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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, today is something we don't look forward to, it's the first day of winter officially on the calendar and that makes it the shortest day of the year in terms of how much light we're going to have. So, it's the shortest day of the longest year we have ever been through 2020, but today is also a reminder 2020 is almost over, thank God, and we know that every day from this point on, it'll get a little lighter in every sense. So that's the good news, we're getting ready for next year, we're getting ready for much better things ahead. But let me just comment upfront for a moment on something that isn't good news, and that's what's come out of Washington DC. I can't even call what the Congress has agreed to as stimulus. It's not a stimulus. It's a short-term survival plan. I'll give you that. There's some aid there that I certainly value for everyday New Yorkers, everyday Americans. It's something, but it's months late. It's billions short. It has no direct aid to localities. There's so much missing you can't call it a stimulus. A stimulus would actually stimulate the economy, help us move forward, help us recover. This doesn't do it. This barely helps us to tread water and from the point of view of New York City, and I know New York State's in the same boat, if we don't get substantial help, we cannot provide the services our people need. We can't keep the good people who serve our people employed. We cannot recover. So, if this is what Washington thinks is a stimulus, they sure don't understand what the people of New York need and people all over the country need. I have a lot of faith that President Joe Biden will make it right, and we're going to need something much bigger, much stronger going forward, but let's not kid ourselves. Something that doesn't help us get back on our feet just can't be called a stimulus.

Now that was bad news, but let's turn to good news now. Let's turn to the things that we can do because we do take care of our own people here in New York City, and we are now, thank God, dealing with a good reality, we're in a new era because the vaccine is here and everywhere I go in New York City I talk to people about the fact that the vaccine is here and it's really lifting spirits and has given people hope. So now it's time to focus on how we turn the page on the coronavirus, how we make 2021 a much better year, and that begins with what we need to do for our children. For so many of us, this is our heart, how we help our children, how we protect them, how we help them move forward, and our kids have been through so much. Let's remember, every adult out there listening, you've been through so much in this horrible year, 2020, but our kids are going through so much in every sense, and it's harder for them to make sense of. They're going through trauma, they're going through a lot of pain and they need our help. And we have to make sure that help reaches every child, and we particularly need to focus on kids in the communities hardest hit by COVID. We always talk about those 27 neighborhoods in New York City that bore the brunt of the COVID crisis. African-American neighborhoods, Latino neighborhoods, Asian neighborhoods that really got hit so hard and all those disparities

that came out. We talk about that to focus our energies, focus our attention on making sure we do what the people in those neighborhoods need and that they get the priority going forward. We've got to right the wrong by making them the priority.

So, that's what we will be doing as we go into 2021 as we go into the next school year, we talked over the last couple of weeks about our 2021 Student Achievement Plan, how we're going to close the COVID achievement gap, and we're going to do that for every child. We're going to particularly focus on those neighborhoods that have been hurting the most and the kids who need it the most. You know, I will tell you something pretty unusual that happened last few days, something I said a few days ago when we're talking about how we address fairness and equity in our schools, and we talked about how we create more diversity in our schools, how we address a segregated past and move forward, how we create fairness and justice. We talked about that on Friday, and Fox News apparently was very interested in that and they quoted one of the sentences that I said. I said that we needed to recognize if we were going to address all this structural inequality, structural racism, we would actually have to do things differently. And so here's the quote from Fox News summarizing, they said NYC Mayor sees the redistribution of wealth as an important factor toward ending structural racism education. I'm going to say it one more time in case Fox News is watching again, NYC Mayor sees the redistribution of wealth as an important factor towards ending structural racism in education. Exactly right. I don't get to say it very often, but Fox News got it exactly right. Amen. We are going to fight structural racism through redistribution. So Fox News, congratulations, fair and balanced coverage right there. In fact, if we think we're going to deal with structural racism and segregation without redistributing wealth, we're kidding ourselves.

We got to be real about nothing changes unless you put the resources behind it and that's what we're doing. We're going to make sure our kids have the support they need now, and especially in the new school year, when everyone comes back into the school buildings and that doesn't just mean the academic support, it means the emotional support as well. It means making sure the social factor is taken account of as well, social and emotional learning. That's something that a Chancellor's focused on. That's something the First Lady is focused on, but it takes on even more importance as we go into this new school year, September 2021, it'll be different than anything we've ever experienced in our lives. So we have to make sure that we are really looking out for our kids, that we're checking in on them to see what they need and if they need help, we're giving it to them. And this has been an idea that has long been a core notion of Thrive NYC. One of the foundational concepts of Thrive NYC is get their early, help people, particularly young people, early, provide the support, and if you find out there's a problem, you can do something about it. That's what Thrive has been all about. So here to tell you about this really important new initiative for all our public schools and the way it's going to reach all our school kids, the leading champion for providing mental health support to all the people of New York City, the person who brought us Thrive NYC, our First Lady Chirlane McCray.

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Thank you, Bill, and good morning, everyone. I don't know if anyone can be happier than I am today to say we are bringing social, emotional, and academic behavioral screenings to New York City public schools. Yes, finally.

[First Lady McCray speaks in Spanish]

This is a huge moment. Our teams at the Department of Health, Department of Education, Health + Hospitals, and Thrive NYC have worked towards this day for a long time. And if you're a parent who sends your child to a pediatrician every year for a physical, you know, the preventive measures that are taken and peace of mind that comes with a regular checkup, but our nation has never put that same emphasis on engaging the whole child when it comes to education or prevention, when it comes to mental health. That means educators and families don't have as well of an assessment about what our children are doing and what they need. So think of these screenings as an expanded health checkup for students to learn how they are feeling, how they are getting along with friends and at home, even in the best of times, this is a best practice. Now, after COVID-19, it is critical than ever.

So, let me tell you about P.S. 89 in Queens, the borough that was earlier this year was the epicenter of the crisis. Dozens of P.S. 89 students back then reported COVID-19 had sickened or taken the lives of their loved ones. These children had lost grandparents, parents, their parents had lost jobs and they were isolated at home. Every New York City student will carry the experience of this past year in a different way. Some will be processing grief and have trouble focusing. Some will rejoice at being back in the classroom while others will feel uncomfortable. These screenings will help school staff create individual plans to move forward and help educators make sure that no child falls through the cracks. There are no grades, there are no labels or classifications associated with how these questions are asked, there is only learning how adults can offer the best support. We will begin with schools and the neighborhoods hit hardest by this crisis, but we want every student to benefit and we urge a federal stimulus that will help expand this support. Today's announcement, along with our social emotional learning and restorative justice curriculum and community schools reflects a generational shift in education to supporting the whole child socially, emotionally, and academically. New York City is leading the way because we know it's easier and less expensive to grow a healthy child than it is to mend a broken adult. There is no better investment than our young people and when our young people succeed our city succeeds. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much and, Chirlane, I can hear the passion and the joy in your voice. This is a vision that you've had and a lot of other good people have had for a long, long time, and now it will come to fruition starting in September, and we're going to be able to do so much good for so many children. This has been a labor of love for a lot of people. I want to thank our Deputy Chancellor for School, Climate, and Wellness, LaShawn Robinson, who's put her heart and soul into this work and has been one of the architects of so much of what we've done with social emotional learning. Also, someone who's really gotten under the hood and figured out how we could make this work in our schools, day after day, he's a former principal and he's been our Senior Advisor for Education, Brandon Cardet-Hernandez, thank you for the amazing work you've done. I know you truly, truly believe in this approach. Thank you for helping it come to life and I'd like to give you a chance to say a few words about why this is so important, Brandon.

Senior Education Policy Advisor Brandon Cardet-Hernandez: Thank you so much Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray and Chancellor Carranza. You know, today is a historic day and one that is truly exciting for all of us educators and parents who understand the inextricable link

between social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and academic success. See, New York City educators, we've always understood that our charge is not just to teach content and skills, but to make sure students have the academic, social, and emotional skills and tools that will allow them to thrive in college and in their careers. And to realize that incredible goal, we have to know our students, truly know them, as individuals and as individuals and as scholars, so that we can teach them their strengths and provide the supports in the areas where they need it. And it needs to be said, educators across the city had been doing just that for decades. And as a former New York City public school principal in the South Bronx and in New York City public school teacher, I know firsthand what it's like to have a student who needs additional supports and then grasping for a way to connect them to the care they deserve. I know firsthand the intense work that educators take on, analyzing and reflecting on how our students are doing and then making sure we aren't missing any signs that that might help us do our job better. And, today, we're launching something that'll make that charge, our charge of educating New York City students, the whole student, easier to realize.

In addition to expanding our partnership with H + H, we're launching 27 new community schools and neighborhoods hardest hit by the pandemic and hiring 150 new social workers to support those communities. And equally as exciting, in September, we're going to launch a simple screening tool, a social, emotional, and academic behavioral screener that that allows us to check in on the whole child, and, for some students, connect them to additional supports they need. It's an honor to be here today and to be able to bring these incredible resources to New York City students, families, and educators. Thank you so much.

Mayor: Thank you, Brandon. Thanks for all the great work you did on this initiative. And now, as I turned to the Chancellor, I want to say, when you have a Chancellor who really values this important work, it happens. And from the beginning, Chancellor Carranza has believed that social, emotional learning and a focus on mental health was necessary to reach our kids. That was true before the pandemic, and we did plenty of work on it before, but we've had so many really, really heartfelt conversations about what kids need now and how much greater it is and how we're going to have to do something truly universal to reach every child and support them. So, again, labor of love is the right phrase here. Chancellor, please let us hear from you about why this is so important.

Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And I want to thank our First Lady McCray, thank you for your passion. Brandon, as always, you bring it right down to the classroom and I want to thank you for that as well. I want to begin today by thanking all of the educators that are out in the field, that have been on the front lines of supporting our students' mental health and emotional wellbeing while also looking after your own families and yourselves as you've done. That they have gone above and beyond by taking the tools of trauma-informed education and social, emotional learning, and integrating them in new creative ways into remote learning and our re-imagined in-person learning. As we've charted our path forward out of COVID-19, we are here to take our students who needed the most first. That means driving support to schools in the 27 communities hardest hit by this pandemic with more critically important supports. This is not new – we're building on the foundations we've built through our Resilient Kids, Safe Schools and Bridge to Schools initiatives that were well underway prior to this global pandemic. Critically, we know community schools work and we in

New York City are nationwide leaders in building community schools. We know what happens when schools are built on a foundation of community partnership and they have the resources necessary to address the unique needs of their communities. In community schools, we see higher graduation rates. In community schools, we see improved student achievement and we see decreases in chronic absenteeism and disciplinary incidents. I don't know about you, but that sounds exactly like the kinds of supports our students will need in a post COVID-19 educational environment.

By providing each of these hard-hit communities with additional community schools, we are partnering with our terrific community-based organizations who have done truly incredible work on behalf of our young people during this crisis in community schools and beyond, and investing in the long-term social, emotional academic success of students in these communities, we will do right by our students in our communities. As our First Lady mentioned, by using social emotional screens, we are providing a simple, effective tool for educators in schools to assess the general wellbeing of our students. With a parent's consent, these assessments will be used to target interventions and craft personalized care for individual students, helping them heal and flourish academically. In addition, it may be that once we do these screens the student is just fine and they're okay. That's fine too, but it's always important to know so that we know when to act.

Paired with social, emotional screening, we are going to 150 additional social workers and expand our partnership with Health + Hospitals to provide the direct mental health care to students. This is an addition to the historic investments that have already been made in New York City. Not only does this ensure our students have access to another caring adult during the school day, but these experts will help educators identify and provide targeted intervention when necessary and appropriate. Our goal is to bring these supports city-wide, but to do what we need to do we need federal support. In the meantime, we will continue to double down on our core belief for our students to succeed academically. We must first need to make sure they're okay. Socially and emotionally.

[Chancellor Carranza speaks in Spanish]

Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you very, very much Chancellor. And, everyone, one more note on education. We announced on Friday that the specialized high school exams were going to be happening in January. Want to remind all parents, all students that registration for those exams begins today. So, you can start registering literally today. The test administration will begin on January 27th. I want to encourage all young people and their parents who think this is the right choice for them to take that exam. This is a chance for everyone. We want to see as much diversity and inclusion in our specialized high schools as possible. So, everyone who's interested sign up today.

Okay. Now, let's turn to the health care front. Obviously, every hour, every day, the fight against COVID continues. And we now have the greatest tool we possibly could have, the vaccine. So, New York City is focused on getting that vaccine to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. Now, it's a brand-new vaccine. Our health care leaders, our health care workers are

getting used to working with it. Obviously, it requires some very careful handling because of the ultra-cold storage, but New York City is moving rapidly to get the vaccine out and get people vaccinated. And, right now, based on the data we've received from the CDC, New York City is vaccinating people basically at twice the national average time. We're basically doing things twice as fast as the national average. In New York City, of the doses we have received, 42.2 percent – as of yesterday, 42.2 percent have been administered. Nationwide, it's under 20 percent had been administered. We are going to keep speeding that up further and further. Our Vaccine Command Center is leading the way and they will provide regular updates on we're doing through their website, which is now live – nyc.gov/vaccinecommandcenter. So, thank you to everyone at the command center. I know they're working intensely to ensure we get the maximum impact from the vaccine. Right now, in New York City, we've had over 18,000 doses administered as of yesterday, that number again will grow rapidly. And good news – more good news – we have a second vaccine. The Moderna vaccine has been approved and will be shipping into New York City very soon. So, what we're seeing is safe and effective vaccines that are going to change the entire reality and help us turn the situation around. And now, not just one vaccine, but two, and we think more to come after that. So, there is some good news right there.

Now, everyone with the holidays upon us it is another time to remember how careful we have to be. It's great we have the vaccine, and with every passing week, with every passing month, that's going to make more and more impact. But the holidays, unfortunately – we love them, we love our family gatherings, we love seeing our loved ones, but the holidays create a danger too. We saw this over Thanksgiving. We all love gathering, but, unfortunately, despite all the warnings people gathered and in some cases didn't take all the precautions. We saw a spike in the number of cases after Thanksgiving. We're really concerned about Christmas and this whole holiday season – New Years – and this is a time where we really could see an intensive spike and we can't handle another spike, so we need to, for all of us, be careful. Everyone, please, you've got to – you've got to wear those masks, practice social distancing, keep those gathering small, do not travel. It's so important. And that would be true if it were not a new fact that there's a new strain of the virus that's been identified England. Even if it weren't for that, all of these warnings would be true. The new strain makes me even more worried about what might happen and how we have to guard against it. I just need everyone to understand, if we hang on for the next few months, if we do the right thing and we fight back, we can turn the corner on the coronavirus. We can avoid having to put into effect a lot more onerous restrictions – no one wants them. And, look, we're going to need help from the federal government, we're going to need help from the airline industry. It's really, in my view, it's time for a travel ban from Europe, given what we're seeing with this new strain, or, at minimum, a requirement that anyone getting on a plane has proof that they have a negative test if they're coming out of Europe. We need to be aggressive. This is a decisive moment. If we get it right now, if we're careful during the holidays and we give time for the vaccine to be distributed, we really turn the corner. So, everyone, we need your full, full participation.

Now, let me go over today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 184 patients. So, that's below our 200 patient threshold, but not by much, so concerned continually about the situation in our hospitals. Our rate – hospitalization rate, 3.1 – excuse me, it's 3.1 per 100,000 New Yorkers. That's too high, we want to get under two percent. That rate has continued to grow, and that's a

problem. New cases on a seven-day average, combining the cases that we have – 2,802 is today's number. We want to be under 550. It's obvious, that's a very, very high number. We've got to bring it down. And then the update on the percentage of New York City residents testing positive, seven-day rolling average, 6.05 percent. We want to get back under five and go well below that. 6.05 percent today, we need to work harder, everyone.

A few words in Spanish, I'm going to go back to the important work that's being talked about today in education.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. 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 First Lady Chirlane McCray, by Chancellor Carranza, by Deputy Chancellor for School, Climate, and Wellness LaShawn Robinson, by Senior Education Advisor Brandon Cardet-Hernandez, by Dr. Chokshi, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Andrea from WCBS.

Question: Good morning, everyone. Happy holidays.

Mayor: Happy Holidays, Andrea. How are you doing?

Question: I'm great, thank you. First question is about the stimulus. Mr. Mayor, you talked about it not actually being a stimulus and the federal government has been pretty consistent in not giving the city what it needs. So, at what point does the city stop putting all of its hope and faith in the feds? And what's your plan financially, moving forward?

Mayor: Andrea, it's such an important question. Look, let me be clear, I'm very happy that there'll be some additional support for every-day New Yorkers and every-day Americans. And there are certainly some good individual pieces in this, but it's not a stimulus. It leaves out state and local aid and will not help us back on our feet, won't help us restore our economy. It's a survival package. It's not a stimulus. So, my hope rests with President Joe Biden. He has been very clear. he wants a true stimulus. He wants a major stimulus that will energize the economy and support all of us. He knows so well after the experience – after the recession in 2008, that it would have been better to have had a bigger stimulus then. He learned that lesson, I know he will apply it. And so, we're going to see that play out in February and the months right after. That will give us time to make our final decisions on our budget that is due in June, but I'm very hopeful that President Biden is going to really resolve this situation and get us a true stimulus.

Go ahead, Andrea.

Question: Okay. The second question is switching gears to social emotional learning. Just like the plan to address learning loss, it doesn't begin until September. So, how do you reconcile that

so many kids right now are falling through the gaps? And are you concerned that so many just maybe lost by the time these programs are available in September?

Mayor: Andrea, very important question. Thank you for it, because we need to realize how much trauma our kids have been through. I'll turn to the Chancellor and then see if the First Lady or any of our other colleagues want to add in. But I would say, first of all, I do not believe our children will be lost from this experience. I believe our children are strong and resilient, but they're really going to need our help. And when we see them in person daily, starting in September, we're going to be able to help them in the most profound way. So, we're laying that framework right now. In the meantime, I know our educators, our social workers, guidance counselors, principals, everyone is watching out for kids who have real needs right now and helping them get connected to the mental health services that are available in every school right now in one form or another, and that's Thrive – a piece of thrive that was so important for the beginning, to make sure that every school was connected to mental health services somehow. Our educators know they can tap into that and I know a lot of them are doing that work right now. Chancellor?

Chancellor Carranza: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Andrea, we're not waiting until September. This is already in place. We're already doing lots of work around social, emotional learning, trauma-informed pedagogy and practices. We've had literally thousands of teachers and principals that have been trained on what to look for and how to support students. We have our Bridge to School program, which has specifically trained our educators around identifying signs of trauma. So, we're not waiting. We're announcing today is that this is part of a systematic – systemic approach, hand in glove with the academic approach, the social, emotional trauma-informed approach to make sure that we are taking care of the whole child as we transition back. So, we're adding to what we're already doing and we're being as transparent as possible about letting parents know, because we get those questions all the time – what is going to be different for my child? So, we want to start previewing for parents, this is what we're going to add to what we're already doing to make sure that we are absolutely laser-focused on the whole child, academic and social-emotional.

Mayor: I want to see if you see if Chirlane, or LaShawn, or Brandon – want to add?

First Lady McCray: I think the Chancellor is exactly right. We are blessed to have launched social, emotional learning this curriculum that deals with children and their emotions last year. So, we were able to get many – thousands of teachers trained, and I'm sorry this pandemic happened, but we were actually well positioned to be able to deal with a lot of the outcomes in terms of how children are reacting to this crisis. So, we're well positioned. We're kind of, you know, ready for this – as ready as anyone could be for this kind of situation. So, the social, emotional curriculum is being delivered remotely in most cases. So, this gives us another tool. It's just another tool to help us assess where children are and be able to build on everything that we've already done.

Mayor: Let me see if LaShawn wants to add.

Deputy Chancellor for School Climate and Wellness LeShawn Robinson, Department of Education: That's right. The Chancellor and the First Lady are 100 percent on point. This school year, over 50,000 educators have completed the training and trauma-informed care. We are building upon existing investments and will continue to do this work to support our children and our educators who have also focused on their own social, emotional development through self-care as well this year.

Mayor: And such an important point, LaShawn, thank you. We care about all the people that work in our schools, our educators, our staff, they've been through so much too. And, you're right, the very same techniques that we have taught them to help kids also is part of making sure we're watching out for them as well. Brandon, do you want to add?

Senior Advisor Cardet-Hernandez: The only thing I'll say is, you know, this is building as well off of, obviously, work we were doing last school year, but also work that we did in our regional enrichment centers this summer, making social, emotional learning a priority there. And, again, as everyone has said, this is just the next step in a systematic – systemic way of thinking about how we are going to be doing school next year.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderatore: The next is Courtney Gross from NY1.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, how are you doing.

Question: Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah, how are you doing?

Question: Good. Thank you. I'm well, thank you. So, I wanted to talk also about the stimulus. Is your strategy going to change at all, given what we saw come out of Washington over the weekend? What kind of conversations do you expect to have with the new administration next year? And what is the doomsday scenario? And when do you make a decision on what that doomsday scenario or those budget cuts could be? I mean, you're going to need a preliminary budget, obviously, in January. How many layoffs are we looking at? What specifically are you asking for –

Mayor: Hold on, Courtney, this is becoming a multiple – multiple-part question. Let me try and get to the core of what you're asking. Listen, it's a very troubling reality, Courtney, that the stimulus involves no direct aid to New York City, or any other city or county or state in the country. That means that we're on our own again. When you think about the fact it was back in the spring that the House passed what was a real stimulus package, and we've waited, waited, waited, hoping and believing that something would happen and, you know, half a year has passed and now we get this – it's really a troubling situation. It means in January, we'll present a budget based on what we know and we'll show what the impact is of the absence of federal

support. But the final decision will come in June, as it always does with the budget. And we're going to work very closely with the Biden administration to get a true stimulus. And there's plenty of time for the Biden administration and the Congress to act in the spring well before we make our final budget decisions. Go ahead.

Question: And then switching gears to the new vaccine, the Moderna vaccine, you said the city is expecting to receive it soon. Do you know when exactly? And how many doses we should be expecting to get and where those would be directed first?

Mayor: Thank you. And Dr. Chokshi, will give you an update on all of that.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And thank you for the question. Yes, we're very excited about the Moderna vaccine coming to New York City. As you know, it was authorized by the FDA on a Friday of last week and the CDC formally recommended it over the weekend. And so, they started to get shipped across the country yesterday. We expect the Moderna vaccine to come to our city beginning today through Wednesday of this week. It will be a total of about 149,400 doses for this week. And the people who will be prioritized to receive the vaccine is laid out in the State prioritization guidance that primarily remains health care workers, including people in community health centers – that's the staff and community health centers – as well as our emergency medical services personnel.

Mayor: Go ahead.

Question: The next is Amy Zimmer from Chalkbeat.

Question: Thank you for taking my question. I wanted to ask about funding for the community school expansion program. So, I wanted to find out how much it's going to cost and how you're going to pay for it after cutting community schools this year.

Mayor: The bottom line is that what we have seen with this pandemic in particular, the calls upon us to do something differently, and what we're saying here is that we will make it a budget priority to provide this support in the 27 neighborhoods that were hardest hit by COVID. Whatever it takes, we're going to make it a budget priority even if it means we have to reduce spending in other areas. If we get the true federal stimulus, as the Chancellor laid out, we will then do this universally across all parts of the city. That's what we would strongly prefer, but we would need federal stimulus support to do that. So, you know, this is a situation, we're now looking at everything that's happened this year and what our kids need, we have decided this is a budget priority and the best way to ensure that our kids are going to be well and able to learn in the new school year. Go ahead.

Question: And can you provide some more specifics about the mental health screenings? So, who will conduct them, how the people will be trained, and then what happens after a screening, if a child needs help?

Mayor: I'll start with the Chancellor and then everyone else can join in on any part of that. Go ahead.

Chancellor Carranza: Yes. So, the screening itself, it's very short. It's evidence-based, it's a questionnaire, less than five minutes. It's done by those who know the child the best in the school. So, it's a variety of people in school that can do the screening. Again, it's a “temperature check” of how the child is doing. We are blessed in New York City that we have an incredibly rich infrastructure called Thrive, where any New Yorker can get the support that they need. We obviously have a very strong partnership with Thrive. We have social workers that we've invested in. There's additional social workers that we will be bringing on board to help support this initiative as well. So, the whole point is that as there are signs that a child may need additional support, we will absolutely waste no time in connecting that child and their family with those additional supports. I also don't want it to be lost that this may also be a good opportunity for this questionnaire, this check, to indicate that the child is doing fine and that they're robust and that they're adapting well, and then that's okay too. But I think even that information is important for families to have as well, so that they know.

Mayor: Thank you. Go again to our First Lady and then LeShawn and Brandon, see if they want to add. Particularly on the note – particularly on the question of the kind of help we can provide to a child if that becomes a need.

First Lady McCray: Well, I want to emphasize what the Chancellor said that this questionnaire is a way of also pinpointing a child's strengths. And I think that's very important to note. We have a variety of resources for our children including the partnerships with community-based organizations that are in neighborhoods, our social workers. Some schools have in-house clinics, and, of course, the expansion with Health + Hospitals will make a huge difference as well. So, whatever the level of a child's needs, we'll be able to tend to whatever that is. We are very well positioned to handle children's behavioral health needs. And I should add that the social emotional learning curriculum is also a way that teachers can address a child's behavioral health needs just in the classroom every day through the coursework.

Mayor: LeShawn, in addition to anything else you want to add, why don't you refresh everyone's memory on the partnership with Health + Hospitals and the kind of services that could be available to a child through that?

Deputy Chancellor Robinson: Absolutely. I'll just add also, the screen is just a way to continue to build strong relationships with families and to deepen our work with students. The questions ask students about their thoughts and feelings about school, themselves, and their relationships with others. And support is readily available and on hand. We're deepening our support systems today through investing in community schools and adding social workers to our school communities. And the partnership with Health + Hospitals is critical, especially in our communities hardest hit by this pandemic, which will allow support in the Health + Hospitals clinic so that young people can be seen by clinicians, social workers, and other professionals inside of Health + Hospitals supporting the whole child with extended supports for families as well.

Mayor: And again, I want to emphasize that it depends on what each child needs, but if a child does need ongoing support, as LeShawn just indicated, you know, we have really tremendously dedicated professionals at Health + Hospitals who will be available, obviously for free, to provide that support on an ongoing basis. Brandon, do you want to add?

Senior Advisor Cardet-Hernandez: The only thing that I'll say is, you know, it's individual work and that's why we're going to take a minute, a few minutes to just check in individually with each kid to see what they need. For most of our students, as you said Mayor, you know, they're not going to have an additional need, but the check-in is just a really good way to show that we care. And for some students that may be an individual conversation with the caring adults, more social interaction with their peers, that the school helps structure, and then for probably the smallest group, it's going to be more support. And, you know, partnerships with H + H allow us to bring that support to reality.

Mayor: Thank you, Brandon. I want to note, you know, really to think about the individual nature of this, as you just said – the Chancellor and I were talking about this earlier. When we talked about closing the COVID achievement gap academically, we talked about how we're going to individually reach each child, how our educators are going to figure out what each child needs to make up for whatever learning loss. We're going to use some new tools like some of the new digital capacity we have to help individualize, tailor-make a program for each child academically. Think of this as the social emotional equivalent, where you can look at a child's situation, and if they have a particular need tailor-make a solution for that child to make sure they feel supported. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: How are you doing today?

Mayor: Never a dull moment, Henry. That's all I can say. How you doing?

Question: Doing well. I'm short, it's the shortest day of the year. So, this is my day.

[Laughter]

Mayor: I like that positive, positive attitude.

Question: You're a confirmed height-ist. So, I thought I would mention that.

Mayor: I'm going to – I'm going to argue with you on that charge. I love people of all heights. We're all in this together.

Question: All right. Well, I stick to my assertion.

[Laughter]

Is there [inaudible] data on how many infections – what the infection rate is in the schools these days? We don't seem to get that number –

Mayor: Yeah. And we should put that out regularly. I'm glad you are raising that, Henry. So, I'll start and turn to Dr. Chokshi. The last I saw was based on the weekly testing. Remember we now are doing the highest level of testing we've done since school began – weekly testing in every single school. It's been very successful, both in the sense of the testing has been rigorous and available, but also because of what we're seeing. The number I saw a few days ago was 0.7 percent positivity, 0.7 percent. Again, in the city, we're right now, we're around six percent positivity for the whole city. So, this really emphasizes the point that, arguably, the safest place to be in New York City is in one of our public schools right now. But Dr. Chokshi in terms of making that information available consistently, could you speak to that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Certainly, Mr. Mayor. The information on cases and testing in schools is on the Department of Education's website. We can make sure to follow up with that link and make sure that it has all of the information that you're looking for, Henry.

Mayor: Great. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Second question has to do with the Department of Investigations report last week, your response to it. Since then, there's been a lot of pushback by people who were out in the streets, and some journalists and people who saw what was going on. And they feel that as much as you characterize this report as being unsparing and accurate, whatever – they feel that it's an understatement of how serious some of the police abuses were in those days. And I'm just wondering whether you have heard these criticisms and what your response to that side of it is.

Mayor: Yes, Henry I certainly – I expect it, and I have heard criticisms bluntly from the whole spectrum. But I read the report with an open heart and I really found it to be extremely clear and accurate, including recognizing the complexity and the challenges and the things that were done right. But also, being very blunt about what wasn't done right and what needs to change. And, you know, when the report says here's 20 things that need to be done differently. You know, there's times where you might say, wait a minute, you know, I'm not sure I'm comfortable with that. I was comfortable with it. I believe they were right. I just believe they actually got it right and it was important to say so. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Katie Honan from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hey, good morning. My question, it goes back to today's announcement. And I wanted to ask, you know, [inaudible] I guess, about the timing of it, but there was a survey released, I think earlier this month, I don't remember, by parents of children with IEPs and various special needs that found that their services were really lacking when it came to blended learning, when it came to when they were getting their mandated services, and that kind of thing. So, how does an announcement like this morning's square with the reality that a lot of families and students with special needs are facing where they are not getting the mandated amount of time with speech and OT, when they're not getting the services that even though they are legally allowed to, because of these challenges that we have now with the various kinds of learning?

Mayor: It's a very – it's a fair and important question, but also points out, the reason we're making this announcement now is to tell people where we are going. We have a lot of work to do now, but with – all of us have one hand tied behind our back because of the physical reality that's been imposed on us by COVID. Hopefully in the course, even of this school year, we're going to get some substantial relief from that as the vaccine progresses and be able to do better and better during the school year. But we know that the chance to make a more profound difference will come in September. That's why we first announced the academic plan to close the COVID achievement gap, but we're also doing the mirror image, social emotional plan to address the trauma and help kids to be able to get the support they need. And that's going to be so much more effective when everyone is back together in September. We wanted to lay out now what that vision is. To what we are trying to do in the meantime even with all the disadvantages, Chancellor and then LeShawn and Brandon, if they want to add, we could speak to sort of how we're doing our best in this circumstance to serve those kids with IEPs.

Chancellor Carranza: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. So, Katie, three things that I'll say then I'll hand off to LeShawn and Brandon. So, number one, this is about directionality. So, we're giving you a preview of coming attractions so that we're laying out what the vision is for September. And we're looking at this at a big scale because there is no bigger scale in America than New York City's public schools. So, it's important to understand where it is that we're going. So, this is about directionality. Now that should, in no way be conflated with the idea that we aren't doing anything right now. We are doing everything in our power to prioritize our most vulnerable students of whom students with disabilities are certainly part of that group. What's the evidence? Well, when we came back to in-person learning in September, we prioritized students in D75, students with IEPs. Over the summer when we were providing additional supports to students, especially even in our recs in the spring, we prioritized students with disabilities, in fact, finding very innovative ways to provide them with related services in person.

As we go forward, even currently, we're doing as creative and innovative as we can within the current environment that we have to provide students with the services that they need and that are mandated in their IEP, but we don't look at them as mandates. We look at them as the right thing to do for students in the best way we can. And the third thing that I would add to the answer to this question is that remember we're picking currently from a portfolio of imperfect choices. If we had our druthers, everyone would be inoculated, everyone – we would have the ability to come back to school in person, everybody five days a week, providing the kinds of services that we did prior to this COVID-19. We just aren't there. So, for us, it really gives us a whole portfolio of imperfect choices, and we're picking the least imperfect of those choices, but I have to give a lot of credit to those out in the field who have really been going above and beyond to make sure that those that need the services the most, our most vulnerable students, are being prioritized and are getting those services to the best of our ability, given our circumstances.

Mayor: Thank you. LeShawn or Brandon, do you want to add at all?

Deputy Commissioner Robinson: Yes. What I will add is that I have an opportunity to serve the children of the city in my professional capacities, and I am also the parent of one of our city's children as well. My son is a young person with an IEP and as a parent to have the school reach

out for a wellness check, to have the school inquire about my son's social emotional being, and utilize the very practices that we have within the Bridge to School plan, to have the teacher talk about the focus on trauma supports in the school, and making sure that my son, a young person with an IEP, my son is a dyslexic young person, is focused on his social emotional wellbeing first and foremost, even before engaging in the academics has been comforting for my family and really helped my son to re-engage in school this year and has helped him navigate through this difficult time. We know that all children have been impacted and I approached this work first and foremost as a parent of a child in our school system and then as a professional. So, the work that we're doing around social emotional learning is a support for all children, especially our most vulnerable, like our young people with IEPs.

Mayor: Thank you very, very much. Brandon, do you want to add?

Senior Advisor Cardet-Hernandez: Nothing, thank you so much.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Thank you. My second question is a follow-up. You know, I recall this summer leading up to the school year, Mr. Mayor, you often said that the 2020-2021 school year would be the greatest in New York City history. It seems like there's now been a shift to September [inaudible]. Can you explain the difference? And can you also articulate a little bit better or clearer what is being done now, especially for teachers who are working with their students and families who are trying to make up for a lot of the challenges with kids that [inaudible] or at least March?

Mayor: Yeah. It's important. Katie, certainly my goal was to see something happen in this school year that was extraordinary. And, in fact, that has happened. It has been the most heroic school year in New York City history because of what our educators and staff and parents and students have done. Somehow keep forging ahead and finding a way to do things that almost no other school system in America has been able to do. New York City public schools opened, opened safely, continued to be safe and healthy throughout. And extraordinary innovation has taken place both in terms of health and safety and academically to keep things moving forward. So, it's been a heroic year for the New York City public schools, but I think you're right to say that the greatness I want to see us achieve really begins in September because we know that in September, we'll be able to have people back in person in a way that hasn't been possible on a sustained basis for so many parents and kids this year. So, what we're now building is a framework to do things, starting in September, we've never done before, to have pervasive social emotional support, pervasive access to mental health support when it's needed, universal screenings, but also on the academic side, the ability to individualize what every child needs and provide them with more instruction than ever before using new approaches. So, I am tremendously excited about what's going to happen starting in September, but I will a hundred percent affirm the heroism of what's been achieved this year.

Moderator: The next is Amanda from Politico.

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

Mayor: Good, Amanda. How you been?

Question: I'm good. Thank you. So, I wanted to follow up on several of my colleagues' questions in regard to the social emotional program. So, I'm looking at my notes, it's the metrics that Thrive issued in like 2018, 2019, and the metrics include, you know, social, emotional learning within the Health Department, social emotional learning in pre-K, trauma services for families with young children. And I know several people have mentioned that this program builds on various initiatives that Thrive has done. However, Thrive has undergone some changes. There's been cuts to the program, programs removed. My first question is how is this program different than the other programs? And is it repetitive of previous programs that've been funded and since have been cut?

Mayor: Very important question. I'll turn to Chirlane but let me start with a quick frame. I remember the early meetings around Thrive and what was so shocking, this is going back years, is a recognition that there was no functioning mental health system in New York City. And obviously there is not in America. And Thrive came out of a series of discussions with the Health Department, Department of Education, and many others where it became abundantly clear, if we did not provide consistent access to mental health services, we could not help New Yorkers and we couldn't address a lot of the biggest challenges we face, so much of what our kids are going through, and also so many other social challenges that really derive from untreated mental illness. So, Thrive was created to do something that had never existed before. And from the beginning, there was a recognition we were going to take some of the best practices that were known around the world and create some of our own. And we knew some would prove themselves instantly. Some might take some more time, but we also took the chance that some new innovative approaches might prove not to be as effective as others, but we needed to try. We needed to do some experimentation to figure out what would work because it had never been done before. And whenever something's been identified as not good enough, it's been taken out of the program. What has been abundantly successful is social emotional learning, and any of the ways to identify the problem early and get help early. That's been the sort of magic formula in mental health when you identify a problem and connect people to mental health services early. And that unites a lot of the best elements of Thrive that have been most effective and most proven. So, certainly universal screenings in our schools is a – it speaks for itself. You're immediately helping to figure out what a kid needs and get it to them early in their life. And that opens up a world of positive possibilities. So, that's just some of the background, but to Chirlane, to talk about the specifics.

First Lady McCray: Thank you. The Mayor is exactly right that before Thrive most of our most of our services, our mental health services, were handled by the federal government or funded by the federal government and through the State. There really isn't a mental health system, a behavioral health system in this country. And there was a lack of coordination between health care providers and how these services were provided. So Thrive was launched five years ago, after 11 months of talking with people from all kinds of communities in addition to the Health Department and Health + Hospitals and professionals in the field. 11 months of talking to people about what was missing, what we needed to have for people all around the city. And what came out of those discussions was a set of principles. And I'll only name two of them, change the

culture because of the huge stigma that everyone felt around mental health. The fact that we couldn't even talk about it was a problem. And act early. And so social emotional learning was actually one of the first things that we wanted to launch, but we didn't have an infrastructure to build on. And what we've been doing over these years is actually getting ourselves to a place, getting our city to a place where we could actually launch the screening, the last year the curriculum, and that it would be embraced. It would be embraced and people would be invested in it and understand what it is we're trying to do. So social emotional learning is Thrive inspired. It is run by the Department of Education, one of our many agency partners. We have 12 agencies now that work directly with Thrive. But we want every agency actually to be able to deal with mental health in some way. We feel that the best way to provide mental health services is that there's no wrong door. That people, wherever they are, whether they're in the workplace, if they're in ACS or DOE, wherever they are, NYPD that they can get mental health services wherever they are. That's what we're moving to. And in this last year that we have we'll be building on that as much as we can.

Mayor: Amen. Go ahead, Amanda.

Question: Thank you. And then my follow-up question is the sounds pretty similar in terms of strategy to the postpartum depression screenings that were done at Health + Hospitals, became incorporated into Health + Hospitals policy. But when I spoke to people who have either received those screenings or providers, I was told that there's just a lack of resources. So if you get screened for postpartum depression, there's no place to send people or there are a few places to send people. How will this social emotional learning screener be different for kids? If they're getting screened and then it turns out that there are a few places to send them, slash does Health + Hospitals have pediatric programs that deal specifically with mental health issues in children?

Mayor: All right, let me, let me start with a quick frame. I'll turn to Chirlane. And also Dr. Dave Chokshi who spent a substantial amount of time at Health + Hospitals, I think could help us with some of the response. Look, you're raising an absolutely crucial point. So the big frame is this, here's a country that does not have universal health care. Doesn't have Medicare for all. Here's a country that has stigmatized people had mental health challenges for generations. Women with postpartum depression have been made to feel bad about themselves, have been treated like there's something wrong with their character, even though they're dealing with an honest and organic mental health challenge. The backdrop here, Amanda is very troubling. People haven't had access to health care and especially they haven't had access to mental health care. And the whole societal construct is broken. So with Thrive the idea was to first de-stigmatize. Second, give people a place to turn. Whether it was 8-8-8-NYC-WELL, or in the example that you point out with Health + Hospitals to have actual screening, actual dialogue about postpartum depression. And engage a mom and make sure that she knew support was available. We find generally because it's New York City and there are a lot of wonderful providers that we can reach a whole lot of people with the next level of help. And certainly Health + Hospitals has a lot it can provide in terms of mental health support. Is it ubiquitous and perfect? No, but I would contest one part of the question a little bit. I think there are resources here compared to any place else in the country that are superior. And we are able to reach a whole lot of people. But if we truly had a national universal health strategy, we could do a whole lot more. Chirlane?

First Lady McCray: Yeah, I would echo what the Mayor just said, is that we've made historic investments in this area. And there are places that people can turn. It may not be exactly what they want, but there are many, many places that they can turn for help. For example, NYC Well. People can call NYC Well and actually make an appointment while they're on the line with a therapist or appropriate mental health professional. We've made investments in Health + Hospitals. We're hiring social workers. We're doing as much as we can and want to do more. I'm praying for a stimulus so that we can complete our work. But there's no other city that guarantees health care like New York City. And with that guarantee of being able to get a primary care doctor even if you're undocumented comes the ability to actually be referred to a mental health professional as well. So no one, and I do mean no one, should have to go without mental health care in this city.

Mayor: Yeah. And Amanda, before I turn to Dave Chokshi I mean, again, let's remember the role – guaranteed health care in this city, including NYC Care, which ensures that even someone undocumented can get health care for free, that also makes it a lot easier for folks to get mental health support or a mom's suffering postpartum depression to get help. It is not the same as if we had a full universal national health care system. That would be superior unquestionably. But I do want to note that once we put guaranteed health care into place, we change the reality, making it possible for everyone to know that they could access health care regardless of their income, regardless of their documentation status. So again, is there everything we want? No, but is there a lot for people to turn to? I truly believe that there are a lot of good options. Dr. Chokshi, you want to talk specifically about H + H and the way that support is provided when those screenings are done?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. Thank you very much. And thank you for this incredibly important question, Amanda and for inviting me to speak to it Mr. Mayor. I wanted to start by pulling out something that the First Lady said, which is this idea of no wrong door for care. And Health + Hospitals has really made considerable strides over the last few years to bring that notion to life. I had the privilege of helping with much of this work, which centered around the idea that people have relationships with their primary care doctor, with their pediatricians, with their obstetricians. And those are very important when we consider the best way to deliver mental health care as well. And so, the way that that's been done is to ensure that resources are embedded in the right places and clinics and in the hospital setting to actually make that real. So, for your specific question Amanda, which was about postpartum depression screening. One of the ways in which this has worked is that when someone does screen in a way that indicates that they need help with a mental health issue there are resources that are directly available. Through an evidence-based program known as Collaborative Care as well as other resources that have been embedded in Health + Hospitals in large part, thanks to Thrive NYC funding. That includes the social workers that the First Lady mentioned, but also other mental health clinicians who are trained to provide grief counseling for depression, anxiety, and other common mental health issues. So as the Mayor has said, there is more work to be done here. But starting with that notion of no wrong door and making it so that there are clear channels for people to be connected to the services that they need, are the principles that have been used.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Hello. Good morning. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yes. You sound crystal clear Andrew. This is a step forward.

Question: Great. I want to ask Mayor, on Friday, the Governor displayed sort of a surprising confidence in New York's ability to avoid a shutdown. And it seems to be a little bit of a disconnect from what we've heard from you and your health numbers? You're urging people to cancel their plans. You're alarmed by the seven-day positivity. And yet the Governor's take seems to be despite the increase in recent weeks, the hospital system can handle it. I'm wondering what's your response to that?

Mayor: The Governor and I have talked about this a lot, Andrew. And he and I spoke this morning. The hospitalization reality, which he's focused on is of course, the single most important piece of the equation. And, you know, when he announced his vision related to hospitals, I joined him for that. And I thought he was right to say, what we learned in the spring was that our hospital system has to be able to handle what's thrown at it. Again, I affirm in New York City hospitals, including all our public hospitals did an extraordinary job in the spring under the worst possible circumstances, but they held. The question now, again, is, as we deal with the second wave, will our hospitals hold? Will they be able to provide high quality care? Will they be able to save lives? I'm convinced the answer is yes. And the Governor's right to say, that's the first consideration. But he's also said, and I've said that restrictions are still a very live option if we don't stop this spread. And that we need everyone to participate. So I don't want restrictions. I don't know anyone who wants restrictions, but we have to be ready for them. If we cannot stop the situation from getting a lot worse. And that means anyone that doesn't want restrictions should be wearing a mask, practicing, distancing, canceling their travel plans, having small gatherings only, helping us to stop this spread. So I think there's a lot of agreement on the basics here. I'm going to be watching very carefully. And if at any point my health leadership, and I feel that the situation is getting, taking a new turn and that we need to more urgently change and move to restrictions. We will call that out immediately. But right now, thank God, again, our hospitals are doing very well. And that's a credit to all the good people who work in them. Go ahead. Andrew.

Question: At the start of this call today, you said you believe there should be a travel ban on, I will just, I'll get you to elaborate on what you think it should be? If this is just flights coming in from the UK or from other parts of Europe? And as an aspect of that, we expect the Governor to talk about this as well and say, this is the FAA's job, the federal government. But if this is a really urgent situation, could you not send your own Health Department to JFK Airport and to do something much more aggressive with regard to the folks who are landing even today?

Mayor: I really appreciate that question because I take a very stern view of this matter. And I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi on this as well. Andrew, I think, you know, this is something the Governor's talked about. I agree with him 100 percent you know, way back when, when this started. Trump administration put a travel ban effect for China. I thought that was the right thing to do, but they didn't do it for Europe. That was the huge mistake. And that's what left New York

City vulnerable. Now you fall fast forward. I said a month or two ago, there should be a requirement for international and domestic travel that people prove they have a negative test result before getting on a plane. I think that's just common sense. I put that out there. Federal government was not interested in pursuing that. I think they should have then. I think they should do it now at minimum. But now that you're saying, here you have a new strain, apparently even more infectious developing in the UK, already spreading in Europe. I think the best solution is at least a temporary travel ban from all incoming, for all incoming flights from Europe and the UK, to protect us against an exacerbation of a second wave. Why on Earth wouldn't we put that temporary measure in effect? We can't do that, only the federal government could. At least have a requirement for a negative test before getting on a plane. I do not believe we have the independent ability, unfortunately, to turn people back or I would be doing it right this minute. But to the bigger challenge, Dr. Varma, then Dr. Chokshi to talk about this new strain and the challenges we face from it?

Senior Advisor Varma: Great. Thank you very much for the question. This is a really concerning development. I've reviewed the evidence from the UK and concur with the assessment that there is a lot of uncertainty, but what we know right now is that the strain does appear to cause infections more readily. It does not appear to cause infections more seriously. That is your risk of having a severe outcome does not appear to be changed. There is of course, a lot more to learn. And we may modify those assessments over time. Now in terms of what we need to do here, I think the Mayor is absolutely correct that one of the things we in the global health community have learned is that restricting travel can be a very important way to slow the growth of new infections. I think it's unlikely that we could ever stop this strain or other strains from entering the US. But temporarily restricting travel can certainly do that. The longer-term strategy, however, is exactly as the Mayor has said. We need to really be adopting the measures that other countries around the world do, which is testing before departure, testing upon arrival. And then of course, you know, continuing to enforce the, not only the State requirements, but even having a federal requirement for isolation and quarantine. The last point I will make is really the big picture. And the big picture is how does this happen? Now we know viruses mutate. This virus probably adapts and you know, changes one or two times every month is what we know by its biology. The way we stop this virus from replicating and causing new mutations is to have fewer people infected with the virus. The virus doesn't mutate on its own in the wild, it mutates in human bodies. So, the only way that we can really prevent this virus from mutating into a more infectious strand here in the US, is to reduce the number of infections by all the measures that we've been talking about.

Mayor: Amen, Dr. Chokshi, you want to add?

Commissioner Chokshi: Dr. Varma covered all of the high points. The one that I'll just emphasize is how much this underlines the importance of quarantine associated with travel. We take this extremely seriously for the reasons that Dr. Varma has pointed out and because of the holidays we are worried about additional travel occurring over these coming days. It makes it all the more important. Our advice is do not travel, cancel your holiday plans. If for whatever reason it is absolutely unavoidable to travel, the importance of following the quarantine requirements becomes even more paramount.

Mayor: Amen. Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: The last question for today goes to David Cruz from Gothamist.

Question: Hi Mr. Mayor. How are you doing?

Mayor: Good, David. How you been?

Question: Pretty good. So there was a school in Park Slope, an elementary school in Park Slope that had tested only one of two cohorts since the randomized testing program began. And the teachers have explained that they've asked the testers to come on different days, but they've been ignored. And at least two other schools that I've spoken with have also experienced the same occurrence. And you've spoken about how rigorous testing is, though this doesn't appear so in at least these two cases. So, what could this months long oversight?

Mayor: Okay. David, I appreciate the question and I really want to make sure – so first of all, please share the information with our team here, because any school that's not going through the right cohort approach, that's something we want to fix immediately. We can fix immediately. That could be as easy as just changing the days when the testing occurs. I would caution that the weekly testing has only been done recently. That's only since we came back a few weeks ago and put the weekly testing into place. So the months long, I want to be careful when you say that. That we get the facts, I would be surprised if it was something as long as that, but I want to see the facts and act on it. The bottom line is we will do that testing in every school every week. We want different people to the maximum extent possible each week, obviously. And that's what gives us the clearer picture of what's going on. What we do know is the positivity levels across all our schools have been really strikingly low, thank God. It's a great credit to our school communities, but we need it to be always an accurate measure. So I'll ask Dr. Chokshi to follow up with his colleagues in the Test and Trace team and make sure in these individual cases that we adjust in any way we have to. Go ahead, David. David? Do we still have him? He's gone? Oh, he's on. David, you're there? He's on, but we can't hear him. It's a neat trick. I don't know if you're mute? All right. Microphone trouble it is. Well, I'm going to conclude, unless you can use the miracle of technology to bring him back.

Moderator: We'll circle back to Dr. Chokshi.

Mayor: No, I meant the journalist.

Moderator: Oh, David Cruz. Can we hear you?

Question: Yeah, I'm here now.

Mayor: There you go.

Question: Well, just want to say, a point of clarification for Park Slope, it's been happening since October. I know they had the monthly program, but it happened October, November and into December. So just want to make sure that that is noted. And unrelated question to that,

regarding Times Square on New Year's Eve, what is being done to make sure people don't congregate?

Mayor: A very good question. And you know, David, I liked the fact that your question involves the words New Year's Eve, because that means that 2020 is almost over. So, let me start with that. It's something we can all celebrate. You're exactly right. New Year's Eve this year is not a place, Times Square is not a place to congregate. We are going to get that message out intensely over the next days, set up a protocol to avoid people congregating. We'll have details on that soon. We have had honestly, pretty good success. I think Thanksgiving Day is a great example of that. Obviously, the Macy's parade, one of the biggest events all year in New York City. Again, thanks to Macy's for the way they handled it. And thanks to the NYPD and all the other City agencies that were involved. It managed to be something that was a really wonderful televised event that people could still feel the continuity and the emotion of it, but not a place where people gathered and that was achieved successfully there. We're going to use a model like that for New Year's Eve. So, details coming, but exactly the right idea. It will be on television. You'll still see the ball drop. But we're letting people know right now, it's not a place to be in-person.

Okay. Everyone, as we wrap up, look today what we talked about is really about people looking out for each other. New Yorkers have been amazing in 2020, truly amazing, having each other's backs, watching out for each other, helping each other through. When the heroic story of 2020 in New York City is written, it will be about the way New Yorkers were just there for each other. Well, what we announced today is about being there for our kids, being there for our parents. Making sure that if a child's going through distress, if they're feeling the effects of the trauma of this year, that we're recognizing it, we're talking to them about it and their family. We're helping them through. We're getting them the support they need. One of the powerful things that's been done over these years in New York City, and I really give our First Lady credit for this incessant work of de-stigmatizing, taking away any notion that if you're having a mental health challenge, there's something wrong with you. There isn't anything wrong with you. There never was anything wrong with someone who had a mental health challenge. It's part of human life. And we need to be able to talk about challenges. When we talk about them, we can act on them. So universal screening is going to allow us to really engage every child and connect with every family. And for any child who needs help, it's going to create an atmosphere where they feel good about the fact that they can talk about a problem and then help will be there. And that's how we move forward as a city, just being there for each other. We've all been through so much. We'll be talking about it for a long time. But what's most important is we're all going to help each other through. And very soon, we're going to be doing that in a brand new year. And we can't wait. Thank you, everybody.

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