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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. We do not just have good news this morning, we have great news this morning. Really wonderful, powerful, clear indications of the fact that New York City is moving in the right direction. We are getting healthier all the time. We are opening up. We are recovering. We are definitely winning the battle against COVID. So, let's talk right now about the positivity level in the city. I'll do the full indicators later, but, right now, 1.13 percent – the lowest since September. This is really striking, COVID is being run out of New York City because everyone's going out and getting vaccinated, doing the right thing. This is an eight-month low and this is a great, great sign for where we're going.

Now, the vaccination effort continues to move forward. We're getting very close to 8 million vaccinations. Officially, as of today, 7,962,139 doses from day-one, climbing all the time. Let me give you some facts about who has been vaccinated. Seniors – 70 percent of seniors in New York City have received at least one dose – 70 percent. 60 percent of all adults in New York City have received at least one dose. And 50 percent of adults are fully vaccinated. So, things are moving forward, moving forward aggressively. We've got more to do, unquestionably, but these are really, really great numbers that give me a lot of faith about the direction we're going in.

So, we know vaccination works. Vaccination equals freedom – simple as that. Vaccination equals freedom. More and more people getting vaccinated, they need us to reach them. They need us to make it accessible, convenient, fun. And that's what we're doing, so let me give you an update. More and more incentives available. Anyone who likes the incentives you've heard about already – if you like Nets playoff tickets, if you like free admission to the Bronx Zoo, or, if you're like me, and you like French fries from Shake Shack, all you've got to do is go to vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/benefits – vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/benefits to find out all the different prizes and incentives available.

Now, we have a new, exciting incentive now. It is the New York City vaccine contest. This is a new contest that's going to make really great prizes available. We're going to do it every week. So, every week we will announce a new contest and the prize will be announced – what it will be, will be announced the beginning of the week. And then, the following Monday, we will say exactly the winners of the prizes. And anyone – anyone that goes to a City-run vaccination site and gets newly vaccinated qualifies. Anyone who goes to one of those sites, gets newly vaccinated qualifies. You opt in when you go and get your reservation for your first dose appointment. Now, this will be going through now, the end of May, through June, into the beginning of July. What kind of prizes are we talking about? Staycation packages – think about that. Everyone's been at home a little too much, might be nice to go to a hotel – one of our great hotels here in the city – and enjoy some other great amenities and entertainment. So, there's

going to be staycation packages, Broadway show tickets, something so many New Yorkers are yearning for. These great opportunities – obviously, free prizes for folks who get newly vaccinated. And let's talk about this week's prizes. So, first of all, there'll be 10 available prizes in this category. Free one-year passes to Crunch Fitness – all free, whole year, Crunch Fitness. Now, full disclosure, I'm a YMCA guy – I don't know if anyone's heard that – but Crunch is good too, and free for a year is very good. So, this contest starts right now this week for everyone who signs up to get vaccinated. And then – this one's fantastic – we talked a few days back about the Governor's Ball coming back – incredible acts – absolutely incredible acts. For all you Megan Thee Stallion fans, here's your opportunity. Three-day passes to the Governor's Ball. Are you saying only one is available? No, I'm saying 50 are available – 50 three-day passes to the Governor's Ball. So, amazing acts – get vaccinated, go to the Governor's Ball, couldn't be simpler than that. And anyone who wants to be a part of this, real simple rules, you just need to be 18 or older and you need to book your appointment this week.

So, this just continues to show there are so many ways to get people focused and excited about getting vaccinated so we can keep moving forward with a recovery for all of us. But there's also a lot of great news out there showing us the recovery is moving and we just got some great news about one of our favorite people – Stephen Colbert. The Late Show with Stephen Colbert will be resuming with a live audience at the Ed Sullivan Theater on June 14th. Full audience – full audience of vaccinated folks enjoying one of the great comedians of our time. Everyone, this is – this is incredible news. This shows we're moving forward, moving forward fast. And it's further proof – we say, there's no stop in New York. It's so clear, New Yorkers are making it happen in so many ways. There's no stop in New York. There's no stopping Stephen Colbert, he's coming back and so many others are going to be coming back soon. So, that's the way forward for the city.

Now, we need to bring back a lot of different pieces of the city. For months, I've been talking about how important it is to bring back our court system. As of today, all court employees – this is a State operation, let's be clear – as of today, all court employees are supposed to be back. We, of course, want to do everything we can do to support them and keep them safe. We need courts running full bore, full steam ahead so that we can deal with the whole criminal justice system working again. We can have the reality of dealing with anyone who has committed a crime that they go through due process and, if there are consequences, they get those consequences. We haven't had that for a year. We're finally going to have that again. We're going to support this as part of our Safe Summer New York City plan with a full whole effort to make sure that anyone who needs vaccination who is part of the court system gets it. So, we'll have pop-up vaccine sites outside the courts today. There'll be open from nine to five to get all staff vaccinated. Locations at Lou Gehrig Plaza in the Bronx, at the Staten Island Courthouse Plaza, and at Queens Borough Hall. Every piece affects everything else, so getting folks vaccinated, work in the court system, getting the court system up and running fully is key to making New York City safe this summer, is key to addressing gun violence. So, this is a crucial piece of the equation.

Now, we have seen some acts in the last few days – acts of violence and acts of hatred that are absolutely unacceptable and have caused a lot of pain, honestly. I've talked with members of the Jewish community who have really felt hurt in every way to see people attacked simply because of who they are, because of their faith, because of their ethnicity, to be attacked because of who they are. That goes against everything we believe in as New Yorkers. It goes against everything New York City is about. We will not tolerate it. And I always say, when it comes to fighting hate

crimes, whether they're directed at the Jewish community, the Asian community, the Muslim community, any community – it's the same approach. Educate, bring out people of goodwill to stand in solidarity with each other and support each other, but also clear consequences for anyone who commits a hate crime. So, the NYPD is now out in force. There have already been arrests from the incidents we saw on Thursday. There's certainly going to be arrests from what we saw in the last 24 hours. Yesterday, I was in Borough Park in Brooklyn at the 6-6 Precinct, meeting with police officials and community leaders about the importance of police presence in the community. You're going to see that presence. We know how to do this the right way, how to put the presence out there that gives people a sense of security and certainly sends a message to anyone with hatred in their heart that they shouldn't even think about it. And we're going to protect the Jewish community and make sure people feel that that protection is there for them. And we have to move forward. And I've been really clear about the fact that anti-Semitism been growing in recent years around the world. We have to stop it. And if there's one place it needs to be stopped once and for all it's right here in New York City, and we will do that. We will stomp it out. No place for anti-Semitism in New York City.

Okay. Now, a lot of important news today, but this is a case of saving the biggest news for last, and it is a very, very big deal. I am so happy to tell you – and I was a New York City public school parent. Every single day my kids went to school, they went to a New York City public school. They got a great education. And this has been such a tough year, what parents have been through, what kids have been through. It's time for everyone to come back. It's time for us all to be together. It's time to do things the way they were meant to be done – all the kids in the classroom together, getting a great education from educators who care, staff members who care, the school community coming back fully. So, I'm very pleased to announce New York City public schools will fully reopen in September. Every single child will be back in the classroom. I have talked to so many parents who have been wanting to hear this confirmed and I am confirming it once and for all. We're going to have plenty of protections in place as we proved, even during the toughest months of COVID, that we could keep kids and staff safe with a gold standard of health and safety measures. We're going to do that again. We're going to keep our situation room running. Look, New York City proved – when other cities didn't even dare to reopen their schools, we reopened our schools and we proved they could be safe. We're going to do that again. We're going to support kids. We're going to support the whole family. We're going to show that we'll do new things to reach kids academically and to address their emotional issues. But it only works if everyone is back in person, the way education was meant to be.

So, this is going to be crucial for families. So many parents are relieved, I know. And it's also going to help us move this whole city forward. Now, I want you to get a little more sense of what this means. So, I'm going to turn to live correspondent, live from the New Bridges Elementary School in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Our live correspondent, Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter, are you there?

Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I am live from Brooklyn at New Bridges Elementary School with Principal Bowles, and we are here today to announce the full reopening of schools for September. Can we get some noise?

[Cheers]

Today is a very, very special day, but you don't need to hear from me. I have some very special correspondents with me today who are going to tell you why this is a special day.

[...]

Mayor: Amazing.

Chancellor Ross Porter: I couldn't have said it better myself. We've been dancing and singing all morning here at New Bridges, because this day is for us. It's for all of us. It's for the parents, the educators, and the young people who've waited for the light at the end of the tunnel. This will be the return to our new normal, to learning, to friends, and everything else the school community has to offer our children. And, as the Mayor said on September 13th, 2021, New York City public schools will fully reopen for all students.

[Cheers]

For the first time – we will be back for the first time in 18 months. There will not be a remote option. Because of that, there will be no COVID-related accommodations. The last 14 months put a stark spotlight on how nothing can replace the importance of the in-person educator in class with his or her students. So, we will welcome all of our teachers and staff members back in the fall. At least half of fully vaccinated and even more will be by September. And now, most of our middle and high school students are eligible for vaccines as well.

We would not be doing this if our schools were not safe. I'm a mother. I'm a mother of a New York City high school student who was so excited. She was singing and dancing this morning. And so, we would never take any risks with our most important assets, and that's our children. We have invested in nurses, in ventilation, and in testing for our schools. And thanks to our gold standard health and safety policies. Our seven-day school positivity rate is incredibly low – 0.16 percent. As of now, in September, masks will be required. Look at how beautiful they look in their masks, right? Masks will be required and we will continue to follow the CDC social distancing guidelines at that point. But we know how to be nimble. We are New Yorkers and we are in Brooklyn today, and we will continue to monitor the CDC protocols for guidance in the fall.

This has been a challenging year in so many ways. We cannot return without acknowledging the enormous losses and the enormous learnings for our communities, meeting them – we will continue to meet them where they are and support them with whatever they need. Our new normal we'll include social-emotional supports in every school. Our new normal will include increased funding, no hiring restrictions for school pedagogues, and expanding our teacher pipeline to bring more educators into our system. Our new normal will include our school communities becoming completely whole again, finally, at long last. We know many families, many educators, many community members still have more questions and may have some concerns. And I say to you, I hear you. We are here. We will continue to listen and answer questions. I'm currently in the midst of the five-borough tour of family engagement forums to answer all of your questions. Please join us for those important conversations. This summer, our schools will open their doors for you, starting in June to host visits, we want to welcome our families, and we want you to see our schools, see how safe and ready they are, and a shout out to all of the principals, teachers, school food workers, school safety agents, all of the folks who

have done so much – our crossing guards, our custodians, to keep our building safe, to keep them ready, and I personally, not only as the Chancellor and an educator, but as a mother, am so grateful to each and every one of them. It's your turn, DOE – get vaccinated. Every New Yorker who is vaccinated is another step towards the light at the end of the tunnel. Do it for yourself, do it for your community, do it for our babies, mark it on your calendars. Guys, ready? September 13th. We stepped back into the light, and welcome all of our young people back to school. This is the day for them. More importantly, this is the day for all of us. I'm passing it back to you, Mr. Mayor, you missed all the singing and dancing. The fun is right here at New Bridges Elementary School, right guys?

[Applause]

Mayor: Meisha Ross Porter found possibly the cutest kids in all of New York City, right there. I'm like blown away. What a beautiful performance, such great energy and passion for those kids. I also want to thank the teacher, Alice Sweet, for her amazing work. You could see her passion and intensity and love for our kids. Drawing out that beautiful, beautiful music from them. This is an example, you know, they say a picture's worth a thousand words. That song alone shows you why it's so important for our kids to be back. What a difference it makes the magic happens in the classroom, that just can't happen remotely, and that's why we're going to bring everyone back together, now. We're doing it for our kids because it's the best way to educate our kids, support them academically, support them emotionally. We're doing it for them. But let me also talk about parents. I've talked to so many parents who have done their best to be at home teachers. They've done their best to support their kids. They've done their best to juggle work and other obligations. They're ready for a break too, and I know one parent who I think definitely can speak for many parents in her district for the, that they are ready for a change and ready to move forward. Council Member, Majority Leader of the New York City Council, Laurie Cumbo of Brooklyn. Laurie?

[...]

Mayor: You look very happy, Laurie. You look happy. That's a big smile there.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much Majority Leader. You always make the show better and thank you for bringing your passion to everything you do, and this is a wonderful day. Thank you for your leadership as well.

All right, now you want more good news. We have more good news and it's our indicators. This is just wonderful, and again, you earned it, you earned it, everything you did, all New Yorkers, and you can make it even better by getting vaccinated. So, here we go. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID 19 today's report, 85, only 85 patients confirmed positivity level 18.82 percent. This is really, really good to see. And hospitalization rate per 100,000, 0.81, continuing that downward slope. We want to keep driving it down. Now, new reported cases. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average daily report, 405 cases. Look at that go down and down and down, and number three, as I said earlier, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 today's report on seven day rolling average. It is not been this good since September last year, a 1.13 percent.

Absolutely amazing. Okay. Few words in Spanish, and I'm going back to the reopening of our schools.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Good morning. We will now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we are joined by Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Senior Advisor on Public Health Dr. Jay Varma, and Dr. Mitch Katz, President and CEO of New York City Health and Hospitals. Our first question goes to James Ford from PIX 11.

Mayor: Hey James, can you hear me?

Question: Great yeah, I've been having some phone issues, so apologies there. Thanks very much for taking the call and happy new week.

Mayor: It's a good week, James. How're you doing?

Question: So far, so great. Thank you very much. I appreciate you asking. I'll begin with a question posed by my colleague, Nicole Johnson who points out that a person was pushed in Queens this morning onto the tracks at a subway stop and that we're seeing violence, violent incidents in the subway repeatedly lately. Have the additional officers that you have referenced being deployed in the subway been deployed? Has there been much planning to have their shifts actually on the trains and on the platforms increased? And how soon, if at all, do you expect to see a turnaround in this situation?

Mayor: James, important questions. The deployments obviously have just happened. They have happened, but it's just been done to go up to this, now, higher-level, the largest police force in the subways in New York City in over 25 years. Now, James, you can think back to 25 years ago and before when we had many, many challenges, the fact that we put this much focus, this much personnel into the subways, unquestionably is going to have a huge impact, but we're going to keep doing whatever it takes, including the mental health services in the subways, the homeless outreach in the subways, all of this adds up and will keep adding up. But we also know, and the public safety experts say it, the recovery itself is going to have a huge impact on safety, more and more people coming back to the subways, more and more everyday New Yorkers being in the subways helps keep everyone safe. So, the recovery is happening, we can see it. Subway ridership going up, bus ridership going up. It's going to have an impact, a positive impact on safety, but unquestionably this level of NYPD presence will make a big difference. Go ahead, James.

Question: We've been getting input from various New Yorkers regarding having alcohol served on the go and possibly keeping it as part of New York City life as the pandemic winds down. Can you talk about the prospects for that continuing?

Mayor: Look, I don't know, what's being thought about at the state level and obviously the State Liquor Authority has an important role here, but I'd say it worked as something to sustain

restaurants and bars during the pandemic. I think we should keep it up for the foreseeable future. It was something that was important to people, important to keeping those jobs, important to keeping those businesses going. We are not out of this yet in terms of full economic recovery. So, I would say, keep it going for the foreseeable future and then reevaluate down the line.

Moderator: Our next question goes to Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. Hope you're doing well.

Mayor: How are you doing today, Andrew?

Question: Good. I'm wondering if you can address – as excited as people are, and as parents are to hear the news about their kids going back in September, there are parents who are beside themselves, that here we are on May 24th and in particular high school parents, their kids, if they're lucky, go to school two days a week, and when they are in the classroom, they don't have a teacher in front of them on there watching a teacher on a zoom, and so there are parents out there who are not exactly ready to throw a parade about this news because they wonder, given the transmission level that exists right now, why you couldn't have delivered this reality sooner?

Mayor: Why Andrew, look, first of all, we just want to be very clear. A lot of our high school students obviously are getting in-person instruction. There are parts of the days in some high schools where it's otherwise, but let's be very clear, in-person instruction is the norm all over the city for kids who are in person and just being in a school building is positive unto itself. It's a safe environment with caring adults. There's an academic support. There's emotional support. There's a lot of reasons why it's good. We, every step along the way showed parents what was happening, created a gold standard of health and safety that worked. We offered the opt-in periods. Parents made a decision, I understand why many cases they'd gotten used to the norm with remote and they didn't want to disrupt late in the year, but September is a whole different ball game. A lot of parents said to me, let us know as soon as possible and let you know, as soon as possible, let's all come back, we're ready, and undoubtedly the news is going to continue to get better as more and more people get vaccinated, and there's plenty of time to get kids who are eligible vaccinated. So, I am looking forward. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Do you have a scenario where, and correct me if I'm wrong, the current plan for the fall is the only time they'll be remote is if there's a snow day, right? Then everybody would be home learning remotely. Is that a model to ramp up to a larger remote option in the event that the hard to believe happens and that we have a variant or an uptick or seasonality ends, that kind of thing. Could you conceive of announcing in the fall, we're back to remote in some capacity.

Mayor: I can't conceive of it based on all the facts we know now. So, I want to be very clear, Andrew. We've been led by the data and the science throughout this whole challenge, data and the science couldn't be clearer. Vaccination works. Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz said from the very beginning, you get millions of millions of people vaccinated, it's going to be a whole new ball game. Well, guess what? It's a whole new ball game. So, no, I cannot conceive of that situation based on the facts we know. If some absolutely unexpected circumstance occurred, could we move quickly to remote? Of course, because we had to do it before under much worse circumstances, but I do not foresee that.

Moderator: Next, we have Emma Fitzsimmons from the New York Times.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor. I wanted to find out, you know, what do you say to families who are not ready to return in person? What options do they have if they still don't feel safe in September?

Mayor: Emma, I want to really say – and I'm a parent and you know, it's the thing I feel most deeply is my experience as a parent, we got to understand we're leaving COVID behind. We can't live in the grip of COVID the rest of our lives. It is going to be in our past as a crisis. It may be yet another disease out there, like the flu and other things, but it will be manageable. So, we got to put COVID behind ourselves mentally, too. And you know, there's four months between now and September. We're going to keep showing the data. We're going to keep showing people the health and safety measures. We're going to invite parents to come in, in June and throughout the summer, see your schools, ask your questions, get the information you need. But it's just time for everyone to come back. So, plenty of lead time, plenty of time to answer questions and concerns. But we got to start recognizing we can go back to the world that was before COVID. In fact, I want to make it better than it was before COVID. But it's time to start understanding that we can actually return to the things we knew. Go ahead, Emma.

Question: Thanks. I know you've been getting some questions about the mayor's race but there's also a Republican primary I was at with Curtis Sliwa. He says everywhere he goes, New Yorkers say that they hate you. Fernando Mateo, I know he helped fundraise for you. I'm curious, what do you think of the Republican primary and what it says about the party, the Republican party in New York City?

Mayor: I don't think much about it. It's a side show honestly. They don't have a snowball's chance in hell of winning a general election. So, God bless them.

Moderator: Next we have Alex Zimmerman from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. Back in March, you said that your expectation is that the City would have to have a remote option in the fall. I'm wondering what changed your thinking?

Mayor: It's May. The data has been unbelievably clear. Vaccination worked ahead of schedule. It's had even more impact than we thought it would. CDC has been sending very clear signals about our ability to come back fully in so many senses. It's a whole new day. It's just a whole new reality and we're ready. Go ahead Alex.

Question: The UFT is also, I think, sounds largely on board with there being a dramatic expansion of in-person, at least required in the fall, but have suggested there should be a continued remote option for extreme medical challenges. Is that on the table at all here? Can you speak to that at all? And sort of related to that if there is no remote option, can you also just elaborate a little bit on the safety procedures here? Like if a student has COVID symptoms and they need to stay home, are they just out of luck for instruction on those days? Like how is this going to work?

Mayor: Look, Alex on the first point we will resume the rules that existed before the pandemic. So, there always were rules for providing accommodation for very particular and severe

circumstances that existed before we ever heard a COVID. We're going to resume the pre COVID rules. And look, we're going to work to figure out the right way to handle a kid who is home sick for anything. We obviously have something new now with the digital opportunities. But that would be true for kids who have other diseases that might be home sick with something else as well. We got to figure out ways that we can provide them something. I think there are ways we could do that with digital learning packages and one thing or another. But what we will not be planning on at all is remote instruction as we've known it. We're planning on only one type of instruction in-classroom, in-person, teacher at the front of the room, kids in the classroom.

Moderator: Next we have Jillian Jorgenson from NY1.

Question: Hi, Mayor. Thanks for taking my question. I guess my first question is I know that you're saying that you're going to be doing some work to get these families to feel more comfortable sending their children back. As you know, 60 percent of families or more have kept their children home. But what if they don't get comfortable their children back? Is there any concern that the City could see a drop in enrollment, whether that's families looking to all remote charters or looking to homeschool, which is obviously a much bigger lift than remote learning had been? What happens if that you know, materializes?

Mayor: Look, I'll bring the Chancellor in on this one too. But let me offer my strong view. I think parents care first and foremost about their kids and the health and safety of their kids. But there's just overwhelming evidence now that things are changing rapidly for the better. I don't think parents want to live in the past. Everything that happened in previous circumstance was based on a set of facts that don't exist anymore. I think parents want to look forward. I think parents are really tired, having tried to juggle all of these roles and are going to be ready for a positive change. Chancellor, you want to jump in?

Chancellor Porter: Yes, sure. Good morning, Jill. You know, we've heard overwhelmingly from parents that is time to get back to school and time to get back to our new normal. And like how the young people said this morning, this is our day. And we know, and I've said to you over and over again, I know that we have to continue to be in conversation with parents. We have to continue to build trust with parents. That's why starting in June, we're going to be opening up our school buildings so parents can come in, see our buildings, take tours. And our principals are going to be sure to share, have conversations with their parents. Because the fact of the matter is who the parents want to hear from is directly from the principals about what their school is going to look like in September. And we are, you know, we've heard also overwhelmingly from principals how glad they are to get this news now so they can get prepared for September. And that I think is what's most important. Don't forget we have the five-borough tour going on right now. And so, looking forward to continue to be in conversation on a regular basis with our parents about what we know we will continue to do well. And that is to be in communication and get ready for in-person learning.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Jillian.

Question: Thanks. And then just on the social distancing aspect. And I know you've said that you believe the CDC may change their recommendations and go to even less distancing than three feet. But let's suppose we stay at three feet. That's where we are now. I assume that's what

the planning will begin with. How exactly do you plan to have a full classroom? You know, some schools have 30 or more children, with three feet of distance and what are sometimes some pretty small classrooms in New York City schools? Can you give us some more specifics on what the space requirements here will be and how you think that you're going to be able to meet those?

Mayor: Jillian, first we've seen the CDC moving constantly with the data. So, again, it is, you know, May 24th, the first day of school is September 13th. I think the fact is clear to me that as more data comes in, more progress, they're going to make adjustments. But, right now, let's just take the current three feet rule. Right now, all New York City schools would qualify. That wasn't true a couple of months ago. It's true now. Every single school could go to three feet, according to that rule right now. If we had that kind of rule, we have a lot of classrooms that could handle it as they are. In other cases, we'd have to use alternative space and we would make that adjustment. If we had to use a space that was normally used for other things to make it work for a period of time, we would. But I don't see that. And even if you said, well, that might happen. I don't see it happening for long because COVID is being defeated. It's just visible. And again, we can't live in the past. We got to get ready for something very, very different. So, we'll have plan A, plan B as always. But I have no doubt we'll be able to accommodate all our kids.

Moderator: Next we have Jessica from WNYC.

Question: Hi everyone. Thanks so much. I was wondering, you say that more than 50 percent of school staff has been vaccinated at this point. But I'm sure that many parents and colleagues would want that number to be a lot higher, to feel safe. So, what can you do to encourage more staff to get vaccinated?

Mayor: Jessica, I think it is happening very organically, but we'll keep being systematic about making it easy for staff, for teachers, continuing to get out there in communities because that's, you know, that's one of the crucial pieces that works everywhere. Just more convenience, more answers to questions, incentives work for them too. And constant communication from the schools. The unions have been really important here too, constantly encouraging people. I think what we're seeing is more and more people willing to come forward. A lot of people are now saying, okay, it's time, I'm all right with it, or I'm getting around to it finally, or whatever it is. I think it's just about persistence. And I very much expect that number to go up. Go ahead, Jessica.

Question: Okay. And can you promise that there will no longer be Zoom in a room, where teachers are teaching remotely to students in class?

Mayor: Yeah, because everything's going to be in-person, period.

Moderator: We have time for two questions today. The next question goes to Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. Lots of questions today. I think a lot of ground covered about the return to school. I guess one detail I was wondering if you could address, was the use of learning pods. Is that something you anticipate continuing next fall?

Mayor: No. Just, I think it's going to be a thing of the past. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Got it. And yeah, in the separate but related vein of things coming back to normal, you mentioned in passing, your membership at the Park Slope Y. When's the last time you were there? When do you anticipate becoming a regular again?

Mayor: It was a long time ago, right before the gyms were closed down originally. And you know, I'm looking forward to going back. I think at the rate I'm going, it'll probably be next year when I'm done with this job. But I am definitely looking forward to going back at some point.

Moderator: Our last question goes to Yehudit from Boro Park 24.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thank you so much for coming to Borough Park yesterday. And for your words, that show that you're an ally by speaking out against anti-Semitic hate crimes.

Mayor: Thank you, Yehudit. It is so important and everywhere I go, I'm saying to people, this is unfortunately a worldwide phenomenon, but we've got to show we can stop it right here in New York City. Go ahead.

Question: Great. So, my question is thank you so much for providing that full police presence in Jewish neighborhoods, which we really appreciate. But another element of these attacks is an unfortunate and typical pattern we sometimes – we see, which is that Hamas bombs, Israel gets blamed in the media and anti-Semitic attacks unfortunately increase worldwide. I'm wondering whether you would consider further helping to protect Jewish New Yorkers from hate crimes, by appealing to your progressive allies. By explaining to them that when they blame Israel for getting bombed by Hamas, which both the U.S. and the E.U. both described as a terrorist organization, that inflammatory and in many case bias language of elected officials actually incites anti-Semites who wants to do violent harm to Jews. So, I'm wondering whether Mayor de Blasio would further stand with us in solidarity by providing a statement that calls for a stop to the incendiary and bias language of any New York City elected officials on Israel? Because those words actually incite violence against those of us who are identifiably Jewish and support Israel.

Mayor: Yehudit, I really appreciate the passion with which you're raising the question, honestly. And I know you're speaking from the heart. Look, I've talked a lot and I think this is a parallel example that will allow me to answer your question properly. Talked a lot about the efforts to undermine Israel with boycotts, etcetera, the BDS movement, which I fundamentally oppose. And my message, I think the more effective message is the positive one. That that kind of movement undercuts the possibilities of peace. I'm someone who believes in a two-state solution, not everyone does. But I believe that is the way forward. I think the BDS movement works against, by its actions and effect the pathway to a better outcome. What I would say to all progressives is remember your history, remember the history of anti-Semitism, remember why it's so important to have a homeland for people who've been oppressed for millennia. But we also all need to work together on a way forward. And the way forward to me is a peaceful lasting solution. That's what I want to focus people on. And the understanding that anti-Semitism is way too strong in this world. And must be confronted. Go ahead, Yehudit.

Question: Okay. Thank you. And then secondly, I'm wondering when you mentioned that more arrests would be coming over the perpetrators of the hate crimes that took place in Brooklyn on Shabbat, I was wondering how long do you plan – when do you expect that arrest? And also, how long do you plan for the presence of the police force to be visible and felt in Jewish neighborhoods?

Mayor: Again, I won't speak for the NYPD, but having gotten thoroughly briefed, I'd say you'll see arrests, additional arrest in the next few days. The pattern has been very clear with hate crimes and with all crimes, NYPD has had a remarkable track record in recent years, finding suspects of crimes. There's a lot more available resources nowadays than there used to be. I'm very confident about that. We'll keep the presence there as long as it's needed. I certainly expect to have a lot of presence over Shavuot coming up, and we want to make sure that people are safe and we want to stop this pattern dead in its tracks, show that anti-Semitism will not be accepted.

And look everyone just to conclude today, I think this is part of New York City's ability to fight back through anything and everything. Here we are today, celebrating the fact that New Yorkers stood up to COVID, did all the right things to fight back this horrible disease. We're finally turning the tables. New Yorkers, we opened the nation's largest school system when other cities wouldn't dare. We're a city that doesn't accept division. It doesn't accept hatred. We fight it back and we've proven time and time again that whenever there's some outburst of negativity and hatred, we can fight it back. And the good people of this city prevail. This is who we are as New Yorkers. So, when we say no stopping New York, we are saying that because we've lived it, we've experienced it, we know it. And this is what gives me so much hope going forward, especially as we celebrate the great news today about our schools. Thank you, everybody.

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