours is not one of the districts listed above, no action is needed.

The federal government has provided more information, including examples, about these changes:

- Earlier access to maternity benefits
- More choice for parents

## Questions

If you have any questions about the impact of the recent Employment Insurance changes on your collective or employment agreements or policy, please contact your BCPSEA labour relations liaison.