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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON CBS THIS MORNING**

**Gayle King:** The largest public school district here in the country has abruptly stopped in-person learning – that's New York City – forcing more than a quarter-million students to stay home. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the move yesterday to make all New York City public school virtual again, leaving many parents scrambling. This comes as three percent of coronavirus tests in the city come back positive. Now that number has not been that high since the spring. Mayor Bill de Blasio joins us now, first on CBS This Morning. Mr. Mayor, thank you for joining us. Your ears must be burning today. The parents are mad with you. The kids are upset. Your critics are questioning your competency for the job. Help us understand your thinking here.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Gayle, look, my kids went to New York City public schools. I really do feel what parents are going through. I told them last week we had to get ready for this possibility. Parents are scrambling because it's really tough to be a parent, especially in the age of the coronavirus. But the number one job I have is to keep people safe. I said from the beginning, we would be led by the data and the science. I have the largest school system in America. A lot of people said we would never be able to reopen it, but we did back in September. And a lot of people said we'd never been [inaudible] –

**King:** But how are you justifying, Mr. Mayor – this is the question. How are you justifying that three percent number when the data doesn't seem to support it and neither do the public health experts? I think that's what has people upset.

**Mayor:** I disagree with that, Gayle. The data's very clear that we have to keep our kids safe, our educators safe, staff. We've had an increasing rate, obviously, as you said in your opening, here in New York City and everywhere around the country. We set a clear standard. We said, if it goes above three percent, we're going to shut down for a period of time but then we're going to reopen with a new set of additional health and safety standards. That's the key thing. We opened before. We're going to open again.

**Tony Dokoupil:** Mayor, I think the question for parents and for everybody right now is why three percent. The World Health Organization says five percent, the Governor says he wouldn't take action as long as it stayed below nine percent, other cities and states around the country have higher thresholds. You've chosen three percent. You're sticking to it. How come?

**Mayor:** Because we were the epicenter of this crisis, everyone knows that. We needed to bring our schools back in the fall and we needed to show parents and staff that they'd be safe. So, we set a very stringent standard and a whole lot of other health and safety standards, the distancing, the face masks for everyone, kids and adults alike, and we proved that schools will be safe. But we said, if that rate went up higher, we were going to stop, we were going to pause and reset. Our schools are going to come back, but they're going to come back with additional safety standards. That's what we need to keep people safe.

**King:** You're leaving the bars and the restaurants open where it's been proven that those are super spreader places as opposed to the schools.

**Mayor:** Yeah, Gayle, the Governor made clear yesterday that New York State is going to, very soon, be applying what they call an orange zone standard to New York City. And that will be closing indoor dining and a number of other things. So, those restrictions are coming very soon, it's quite clear.

**Dokoupil:** But Mayor, in the meantime, a lot of parents are joking, I guess I'll send my kid to the bar today because that's still open or maybe they can work out at the gym, pump a little iron. You know, I want to know more about your equation here because the costs of this shutdown we know are going to be significant. It's going to be significant in terms of learning for children, the economy, because parents can't work, domestic turmoil. New York City apartments are very small. That's the cost. You've acknowledged those costs. Can you quantify the benefit here?

**Mayor:** Tony, the benefit is keeping people alive and keeping people safe. Look –

**Dokoupil:** But Europe –

**Mayor:** We have to be clear about this history. We were the epicenter of the crisis, and a lot of people truly believed it would never be safe for our schools to come back until there was a vaccine –

**Dokoupil:** But we didn't know –

**Mayor:** You have to keep faith with people and show we'll keep them safe.

**Dokoupil:** You're right on the – we did not know back in April, but we do know now, and there's been an evolution in the approach. Europe has bars and restaurants closed, but schools are open. Other states – President Trump, we have to remember it was calling for this in the summer, a lot of Democrats were opposed to it, but states have come around and said, you know, we are going to prioritize schools because that is so important. And so, that's why this equation is so

important. It's a cost benefit. You can't put any number at all on what the benefit is going to be. And yet we know the costs. 60,000 kids don't even have iPads to learn at home.

**Mayor:** Well, wait, wait, wait – we have been providing free iPads for every child in New York City –

**Dokoupil:** You're a Chancellor said yesterday that they don't have iPads for 60,000 kids.

**Mayor:** It's really simple, really clear. Every child in New York City who needs one can get a free iPad and any child that doesn't have it now, we're going to get to them right away. And we've distributed over 300,000. We'll do more. But the bottom line is this safety and health come first. We can and we will reopen our schools, but with an even higher and more stringent standard, that's the bottom line. New York City schools will come back. It's going to require a lot more testing, but we will bring them back.

**Anthony Mason:** Mr. Mayor, what about the quality of learning? My wife's a teacher at a charter school here in the city. A lot of teachers are concerned about the virus and going in, but they're also concerned about kids falling behind and increasingly say that's happening a lot. What do you do about that?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Listen, I'm really concerned about that, going all the way back to March when we had to close originally. I think the key thing – I'm a believer in in-person education. That's why I truly want to get the schools back with the right standards. And obviously once the vaccine is here, we're going to distribute it very quickly in New York City and get our schools back in a much deeper way –

**King:** But that's not until Spring at the earliest –

**Mayor:** I think we have lost something here with our kids. And what we've got to do is continue to improve remote education, continue to make sure every kid has a device who needs them, and get them back in the classroom as quickly as we can safely do it.

**King:** Was there an uptick in COVID cases in schools here in the city? Is that's what's [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** The challenge is everywhere in the city. It went from just a few weeks ago, Gayle, very isolated pockets in New York City where we were having serious upticks to now, unfortunately, it's all five boroughs. You've seen the case numbers –

**King:** But I'm talking about in the schools. I'm talking about –

**Mayor:** And, of course, it's been affecting schools too. We've had a number of schools that have had to be shut individually for that reason. That's why we have to get ahead of this for safety's sake, but we can put more stringent standards and including a lot more testing. I think this is going to be the key, a lot more testing school by school to get them back and running.

**Dokoupil:** Yeah. Mr. Mayor, I think another thing I'd like to point out that is upsetting parents is that the private schools are open. So, that exacerbates inequality even more. And I want to call your attention to an editorial by Nick Kristoff, generally a progressive columnist for New York Times, who said that President Trump was right over the summer to call for schools to reopen because the science actually has come around and supported that position. You were opposed then. It seemed political. What do you say to people who look at you holding to this three percent, which is more conservative than anyone else in the country, and they say he's sticking to a political decision, it's politics again?

**Mayor:** I don't think it's political in the least. Again, it's ironic, you're right. President Trump wanted schools open. I generally disagreed with him across the board, but in this case, I believe from the beginning we had to reopen and lots of folks thought it couldn't be done safely in New York City. We proved it could be, but we're dealing with a new circumstance. The way you opened the broadcast was so clear. We're dealing with a new circumstance, a surge that we have to be very, very concerned about. We've got to reset this equation. So, I say to my fellow parents, I don't expect this to go for long, I expect us to come up with a new standard that's more stringent. We're going to ask a lot of parents – we're going to ask them to get their kids tested a lot, but then we can come back.

**King:** That's what I was wondering. What is your timeline to reopen? Do you have one?

**Mayor:** This next few days, with the State of New York, we're going to come up with the new standards and announce them before Thanksgiving. And then I hope to be back in the next few weeks, but again, I'm going to ask a lot of parents to make sure kids are tested very consistently. I think that's going to be the key, Gayle.

**Dokoupil:** Yeah. And then in the meantime, overwhelmingly Black and Brown school districts and low-income kids are going to be back in very small apartments for the first foreseeable future.

**Mayor:** That's why we want to get them back in school [inaudible] the right way, the safe way.

**Dokoupil:** All right. Mayor de Blasio, thank you very much.

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