

## SCHOOLS

## Proposed teachers college puzzles union

DYLAN SHORT

The Alberta Teachers' Association is continuing to look for answers around how it will be affected by Alberta Education's plan to remove the group's authority to discipline teachers.

Jason Schilling, president of the ATA, said he has yet to have a conversation with Education Minister Adriana LaGrange about the plan to remove the union's role as disciplinarians when complaints are levied against teachers.

Currently, the ATA investigates complaints of unprofessional actions for all of its members. The Education Department looks into complaints made against teachers at charter and private schools.

In early December, LaGrange announced in an emailed statement that she would introduce policy in 2022 that would remove the ATA's disciplinary role.

Schilling said he is still looking for answers as to what a new process would look like and what it would mean for the union.

"What I've heard from teachers is that they've scratched their head as to why the minister would indicate that she'd want to do that now that we're in the middle of a pandemic and we have a lot of other things that we need to focus on," said Schilling, speaking in late December.

LaGrange made the policy announcement in the wake of Calgary police laying sex-related charges against a former Calgary Board of Education teacher.

The teacher had been stripped of his licence years earlier by the ATA after complaints were made against him. The ATA has said it was not aware of any criminal behaviour at the time of the disciplinary process.

However, Schilling said creating a college — which would typically be responsible for disciplinary action — separate from the union is not a new sentiment for Conservative governments.

"The policy within this Conservative government to split the association into a union and a college is not new. We've seen this before. It's reared its head up a couple of times," said Schilling.

How a college would be created is murky, said Schilling. He said it is unclear how it would be funded and what the consequences for the ATA would be.

"There's not a lot of detail exactly how they plan on doing this, what this will look like," said Schilling.

Nicole Sparrow, press secretary for LaGrange, said this early in the policy-making process the department can't surmise what the final policy will look like, but noted all aspects of the teacher discipline process should be improved.

"During this review, we want to hear from education stakeholders like the ATA, as well as victims and their families," she said.

Sparrow said Alberta is the only province in Canada with a lone organization that simultaneously represents and disciplines teachers.

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Pharmacist Brad Couldwell of Glenbrook Pharmasave says "everybody is overloaded" amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. AZIN GHAFARI

## Added work brought by pandemic proving stressful for pharmacists

BRODIE THOMAS

Pharmacist Brad Couldwell says he's been doing his best to keep soldiering on through the pandemic.

The owner of Pharmasave Glenbrook and a past president of the Alberta College of Pharmacy said he's got the grey hairs to prove it.

But the workload just keeps going up, as the daily responsibilities keep growing: from filling prescriptions, to delivering vaccines and handing out rapid test kits — plus dealing with a public that is increasingly frustrated by shortages, trying to clear up COVID misinformation and keeping himself and his staff safe.

Privately owned pharmacies have been taking on a share of the public-health burden by agreeing to administer COVID-19 vaccinations on top of the work they generally do in providing prescriptions for people.

Couldwell said agreeing to hand out rapid test kits, however, may have been too much, at least for his operation.

The province offered pharma-

cies \$5 for each test kit handed out. He said the time and paperwork that goes with handing out each of the kits makes it more like filling a prescription than simply handing over a box.

"When I saw five bucks, I said, 'Oh, my God.' It's better for us to vaccinate and it's better for us to do the prescriptions rather than trying to hand out 400-plus kits that everybody wants right now."

Couldwell said he hasn't done the math on exactly how much it costs him to hand out a kit, but that the initial rush was stressful.

"If you try to do those all in one day, that's where the pharmacy team starts to crack," he said.

He thinks most pharmacists want to be good citizens and help out in any way they are asked, but he said the pressure and workload for the average pharmacist are "off the charts" at the moment.

A provincial government representative said pharmacies volunteer to take part in the free antigen rapid test kit rollout, and the province appreciates the assistance.

"We're grateful for the help of

Alberta pharmacies for their help in getting kits into the hands of Albertans," said Jason Maloney, assistant communications director with Alberta Health.

Joe Pham, owner and operator of CrossPointe Pharmacy in Forest Lawn, said things have been operating relatively smoothly at his pharmacy but it hasn't been without hiccups — such as the furnace conking out in the middle of a cold snap.

He said the phone is ringing constantly with people asking about rapid test kits and Pfizer vaccine availability.

Pham described the challenge he faced in early January, when an expected shipment of Pfizer vaccine was delayed by two days.

Most bookings had been done through the province's website, and Pham did not have the resources to contact those who had booked Pfizer appointments.

"We're turning people away, they're getting mad, so then we say, 'Would you like Moderna?'"

Pham said most people were set on Pfizer and turned down the dos-

es of Moderna.

"People have certain ideas about vaccines," Pham said. "If they had two previous injections of Pfizer, most of them would say they don't want to mix them."

He said it's frustrating that people are getting that advice from neighbours or the internet rather than listening to their pharmacist or doctor.

Couldwell agrees, saying the misinformation that is out there can make each visit from a customer potentially longer than it needs to be.

"The majority of our day is helping people, and guiding them through the plethora of information," he said.

With the Omicron variant's unprecedented spread, both pharmacists say they've been lucky to avoid catching it thus far.

Couldwell said he feels bad for colleagues who are short-staffed due to illness.

"I know everybody is overloaded," he said.

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## CEO of Blackfoot Confederacy council aims to preserve, showcase culture



DAVID PARKER

The Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council decided a little over three years ago to open an office in Calgary to help members of its four Nations deal with common issues.

Chief executive Jack Royal took a short lease on space behind the Blackfoot Inn to "see where we're at" and determine the needs of the Confederacy — Siksikaitstapi — that was established to serve the linguistically related groups that make up the Blackfoot people: Siksika, Kainai-Blood Tribe and Peigan-Piikani in southern Alberta, and Aamskapi Pikuni across the U.S. border in Montana.

The need for a central office here and the growth that has developed in serving its members has resulted in Siksikaitstapi purchasing its own building on Flint Road S.E.

Under Royal's leadership, the organization has grown to a staff of 13, all members of the Blackfoot Nation. The 15,000 square feet of space in the former Calgary office of Clark Builders — which has relocated to the Manchester Industrial area — allows room for planned expansion.

Royal has been CEO of the council for the past three years. Before that, he was CEO of the Siksika Nation for many years.

When the idea was first pro-



Jack Royal is chief executive of Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council. The council has purchased its own building on Flint Road S.E. JACK ROYAL

posed to build a museum on the site of the signing of Treaty 7, Royal became so enthused over the idea to showcase and promote Blackfoot culture while preserving the ancestral background that he applied for and was awarded the role of its first president and general manager.

Working with Calgary architect Ron Goodfellow, he oversaw construction of the stunning 62,000-square-foot museum and development of the park that has since been designated a national historic site, where visitors can discover the rich culture and traditions of his people.

After the Declaration of the Blackfoot Confederacy was signed in May 2000, Royal was asked to assist in an advisory capacity to advance what had been a loose relationship between the First Nations that

had the same language, societies, ceremonies and protocol. He organized a three-day conference attended by 500 of the more than 24,000 Canadian members, plus another 21,000 in Montana, who agreed upon the need to collaborate. Royal was hired as the first CEO of the Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council.

Its members are working together in shared interests under the direction of qualified and experienced staff. One area of focus is the needs of children.

Education services strive to eliminate education gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, and the integration of Blackfoot culture and language in communication at all levels.

The economic well-being of Blackfoot Nations is promoted by the council through efforts that

include job creation, job retention and business development, while other staff are concerned with issues on the availability of appropriate health services, including healing centres.

A key mission is to protect, develop and strengthen Blackfoot language, traditional knowledge, cultural experiences, oral traditions and literature.

COVID-19 struck shortly after the opening of the council's first office in the city, but Royal and his team, although restricted from travel, are succeeding in the Siksikaitstapi vision of honouring and utilizing the past, for the future Blackfoot way of life.

**Notes:** For several years, SWIFT Learning Partners has been quietly supporting youth at Wood's Homes with eLearning courses to help empower them to live a safe, healthy and active lifestyle. The free educational support has been logged in by more than 500 students more than 800

times to access a wide range of safety courses. SWIFT Learning CEO Kim Adolphe has now announced the formalization of a partnership with Wood's Homes to continue delivering courses and programs — at no cost — that remove barriers to education and training to help the youth enjoy a safe, happy and productive life. Much of the offerings prepare students to join the workforce, but also include topics such as bullying prevention. Wood's Homes is a nationally recognized children's mental-health centre providing support for children, youth and families. More than 500 staff provide 40-plus programs and services in Calgary, Strathmore, Lethbridge and Fort McMurray.

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