

Weighty Issues: McKee's wide-ranging weekly press conference



Governor Daniel McKee and Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos fielded questions from the press today on all manner of non-pandemic issues. It's the governor's third such press conference, a step he views as one toward bringing the state back to normal. It's a step different from his predecessor, former Gov. Gina Raimondo, who was notably inaccessible to Rhode Island's temperamental fourth estate.

In prepared remarks to the press, the governor announced he signed the executive order this morning aligning mask guidance in Rhode Island to match that of the Center for Disease Control, but questions from reporters quickly centered on Providence schools. The state Department of Education has overseen a takeover of the long troubled school district since 2019. The district superintendent has come under fire this week for hiring Olayinka Alege, who was arrested this week for forcibly giving a foot massage to an underage male in Warwick. Alege has a history of "toe popping," stemming from his time as assistant principal at a Tampa high school where students complained of it as strange punishment.

Gov. McKee is slated to meet with RIDE Commissioner Angelica Infante Green later today where they will discuss the situation of the toe-popping administrator. McKee declined to comment on the situation any further, as did Lieutenant Gov. Matos until the meeting with Commissioner Green was concluded. McKee added the result of the meeting would be announced later this week, and mentioned he questions the hiring practices of the administration. He is not scheduled to meet with the Providence Teachers Union as of this afternoon.

"The individual resigned, which was the right thing to do," said the governor. The governor also declined to get into specifics when asked his opinion on how the state control of the Providence schools

was going. "We don't need to jump to conclusions of anything that is happening in schools right now," said McKee. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, the nation's largest teachers' union, asked to meet with Gov. McKee this week. The governor's administration professes not to know what the meeting is about, but did say Weingarten and the governor agree that schools have to reopen again at full capacity in the fall. The governor also said he supports SROS in schools.

Providence has seen an upsurge in gun violence over the last few weeks. The governor yesterday attended an event at the Nonviolence Institute with the state's Congressional delegation.

"People who are firing guns on the streets and killing people need to be held accountable. That's our #1 priority..." said McKee. The governor said he supported making long-term investments into distressed communities.

Rhode Island is about to be the recipient in millions of dollars in federal funds from the latest COVID legislation signed into law earlier this year. Gov. McKee is hosting his third community conversation on Thursday to determine a RI 2030 plan. The governor is also meeting with General Assembly leadership on an ongoing weekly basis to determine the best use of the funds.

Tourism is coming back strong, said the governor. Newport's world famous Jazz and Folk Fests opened ticket sales this morning only to sell out in 30 minutes. The governor also announced that most hotels were reporting that they were fully booked between Memorial day and Labor Day, the state's peak tourist season.