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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, good news on the vaccination front, the number of vaccinations in this city continues to climb and thank God for that. Right now, we are almost at three-and-a-half million vaccinations since the beginning of our effort. The official number as of this morning, 3,455,877 vaccinations. We're going to, I think, likely surpass 3.5 million in the course of this day. And this is what it's all about, getting more and more New Yorkers vaccinated. We're seeing a great response out there. More and more people want to be vaccinated. There's less hesitancy – even though there's some for sure, there's less. And more and more sites around the city. And these ideas go together. The more sites you have, the more you get to the grassroots with the vaccination effort, the more community organizations and community leaders are involved, the more people trust the vaccine and are ready to come forward and get vaccinated themselves. And that's good for all of us because we need to hit our goal, five million New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June. That is crucial to a recovery for all of us, that we get as many people vaccinated as possible, as quickly as possible. So, one of the things we're focused on is working with houses of worship. Obviously, people have a deep sense of connection to the houses of worship in their lives and their communities. And we have pop-up vaccination sites at a number of houses of worship. We've been doing this over the last few weeks. We've found really, really great success and great efforts by the faith communities to reach out to their congregations and get people to come in, really reaching people who previously hadn't heard the message about vaccination or hadn't got all the answers they wanted. Now they're getting those answers and they're coming forward. So, this week we'll have vaccination sites at Leviticus Church of God in Queens, at the Christian Cultural Center in Brooklyn, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, and First Corinthian Baptist Church in Manhattan. And we're going to continue to expand this effort across different faiths, different houses of worship because it's working. This is a key part of our grassroots effort. In addition to all the other things we're doing and folks going door to door, signing up seniors for the vaccine, the many, many grassroots efforts that are working, you're going to see a lot more of it in the weeks ahead.

Okay, now, when we talk about a recovery for all of us, when we talk about bringing this city back strong and bringing it back better and bringing it back fairer, well, we got to talk about our children. We got to talk about how to do right by our kids, how to give them the future they deserve, how to help families, how to help working people who were struggling before the pandemic and have dealt with so much in this last year and are going to be dealing with a lot in the years ahead as we recover. Well, I'll tell you something, what I learned a long time ago, if you want to help a working family, give them free early childhood education. We learned this with Pre-K for All, a game changer for so many families, knowing that early childhood

education would be there for their child for free, it would be accessible, it would be easy. There would be no question whether it would be there for them, it would be stress-free, that's the model we created with Pre-K for All. It has become a national model. I am thrilled to hear that President Biden is thinking of including Pre-K for All, as part of his next recovery plan, because this is something that would have a huge impact for this country, if all over America, every child could start at the same starting line, if every working parent knew they didn't have to stress over where their child would be and how they'd pay for it, if their child could get a good start life. This has worked in New York City and it worked because we made it something for everyone.

And today I am really, really pleased to say that our next great wave of early child education, 3-K – we started 3-K a few years ago. We started it in just a few districts. We started where there was some of the greatest need in New York City in the South Bronx and in Brownsville. We said we're going to build this out. One day our dream – one day our dream was that 3-K, early child education for our three-year-olds, could follow the same path as pre-K. One day we said the day will come when 3-K is in every district in New York City, 32 school districts. We dreamed that one day we could be able to have 3-K in all of them. Well, today the dream comes true. Today, we announced that as of this coming September, 2021, 3-K will be in every one of our 32 school districts in New York City. This is going to be a huge expansion. We're adding, for September, 16,500 3-K seats. And that will bring the total to over 40,000. So, parents if you have a three-year-old who will qualify for these 3-K seats in September, whichever district you're in, you'll be able to apply. Now, we don't have all the seats we want yet for September, but we will be in every single district and we'll be able to keep building from there. And this is a huge step to the day when 3-K becomes a fully universal right in New York City, just as pre-K is today. And it's going to make the lives of parents and families so much better.

I always say, when you take the two together, 3-K and pre-K, two full years of high-quality free, early childhood education, you change the life of a child, you change the trajectory of a family forever. And we saw that this morning, incredible, in East Flatbush, Brooklyn at Phyl's Daycare Center, what an amazing place. I know the Chancellor, who will speak as an educator and as a mom, was as moved as I was. These kids, you know, little, little kids telling us the words that they could say in Spanish, going over the addition they had learned, the mathematics they learned, just spontaneously wanting to tell us about everything they learned. And there was so much energy and so much joy. And these are, you know, this is what happens when three-year-olds and four-year-olds have a chance. Their minds are incredibly ready to learn, and extraordinary things happen. So, we saw it this morning, and this is the shape of things to come and here to talk to you about the expansion of 3-K to every district in New York City, our Chancellor, Meisha Ross Porter.

Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter: Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Mayor. This is absolutely a big deal, expanding 3-K for All city-wide, across all 32 school districts. It couldn't come at a better time, you know, as New York City turns the corner on this virus, and we want to get our families back to work. What an amazing opportunity for so many of them. You know, early childhood programs are where it all begins. And I remember being in my own early childhood programming at Edgemere Redfern Daycare in Far Rockaway, Queens, where my Aunt Brenda was my teacher. And I got my foundational grounding there. And I remember as a parent, when Jordan started 3-K at St. Mark's Pre-K in Harlem, and the amazing work the

teachers did there for her. But it wasn't free. So, this is a game changer for families today. You know, today at Phyl's Academy in Brooklyn, Ms. Bennett, thank you so much for building an amazing school environment. And we have something in common. We come from a family of educators that have been building and working in schools forever.

The Mayor and I got to learn Spanish from Xavier and Madison. We got math lessons from Xavier and Madison. We also got to follow our shadow and exhibit – I'm going to have to tell Xavier I lost my sticker, but he made sure I got a heart before I left there this morning. But again, the best part is that it's going to be free and it's going to save New York City families about \$10,000 a year. And so, we can put that in the college savings plan. You know, this is important to so many communities. I remember when we started in District 7 in the South Bronx and what opportunities that provided for families. And I remember when I became superintendent of District 11 in the Bronx, the first thing I was able to do was open pre-K classrooms. And I want to thank Deputy Chancellor Wallack and Stephanie Crane and the team for making this happen. I'm so grateful to our early childhood providers for the way they continue to show up for our children every single day, and with such joy and love and compassion. And you saw it, you saw it across all of the young people's faces who were so excited about learning. And the parents, the look of hope and excitement as they brought their children into school this morning. And so, this exciting time for expansion aligns with our plan to achieve pay parity for early childhood education teachers by full 2021, a goal we are on track to reach. And as we look ahead to next year, I want to make sure I get this right, I encourage families who are interested to apply for 3-K or pre-K at myschools.nyc or over the phone at 718-935-2009. These new programs will be coming online in the coming weeks. So, you can learn more also nyc.gov/pre-K – I'm sorry, nyc.gov/3K. And I'm going to pass it back to the Mayor, but we still want to know more about how *The Gruffalo* ended.

Mayor: *The Gruffalo*. I was very struck. We were in the middle of a story being read in the classroom and then the Chancellor and I had to come here. So, we're going to wonder for the rest of our lives about the Gruffalo –

Chancellor Porter: *The Gruffalo* –

Mayor: Chancellor, I do have my sticker. I want you to see, okay, you got to take care of your sticker next time. Okay.

[Laughter]

I also want to extend my thanks, as the Chancellor did, to Deputy Chancellor Josh Wallack and the entire team, everyone, from the beginning, amazing people who worked on pre-K and then 3-K over these last eight years, incredibly dedicated people who built these programs often at a breathtaking speed, because we wanted to expand to expand quickly. And also, reached out to communities all over the city to let parents know it's been an incredible, incredible journey. Thank you to everyone. And I want you to hear now about what this means for a family in this city, what it means to have access to free, quality early childhood education. I'm going to turn to Lydia Vargas, and you should know that her son attended 3-K last year, is enrolled in pre-K now.

And Lydia is going to give you a sense of what it means, what it means to have this for her family. Lydia, welcome.

[...]

Mayor: Excellent, Lydia. Thank you. Thank you for telling the story of your family. And I'm so happy for Jacob, that he's doing so well. And I'm glad that your next child as well will have the chance. And this is the beauty of pre-K and 3-K, what it does for families. And I want to just say, this is an amazing moment, and it's really been a team effort. Of course, we're able to now get back in the game with expanding 3-K in part, because of the federal stimulus. So, we're so thankful to President Biden, to Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, our entire delegation in the Congress for fighting for a stimulus that had a lot of focus on education. That's tremendously important. But also, the whole way through we've gotten incredible support for pre-K and 3-K from the State Legislature and especially from the City Council. This was a huge endeavor from the beginning. For us to achieve it, we needed the help of the City Council not just in terms of the City budget alone, but for those of you remember the beginning of pre-K and then 3-K, we needed a lot of help community by community, identifying the locations, getting organizations, grassroots organizations to join in the effort, and the City Council played a central role from the beginning. So, this expansion also has been something that the City Council has been pushing for and has made very clear to the administration that they thought should be a priority as we plan ahead. And I'm very thankful for the City Council for that support and that firm commitment to 3-K. I want you to hear from some of the Council Members who have been a part of this effort, who have fought for 3-K for their communities and are here to celebrate the fact that it will be in every district. First, I want you to hear from Brooklyn, from someone who really fights for her community and particularly understands as a mom herself how important early childhood education is – Council Member Laurie Cumbo.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you, really appreciate your, as always, energetic support. Laurie, the only thing you do is energetic and that's a compliment. And thank you – thank you for making so clear why this matters to so many families and thank you for your crucial support for this. Now, I want to turn to another Council member and he represents one of the districts in New York City where the demand has been greatest, where we have the most overcrowded schools and where there is just an intense need for working parents, including a lot of struggling immigrant parents to have more options for early childhood for their kids. I know he is a strong supporter of this 3-K expansion. My pleasure to introduce from Queens, Council Member Francisco Moya.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you. That's so kind of you, Council Member. And thank you for being such a strong supporter of pre-K and 3-K in Albany, and here. Thank you so much. And I want you to hear from one more Council Member, and I will say this as a compliment, he has been slightly obsessed with the expansion of pre-K and 3-K in his district. I appreciate that. I appreciate that he has brought immense energy to bear, and it's real interesting when Council members come to you and they say, hey, there's something we really need to focus on, I need to talk to you about

it. It's heartening to me where the thing that it brings out the most passion is early childhood education. That has been true for Council Member Ben Kallos. He has talked to me about this dozens and dozens of times over the year, and I'm really happy that we can have him join us on this day where this dream is finally being realized and 3-K will reach his district now. From Manhattan, Council Member Ben Kallos.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you. That's so kind of you Council Member, and thank you. And you have been an extraordinary advocate, and, you're absolutely right, your advocacy goes long, long before your own family grew. But thank you, because you said a really important thing there about, we need everyone's help to make this come alive over these next six months. You will remember, Council Member, the first six months of pre-K in 2014, a very exciting time, but to quote Lydia, nerve-wracking as well, as we were trying to find all the right space and make it work. Well, we're going to do it again with your help, Council Member, and your colleagues. And we will find the space. And the team at the DOE has proven, and SCA, that they can do it. So, we're going to have them do it one more time. But this is going to be really – we use the word game-changer maybe a little too much in life, but this one is a game-changer. This changes families' lives and we're just so excited. This is really a good day for this city.

And with that, let me talk about today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report is 248 patients. Confirmed positivity level of 54.09 percent. Hospitalization rate, 3.79 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 3,282. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.36 percent. I'm going to say a few words in Spanish back on 3-K.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media and please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Chancellor Porter, by Josh Wallack, the Deputy Chancellor for Early Childhood and Enrollment, by Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. Mayor, there's a new poll out in the mayor's race today that shows 50 percent of New Yorkers are undecided with less than three months to go until the primary. Does that number surprise you? What do you make of it?

Mayor: It really doesn't surprise me, Andrew. Look, I think you've got a big field of candidates. We're in the middle of a pandemic and folks are so focused on, you know, their own lives and taking care of their families, and there's, I think, a good reason why folks still have not been able to focus a lot yet, but you know, there's three months to go. There's certainly time for that to

happen. It will happen, inevitably. But this one is developing more slowly, I think, than other elections we've seen. Go ahead. Andrew.

Question: This is on a different topic on behalf of my colleague, Sarah Wallace. This is about your Department of Correction. You have said that triple shifts by correction officers are unacceptable. We have documents that show there were 58 triple shifts at one jail last weekend. Is your Commissioner ignoring your mandate? Are you prepared to commit to hiring more officers?

Mayor: Look, we absolutely do not want triple shifts. There's no question about that, and I'm going to get an update today on why that was necessary in that situation. But we have, historically, as you know, we had a really substantial number of hires of correction officers because we used to have a real big issue with overtime. That's been much less of a problem now because the number of folks incarcerated has gone way down and that's a good thing. But sometimes I think there are aberrant situations. We got to make those, you know, very, very rare, and if not, never. So, I don't want to see this going forward. I'll follow up on this today, and if we have to make some adjustments in terms of personnel to avoid the triple shifts, of course we will.

Moderator: The next is Christina Viega from the Chalkbeat.

Question: Mayor, Chancellor and—

Mayor: Hey, can you hear us, Christina?

Question: Can you hear me?

Mayor: You sounded real light. Just speak up a little bit.

Question: Can you hear me?

Mayor: There you go. That's better.

Question: Okay. So, my first question is if the City can create the 6,500 new 3-K seats, why not address the persistent shortage of preschool special education seats that we use certain families without services or [inaudible]?

Mayor: Well, Christina, we want to get to work on that too. Look, the goal here is always to be as universal as humanly possible, and as you remember, Pre-K started in stages, 3-K obviously started very small and built up. We want to reach every child in every way, but that will take some time to put the pieces together. So, 3-K will be in every single one of our 32 districts in September, but there's more work to be done to reach every child and we will continue that work, and we'll have more to say on that soon. Go ahead, Christina.

Question: Along those lines, how many slots would it take to reach universality? Like how many – how close are we with this announcement? And can you break down how much you're spending and from what sources to get to this level?

Mayor: Yeah, we're at about a 25,000 kids in 3-K now. We will be adding 15,000 seats for this September, 2021. So, that'll take us to 40,000 plus. We believe that the natural maximum here is something like 60,000, 61,000 kids. So, we want that to keep building fast over the next year or two and the budget – we'll get you the updated figure, but adding this is a substantial investment, but again, as a matter of priorities this is to me, unquestionably, one of the highest priorities we can have in this city, and certainly one of the highest priorities within education. If you get early child education, right? Everything else works. I'm going to turn to the Chancellor on this point, because she is a lifetime educator. There's lots of choices to make always within a budget. But what I've felt from the beginning is the investments in early childhood education, they have a profound impact on families, as you've heard, but they're also where we get the biggest impact for the dollars we spend on education. Because if you get that foundation right, all of the things are possible, and Chancellor, could you speak to that?

Chancellor Porter: Absolutely. So, we absolutely understand how important it is to, you know, ensure that we have services in place for our youngest students, particularly our students with IEPs, but ensuring that all of our students have a strong start will really be a game changer in this space. I spent my first morning as Chancellor in Brooklyn at P.S. 15 visiting first and second grade ICT classes, and so again, this opportunity to expand 3-K will become a game changer in that space, and you know, starting earlier, starting younger is, is the best way to, you know, make sure we are giving our students all of the foundational learning and understandings that they need. Today is the first step, but we know we need to do more work in this area and we will continue to do so.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: The next is Sydney Pereira from Gothamist.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Minor. So, this morning Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and Councilman Mark Levine, you know, held a press conference calling for the Governor to slow down the reopening, and not move forward on some of the specific April changes that are coming with sports arenas, and arts and entertainment venues. I know you've expressed similar concerns about how quickly the state is moving on to the opening, but I'm wondering like what specifically do you have to say about the reopenings coming in April with sports arenas, and arts and entertainment venues, and is there anything the City could do to scale back or, or I guess encourage residents to not go along with the Governor's reopening decisions. I know that you, you can't override the Governor's decisions here, but I'm wondering what else could you do with the reopening decisions you do disagree with?

Mayor: Sydney, I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi. The – look, first, this is just such a clear example of why we need local control. We have some of the best health leaders in all of America right here in New York City, and they've been consistently clear about the fact that there are some things that can be done safely and other things that can't be at this point,

especially while we still have the real questions about the variance. The State of New York should really defer to the health leadership in New York City on these matters. Once they make a decision to your bigger point, Sydney, it's hard to tell people this is how you should, or shouldn't respond to a decision by your own state government. But I think what we do consistently is say, we're going to implement the decision in our own way, which means a lot of public education on how to go about things the right way, a lot of inspections obviously, and educating folks in each facility about the right way to do things. But where we have a particular concern right now is the fitness classes, which is I think the epitome of what not to do because it's people involved in, you know, intensive exercise, letting out their breath, you know, in the middle of exercise, either not wearing a mask in some cases or the mask that's gotten wet and therefore is compromised. And that just doesn't make sense, and additionally, you know, throwing down the caution that we should not go past 50 percent with indoor dining. Those are two that really concerned me, and we're going to keep, as we see each decision looming, talking about what we think makes sense, and if we think any decision that was previously made is no longer tenable because of the health care environment we'll speak to that as well. Dr. Varma, you want to comment?

Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma: Just to echo the comments that you've made. You know, we obviously have – there's the challenge of who regulates what things are open or not, and so from our perspective as health leaders you know, if we can't change sort of the regulatory environment or who's making decisions about what's open or not, we have to focus on, what's also really important, which is educating New Yorkers about the best way to reduce their risk, and that's why every morning you hear and you see our public announcements, you know, really focusing on those really critical measures that we all know are so important. So, we would like to be in a setting where we have full local control, as the Mayor said, over identifying what did they high-risk setting and how to regulate its operations. But in the absence of that, we want to make sure that New Yorkers have the most critical information because we are still at this very tenuous time right now, where we need to be fighting with all we have, and that includes getting vaccination because there really is a prospect for things to improve in the very near future.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thank you for the question, and yes, you know, you have heard some of our concerns with respect to the fact that we remain in that time where we have to be cautious and careful when it comes to COVID risk. We've talked about some of the things that contribute to risk and how we can lessen it. Outdoors is better than indoors, situations where you're able to wear a mask consistently and properly are better than those where you are not, and smaller groups are better than larger groups. So, those are the things that we urge our fellow New Yorkers to take into consideration when they're thinking about their own risk, and as you've heard me say before, this is particularly true for people who may be at greater risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19. If you're older, if you have an underlying health condition, or if you have someone in your household who meets those criteria as well.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Sydney.

Question: Thank you. I have another question about schools from my colleagues. You know, my colleagues are getting reports of high schoolers who are sitting in classrooms and watching a remote, you know, an instructor remotely or virtually, and just with this new opt-in window and kind of the new three, three-foot rule guidance. I'm wondering if the Department of Education and you are confident enough in staffing to provide an actual classroom experience you know, going forward.

Mayor: It's a really good question to me, I would say, first of all, we've talked about this very question yesterday at our meeting with senior members of the DOE leadership, and the Chancellor and I talked through this point. I think it's important to say that the concerns about kids being in a classroom and doing remote work, well first important to say, even before the pandemic, sometimes kids were a classroom doing online work, but much more germane to the current question. This doesn't really, from what we're aware of – it is not really a pertinent issue in elementary school or middle school. It's a pertinent issue in some high schools, and it tends to be the biggest high schools and the high schools that have the most comprehensive curriculum, because that's where you have some of the problem. Having a teacher available who has the particular subject background, and that's of course affected by how many teachers are on accommodation right now and not available in-person.

So, there are some issues, but they're navigable issues, and it does not take away from the fact that a child is in school with the support of caring adults, professional educators, guidance, counselors, you name it, I'll turn to the Chancellor, but just say to the question of where we go from here, clearly, we have classrooms with a teacher in the classroom that could handle a lot more kids. The six-foot rule create a real artificial reality where classrooms were very, very small size and we undoubtedly can accommodate a lot more kids, just as we are now with the staffing we have now, and if we have to make some additional staffing adjustments or additions, we will, but I do think we have to keep in mind that the substantial number of teachers working from home because of accommodations is really at the core of some of this. Go ahead, Chancellor.

Chancellor Porter: Yeah, I would agree with the Mayor. I would also add that each school is working through their specific programming issues, but I also want to acknowledge that, you know, what is happening in those cases is that there is an adult in the room, working with a partner teacher, and I just want to acknowledge that our teachers are really working in partnership and collaboration when the specific content area, teachers not in the room, to ensure that our students are getting the support that they need. Listen, I'm a high school parent, my own, my own child Jayden is back in 10th grade, and she was so excited about just being back in school, just connecting with her teachers, just connecting with her classmates, and so part of this is about socialization, but we understand the need to ensure that we are wrapping ourselves around our students you know, and getting them back in school and to the Mayor's point, our lowest numbers are actually in high school, and so we feel confident that we'll be able to support more families coming back in.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Erin from Politico.

Question: Hi, Mr. – excuse me. Hi, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask about the Open Streets program. We had a story this week that a quarter of the open streets that were originally opened have since been closed and, you know, taken back by cars for a variety of reasons. Some because they rely on volunteers who just didn't really have the bandwidth to keep it up. Some because you know, cars were just kind of not respecting the restrictions. So, I'm basically just wondering, you know, with your promise to make the program permanent and expand it, you know, is there anything you can do to make sure that the streets, once they do open, are actually, you know, can continue for the long-term?

Mayor: Yeah. Thank you, Erin. I think obviously, you know, the winter weather also affected the equation in terms of people wanting to be out, but yeah, we – look, we want to go back as we're getting ready for a warmer weather again, figure out the right places for open streets, the right number. Yeah, we do need – there's a certain amount of staffing that goes with them, that has to happen. We've got to sort that out. But I think we also found with everything we do, some places worked really great. Most places worked great. Some places didn't work as well as planned and, you know, new options will be looked at, but I'm very confident that Open Streets is going to be a big part of this year in New York City and the future. It was an incredibly positive experience and we just got to keep improving it and fine tuning it as we go along. Go ahead, Erin.

Question: Thanks, and then I want to follow up on your announcement about city workers coming back to the office yesterday and clarify something because the unions in some others have expressed concerns about, you know, needing better safety regulations to make sure it's done safely. With regards to masks, I believe that you said, oh, well, there are some people who are just, you know, off by themselves and, and not around anyone, and so they won't have to wear a mask, but with respect, I think we're mostly talking about office workers here because the front line of people are already in person. So, if you're understanding where you are in an office, and there are other people in the office and the desks are six feet apart, do you have to wear your mask? Is that mandatory or not? And if not, why not?

Mayor: No, it is mandatory. And we needed to do a better job of clarifying that, I'm glad you raised it and we'll make sure the written guidance is really clear. People have to wear a mask in the offices period. We were referring to the fact there are some aberrant situations where, you know, you could have a late shift or something where there's very few people around, but the basic rule is clear. Folks coming back, city workers coming back to serve the city, we want to keep them safe, we want to keep each other safe, of course they have to wear masks. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah, good morning, everyone. I wanted to get your latest thoughts on the situation in Albany. In a little bit Governor Cuomo is going to take – okay, I apologize for the webpage that sprang up –

Mayor: This just proves its live TV. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Totally, the casualties of multitasking. Governor Cuomo in a little bit is taking questions from reporters for the first time in a while. What do you want to hear from him at this point in time?

Mayor: I've been clear, I think he should resign so we can move forward in this state, but I'm not expecting him to do that today. So, the next thing he should do is resume normal democracy, restore democracy in the State of New York, restore local control so we can move forward. I am concerned that some of the decisions he's made lately I think are more and more about politics than about the health of our people. Well, the way to resolve that is to restore local control. Let us make the decisions for our own people. We are moving slowly but surely out of this pandemic, it's time for a democracy to come back in the State of New York. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Yeah, thanks for that. And switching gears I understand undocumented workers have been doing a hunger strike for some days now trying to draw attention to lack of funding in the federal stimulus and in the state budget for them. Just seeing a hunger strike, very drastic gesture, what do you make of that situation?

Mayor: It's very moving. It's very sad that folks who are trying to take care of their families are led to a situation where they feel that's their only choice. I mean, look, this is the American problem, there's 12 million people here and we're not acknowledging it, and not being honest about it as a nation, in terms of our laws and our policies, there's 12 million people who are Americans, because they're here as part of our communities, they need a pathway to citizenship now. We need comprehensive immigration reform, and we should provide support so families can remain whole, which is why in this city, we don't ask documentation status. We do provide a variety of support, including guaranteed health care for folks who happen to be undocumented. You know, folks are going through a lot, they need help, and we're going to try and figure out every way we can help them notwithstanding the problems of the federal laws.

Moderator: The next is Matt Chayes from Newsday.

Question: Hey, good morning, all. How are you doing?

Mayor: Good. How are you today?

Question: I'm doing okay. Thanks for asking. Dr. Chokshi, under the door-to-door vaccination plan you described for the J & J shot, will a senior of color be more likely to get a door knock from a vaccinator than a senior who's white?

Mayor: So, before Dr. Chokshi goes and I'll turn to him. Matt, I know you like to ask these yes and no questions, I just want to affirm first of all, it's not just someone knocks on your door and says, hey, I have a needle here. It's a - we do the appointments, obviously. We encourage people to get vaccinated. We have door to door efforts to sign people up, and a lot of people are signing up on their own or their loved ones are. As with everything we're focusing our efforts on where COVID hit hardest, which was in communities of color, but it is about individual willingness to sign up, and that's the X-factor. You can't mandate. You're not saying to someone we're going to

vaccinate you, whether you want or not. It's about who chooses at this point to be vaccinated, and that is something that's open to people of all backgrounds. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thanks, Mr. Mayor, I'll just build briefly on what you said. You know, first and foremost this is about outreach and making sure that we are getting people through our canvassing, through our phone calls, through all of the different channels that we have to engage, you know, the people who will most benefit from vaccination, and that includes through our homebound program. Specifically, for people who are homebound, you know, this involves collaboration and outreach with NYCHA, with our Department for the Aging, including naturally occurring retirement communities. So, we do take very seriously our obligation to ensure that we're maximizing access through that type of outreach, and as the Mayor has emphasized, not just today, but over the course of our vaccination campaign, that includes putting the hardest hit neighborhoods and particularly communities of color at the center of our efforts. I'll just add one more note to this as a doctor, which is that unfortunately, you know, when you think about the people who are homebound, who are disabled or may have less mobility because of chronic conditions like diabetes or cardiovascular disease, unfortunately those burdens have disproportionately been born by communities of color as well. It's one of the reasons that we felt so strongly about bringing vaccination to people who are unable to come to the sites that we have set up.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead, Matt.

Question: For the record that there was no, yes or no there, but I got another question for you. Earlier this month you said someone who commits hateful, but non-criminal conduct, could be visited by the NYPD. Do you still stand by that? And if so, has the NYPD begun conducting these activities? And if not, when will they begin?

Mayor: So again, the whole idea there, let me make sure it's clear. We have a lot of folks who say, I don't know whether I should report something that happened to me or something I witnessed. And what I've been trying to say is please report whatever you see. If you think it might be a hate crime, if you think it was an act of a bias, report it. We're not asking the average resident to be a lawyer here and know exactly what fits each definition. So, again, reminder everyone, you can go to nyc.gov/stopasianhate, and report any incident you see. My point about NYPD is they're going to investigate anything that might be a hate crime, and sometimes it will turn out it doesn't rise to that definition, but still something happened, and it's important that it be investigated. And it's important that if someone is acting out of bias and trying to do something hurtful than other fellow New Yorker, that they know that that investigation is going to happen, that they know it's going to be looked at. So, any, any complaint we get that might involve a crime, of course it's going to be fully investigated by the NYPD. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Juan Manuel from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Juan Manuel, how you been?

Question: Very good. Thank you, a couple of days ago, you had some issues with the indicators, some trouble with the state data. Is that now resolved? And also, you tell us again why the numbers the State is providing for New York City, in terms of COVID 19 cases, not cases by positivity numbers and stuff like that, why are they so different from the cities?

Mayor: Sure. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, and yes, the technical issues, the data issues have been resolved. He can speak to that, but to the bigger point, look, I think this fits perfectly Juan Manuel with the question of restoring democracy, restoring local control. You know, I always appreciate, and I like to remember the people who for each of us in our lives made so many things possible, and one of those people for me was Deputy Mayor Bill Lynch, who I worked for about 30 years ago in this building, and he would always say, God bless the child who has his own. We in New York City, we have to have our own information. We have to have our own data. We have to protect our own people. The CDC today, Juan Manuel, we can respect the professionalism, we can respect the objectivity, there is not political interference, but we all know during the Trump administration, a lot of times that the health care leadership was being compromised and threatened and limited. So, we didn't even know if federal information was accurate. The State of New York has their own methodology, and we don't always agree that it's the most rigorous methodology. Sometimes I am concerned that it might be a more subjective methodology, or there might be political considerations in the data. We want the data to tell us the whole truth. We want to be led by the data and science. So, the New York City Department of Health, which is respected all over the country, has a rigorous methodology, and we believe that is the most accurate read of what's happening in New York City, and we're going to stick by it, because if we have the facts, we can protect our people, but we're not going to depend on anyone else to understand the facts of New York City, we'll do that for ourselves. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor, and yes, first on the technical issue, I will confirm that that has been resolved. The daily indicators and the vaccination data on our website are being refreshed this morning as per the usual schedule, and the rest of our public website will be refreshed on this afternoon, which is also our regular cadence. So, we've worked through those issues that were originally, you know, a problem with some of the state data coming through to us, and so that is all resolved. It gives me a chance to say how grateful I am to the Health Department's data team, which has been working night and day throughout this pandemic in particular, to give us what you've heard me characterize as the lifeblood of our COVID-19 response. Everyone from the Mayor on down and looks at these indicators, not just daily, but sometimes multiple times a day, so that we can understand the trajectory of this pandemic and make the critical decisions to protect New Yorkers based on that data. And just as was said we will always follow the most rigorous scientific standards in figuring out how to analyze the data and communicate it to New Yorkers.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Juan Manuel.

Question: So just to be clear, Mr. Mayor, do you or your health department think Governor Cuomo, or his health department, are cooking the numbers?

Mayor: I would say, and I'll let Dr. Chokshi speak for himself, I would say I believe our numbers are more accurate and more consistent, and I know our numbers are based on objective science and I can't say that about the State. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, and, you know, I can't speak for the State Health Department, of course. I would take a step back and just make it clear that when we look at the trends, you know, with respect to cases, percent positivity, hospitalizations, those are the things that are most important to follow. And you know, despite some of the nuances and the differences between the data, those trends often tell a very similar story, and so that's what we should focus on to make those critical decisions that I mentioned.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question today goes to Nolan from The Post.

Question: Hey, good morning, everybody.

Mayor: How are you doing, Nolan?

Question: I'm all right, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good day, Nolan, it's a good day. I was with three-year-olds and four-year-olds, I'm feeling hopeful.

Question: That's good to hear. You have – you've been asked if the Department of Education would be able to report how many kids are actually getting in-person instruction in city schools, you've said that number is constantly changing, so it doesn't make sense to release it. The City releases all kinds of stats that are regularly updated, whether it's the testing stats for coronavirus or crime stats from the New York City Police Department, or even attendance stats from city schools. So, what's the holdup in telling the public just how many kids are actually getting in-person instruction with schools reopened?

Mayor: No, Nolan, look, it's a good question. I want to make sure, yeah, I think first of all, yes, we should get more information out on this, but we should make sure it's accurate in what is literally an ever-changing environment with our schools. But what we can do is this, as I said, this from everything I've seen is not an issue at the elementary school level or the middle school level in a meaningful way. It is a problem with larger high schools in particular. We talked about this at Department of Education yesterday how to get more comprehensive data together on this and how to continue to address it. If it's a subject expert who's at home on accommodation but are needed to teach that subject in the school, of course that child is going to learn online, even if they're in the classroom. But, as you heard the Chancellor say, with the support of a teacher in the classroom as well. But whatever specifics we can pull together to give you and others a sense of exactly the shape of this, we should do that. And that's something I'm happy to see us do. Go ahead.

Question: Secondly, your administration has made changes to the city's transportation infrastructure a hallmark of your recovery and reopening vision. You've promised at one point to help encourage people to get back on the subway, to help encourage people to start riding again, you said you would ride yourself, now you're vaccinated. You haven't taken your promised week of subway trips yet. Do you plan to do that? And secondly, your Department of Transportation has promised to overhaul how bikes can use the Brooklyn Bridge by July, will you promise to ride whatever bike infrastructure exists on the Brooklyn Bridge by the end of July?

Mayor: Yes, and yes, I will happily. I'm really looking forward because we need that change on the Brooklyn Bridge. Looking forward to that day and I will happily participate on a bike for sure. And yes, the subway trips, I'm looking forward to that too, and it's something I think is important. We obviously saw last week the highest ridership in the subways we've seen since the beginning of the pandemic. I think you're going to see more and more people coming back. I want to encourage it and certainly we'll be out there showing that, so we'll schedule that soon.

So, everyone, look, today is a day - I'm just going to say it – really, really does do your heart good to be out in a school with first of all, educators, I just want to thank all the educators, everyone who we saw today, who, you know, just love - they love the kids. They want to be there for the kids. And that's inspiring to see the adults who are there for kids and look out for kids, but the kids themselves are the ultimate inspiration. And every time I spend time with those three-year-olds and four-year-olds, it just reminds you of what's possible. While we were reading the story or listening to the story being read – what was the animal called again? The Gruffalo?

Chancellor Porter: It was - the Gruffalo.

Mayor: The Gruffalo. The – I was looking at the faces of the children and the focus, when you see what three-year-olds and four-year-olds can do, the way they can learn. We, you know, we say they're like sponges. Well, you know, the science would say that at the point of greatest intellectual development in our lifetimes, it happens in those first years of life, and when you're watching these kids, are just focused, they're feeling it, they're so energized about it. You know, the children bragging to us about what they could say in Spanish, even though it wasn't their native language and, you know, showing that they could do the addition, they could do it. It was just beautiful and hopeful. And it was also a vision of equality, because every child had the same opportunity. It didn't matter where they lived, didn't matter what their ethnic or racial background was, or how much money their family had in their bank account. Every single child had the same exact opportunity and that's what we believe in. That's our values coming to life. So, it was a beautiful moment as the shape of things to come in the city. It's the shape of the recovery for all of us. We saw it today in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, and you're now going to see the same thing in all 32 school districts in New York City, and that's something to celebrate. Thank you, everybody.

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