

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 16, 2020, 8:30 AM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEAR LIVE ON MSNBC'S MORNING JOE

Mika Brzezinski: Joining us now, the Mayor of New York City, Democrat Bill de Blasio. First off, what is the latest citywide positivity rate right now?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Well, Mika, look, we are fighting back this second wave here in New York City. And I just want to tell you, it's amazing what New Yorkers are doing. On Friday alone, 75,000 people came out to get tested and that's really helping us to manage the situation. So, the latest information that we just got now, our seven-day average positivity is 2.77 percent. We just got that information now. So, New York City public schools are open today. They'll be open tomorrow. And if people keep doing what they're doing, coming out for the testing, wearing those face coverings, there's a real chance here we can fight back this second wave.

Brzezinski: And where are you on keeping schools open? And are you and the Governor aligned?

Mayor: Yeah, we've had some really good conversations about this. What you played there in that clip, Mika, I think reflects the conversation. Look, we set a standard of three percent to keep faith with our families and with our educators and our staff. We said, look, after everything this city went through, the epicenter of the crisis back in the spring, we would bring schools back, unlike almost any other major city in America, we would bring schools back, but do it very, very safely. We've been able to prove that, Mika. We've had extraordinarily low positivity rates in the schools. We've got a gold standard we've put in place for safety measures, health measures to keep everyone safe. Everyone wears a mask, kids and adults alike, every day in school. It's worked. But now if we reach this three percent level, God forbid, but if we reach it, we're going to have to do some kind of reset. It's not a matter of saying, let's just forget we had that. No, that was a rule we made to keep faith with people and show our commitment to safety. We're going to live by that rule. But then the question is how do we come back as quickly as possible? And I agree with the Governor, a different approach to testing could be a really crucial part of a fast comeback.

Brzezinski: Sure, especially if Biden gets that DPA going. Kasie Hunt is with us and she has the next question.

Kasie Hunt: Hi, Mr. Mayor, good morning. You guys sent a note over the weekend to New York City parents saying, be prepared for schools to close on Monday. And obviously that sent a lot of people into a bit of a tailspin. It's pretty hard if you've got two parents possibly working from home, possibly, you know, people who can't work from home having to go out, have

childcare problems, and yet you're still letting people dine inside. So, I understand there's an economic impact from shutting restaurants, but the ripple effects of closing the schools before you close the indoor dining are pretty significant. Why make the decision that way?

Mayor: Kasie, it's a very fair question. Let me first say I was a public school parent in New York City public schools. I certainly understand how much parents are grappling with and how difficult it has been. And that's part of why I wanted to give them a warning that we were getting close to that number and have a plan-B ready. But what I'm trying to do, Kasie, is stop us from ever getting to that three percent and New Yorkers are responding. So, my hope is that we can keep school going for quite a while, while we fight back this second wave. But on the question of the restaurants, look, ultimately the State has to make that decision. But what I'd say is we are concerned about indoor dining. It's only 25 percent. It's when – there's a lot of safety and health standards that are part of indoor dining to make it a safe experience. But obviously we're concerned about things like indoor dining if these numbers continue to go up.

The challenge with schools, remember again, how much the city went through, we needed to convince parents and teachers and staff that they would be in a safe environment. By saying we would take that three percent rule, that was part of how we gained the trust and were able to reopen our school system and why there's 300,000 kids that will be going to school this week in New York City. We can't simply turn that off and say, hey, we didn't mean it. No, we did mean it. We meant the highest possible health and safety standards. But, again, if we ever have to shut down, I think there's a way we can turn around and come back quickly.

Brzezinski: Jonathan Lemire –

Jonathan Lemire: Mr. Mayor, I wanted to pick up on that thread. Previously, indoor dining was to be closed completely if the city positivity rate crossed two percent. The city has done that, but yet indoor dining, though limited, remains open. So, why not have, if that decision is made, why not have similar flexibility when it comes to the school system? If it does cross three percent, why not be able to keep them open? What message is that sending that indoor dining would be open yet, schools would not be? How much of a role is the teacher's union playing in this, Sir?

Mayor: Yeah, Jonathan, I've known you a long time, so I hate to have to correct you but that first statement just isn't true. The two percent was my statement to the State that when it got to two percent, I urged them to reevaluate indoor dining. That was not a rule. The State makes those rules and they did not put that rule into effect. I do think we have to reevaluate indoor dining. It's been very successful. It's saved a lot of small businesses and I care deeply about these mom-and-pop businesses. It has been safe, but, of course, it needs to be re-evaluated, but that was never a hard and fast rule. The State has to make that decision. And what they've done obviously is now limited the hours for all dining – indoor, outdoor. It's up to them what the next step's going to be.

Lemire: Well, let me follow up there, Mr. Mayor, but the point remains about the school system that why, if there can be flexibility, the State or otherwise about indoor dining, why not the same with the schools? As Kasie just outlined the burden on working parents in New York City, one year familiar with of course, why not be able to perhaps more targeted enforcement rather than a

system-wide shut down? And if the schools are to shut down, how long would they be shut down for?

Mayor: So, Jonathan, it's a very important question. Look, I'm the guy who wanted to reopen our public schools. And there are a lot of naysayers. You may remember a lot of people said, it's impossible to reopen public schools in New York City, it's not safe. And I said, we're reopening. We owe it to our kids and families, and we're going to make it safe. We've proven it could be safe, but we did it with very stringent standards. And one of the promises I made to parents and teachers and staff is if we started to see a major uptick, which we defined as three percent or more on a regular basis, I'm not going to keep schools open until we have a different approach to make them even safer. And I think that's the reality right now, Jonathan. If we get to three percent, we will shut down for a period of time, but I want to come back quickly. Quickly to me means within a matter of weeks. And as the Governor said, and I agree with him, with some additional measures in place to guarantee people's safety. Our students, parents, educators, staff, they need to know they're going to be safe. And so, we can add additional testing standards, additional measures, and my hope is if we even have to close down – and that's not a foregone conclusion – but if we have to close down that we can turn it around quickly with an even tighter system that can give people that confidence.

Brzezinski: Mayor Bill de Blasio, thank you very much once again for coming on the show this morning.

Mayor: Thank you, Mika.

###