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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, I'll tell you something – I had a great start to my week and my Monday morning out at P.S./M.S. 5 in Port Morris in the Bronx. What a beautiful scene this morning of kids coming back to school filled with energy, filled with hope, ready to learn again. I've got to say to everyone at P.S./M.S. 5, great, great energy in that school. The school community was so welcoming to the kids. The parents were so happy and so relieved to have their kids going back to school. And Chancellor Carranza and I took time to speak with a lot of the kids and the parents and we just heard such simple, powerful messages about why kids want to be back in schools, why parents wanted them back in school, how important it was to all of them that this day had come. And a young second grader named Ethan, I asked him how he felt, and he said the simplest idea – he said, I like school. And I talked to a fourth grader named Martha, and I said, are you happy back in school? And she said, yeah. I said, why? And she said, I learn more. I learn more when I'm back in school. And this is why it's so important, our kids need to be back in the classroom. And I want to thank everyone who has worked so hard over these last weeks to get our kids back, to make sure that gold standard of health and safety we have is even stronger with the weekly testing. I want to thank all the parents who got their consent forms in, everyone – and at P.S./M.S. 5, the principal, Danielle Keane, the District Superintendent, Rafael Alvarez, who were with us today, thank you to both of you and your teams for the great work you did bringing back this great school. And it's just one example of what's happening all over the city today – 850 school buildings reopening today in New York City – 850 places where there's joy and there's hope again because kids are back in school.

Now, I want to say – parents, we need you. We need your help continuing to fill out those consent forms at P.S./M.S. 5 today, vast, vast majority of parents that filled out consent forms. Any parent who hasn't had the opportunity to do it – right there as they arrive and they were doing it, they were ready to see their kids get tested. They wanted to keep everyone safe. And at this school, they will be transitioning next week to five-day a week learning. And that's what's happening at schools all over the city in the coming weeks as more and more of them will be able to reach five days a week, some for every child, some for most kids. We're going to keep pushing to get that to be the maximum number of kids possible, getting that five-day a week learning.

So, this was the opportunity today to follow through on the commitment that we made when school began and the commitment we made when we had the temporarily closed school, that we would keep everyone safe. And, in fact, we would add even more health and safety measures to keep the school community safe. I have absolute confidence that our school communities are doing an amazing job, really looking out for each other. And with the face coverings, the ventilation, the social distancing, everything coming together to keep people safe, it's remarkable. The Chancellor and I went and visited a 3-K classroom, we visited a kindergarten classroom. The kids – it's so amazing, they immediately got back into the rhythm of being in school. They are adaptable. They are resilient. They love being in school. And everyone in the

school community is keeping them safe and each other safe. So, this is a very good day for New York City. Now, again, 850 school buildings reopening this week. You've got a 3-K, pre-K, and K-to-five grades opening today. You've got District 75 special education programs, opening Thursday. Another announcement today, in Staten Island, the area of Staten Island with the orange zone, those schools will be reopening based on the new State guidance. Those schools will be reopening for, again, the levels we've talked about so far – 3-K, pre-K, K-to-five will be reopening Wednesday – this Wednesday, December 9th, in the orange zone. And then, District 75 programs right after on Thursday in that area. So, we're going to keep moving forward. We're to keep everyone safe, that's the key. But, to everyone in the school community, you've done an amazing job. And the schools of this city are among the safest places to be. So, with the additional testing weekly, again, parents get that consent form in. Go to mystudent.nyc.gov, get your consent form in. Every single student either needs a testing consent form in or needs a proper medical exemption. This is what's going to keep us off safe.

And speaking of keeping us all safe, let's talk about our indicators. I said a few days back that we are in a new reality here. First of all, the good news, we're in a new reality because the vaccine will be arriving in New York City in a matter of days and every week we're going to get more and more, and that's going to be making more and more impact. But we also have real challenges over these next few months with the colder weather, with the challenges we've seen with the numbers going up with the coronavirus. So, our indicators needed to be retooled to reflect what we're seeing now and to make sure we're giving people the fullest picture of what we're facing and clarity about where we need to be, going forward. So, we're going to go over these indicators. I'll go over them first and then I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, who will go into a little more detail.

So, first of all, as we've done in the past, the first is current hospital admissions. And what we're doing now is flipping the equation a little. Today's report is 144 patients that are going into the hospital. Where we need to be is under 200. We still are. Now, this number has obviously been going up in recent days. We need to keep emphasizing 200 is what we want to stay below. But a new indicator we're adding is the hospitalization rate per 100,000 citizens – per 100,000 residents, I should say, of New York City. New York State uses this approach as well, so we want to track with it. Today's number is 2.28 per 100,000. We want to get that under two per 100,000, going forward. Okay. Now, on current new cases, we're now going to be including probable cases, and this is important to give the fullest picture. So, we, in terms of the seven-day average of daily new cases, that number is 2,180 confirmed cases. And we want, of course – we're well past the number we want to be at, which is 550, but the new indicator is the probable cases. And that number today is 616 additional probable cases. Again, Dr. Chokshi will give you more of an insight into why we think it's important to note those probable cases as well. Number three, the positivity levels in the city – we're eliminating the single-day positivity number, because it's become less and less pertinent with the amount of testing we're doing now and the lag time of getting all the results. The much more appropriate number, the one we're getting the most information from is the seven-day rolling average. So, today's report on the seven-day rolling average is 4.98 percent. Obviously, where we want to be is under five percent. So, the idea is to constantly update these indicators so they can help you understand what's going on and what you need to do and how you can be part of fighting back this second wave. And here to explain why we're using this new approach, some of those been leading the way in the fight against the coronavirus, our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. You've heard me say before that data is the lifeblood of our COVID response, but data is also at the center of New Yorkers response. In order to act on that data, people must know the data for months. We've presented indicators that alert New Yorkers to COVID-19 trends, and shared more data on our public website than just about any other jurisdiction. And those numbers have driven necessary changes to our lives, both individually and collectively. We will continue to present daily indicators, but, as the Mayor said, we are going to make a few updates so that what we present every day is, number one, comprehensive; number two, stable; and number three, consistent. Today, we reported cases that were based on molecular, or PCR tests, which are the most dependable for a diagnosis of COVID-19. However, antigen tests, which check for a virus protein and can often return a result quickly are growingly used as a screening test for COVID-19.

I have to point out that there are some limitations to antigen tests compared to molecular tests. And if you have any questions about which one is right for you, please speak with your doctor about it. But because antigen tests have become more common and have improved over the last few weeks and months, we are adding antigen test results to our Health Department website. Positive antigen test results will be reported as probable cases, according to scientific standards, while PCR positives will continue to be reported as confirmed cases. The daily indicator will combine both of these – both confirmed and probable cases in a seven-day rolling average. These counts will ensure that we're keeping up with the science and making our data more complete. The second change, as the Mayor said, is the elimination of single-day percent positivity. We've all seen how weekends, weather, or holidays can alter testing patterns, which can result in fluctuations in daily percent positivity. So, moving forward, we'll focus on the seven-day average indicator, ensuring we get more stability. Our third change is to add per capita hospitalization rates to our current daily admissions indicator. New York State has a system for tracking total hospitalizations and we share the goal of returning hospitalization rates to below two per 100,000 residents on a seven-day average. And so, we're aligning those figures to ensure consistency.

Now, independent of the details of the methods, I want to make sure we don't miss the forest for the trees. The trends we are seeing across all indicators are worrisome. Our shared goal is to get back below the thresholds that we have set. And the actions we take are will get us closer. And last week, the CDC released a summary of 10 effective public health strategies for COVID-19 resurgence. These are steps that communities should focus on to address high levels of COVID-19 spread. These include universal use of masks, both indoors and outdoors, physical distancing and limiting contact, avoiding nonessential indoor spaces and crowded outdoor settings, increased testing diagnosis and isolation, prompt case investigation and contact tracing, safeguarding persons most at risk for severe illness or death, protecting essential workers, postponing travel, hand hygiene, increased ventilation, and cleaning and disinfection. And, finally, safe and effective vaccines. These are very consistent with the City's guidance over the last weeks and months, but now is the time to redouble our efforts and to turn science into the actions that we know can save lives. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Dr. Choksi. And look, I want to bring these pieces together really simply. This morning, I watched kids – little kids with a mask on, getting hand sanitizer for their hands, knowing that they had to follow rules, getting a temperature check. Look, if our children can do all these things, we all can do it right too. So, it's so important to listen to what Dr. Chokshi is saying, what the CDC is saying. For example, we all, again, love to see our families,

our loved ones, our friends at the holidays, but this is not a time to travel. So, I'm going to keep saying it throughout the remainder of the holiday season, please do not make plans to travel. If you have plans, canceled them – stay local, stay in very small, careful, safe gatherings. Also, for anyone over 65, anyone with those preexisting health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and other serious conditions, or someone who has both change your ways and your habits – stay in, stay in a safe situation, only go out for the most essential needs. We've got to all take this really helpful guidance and live it for a few months as we fight back this second wave once and for all, and as the vaccine comes into the city more and more. So, this is our last big push we can get through soon to the point where more and more New Yorkers will be vaccinated and we turn the corner. Okay. A few words in Spanish –

[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: Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Dr. Dave Chokshi, Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Rich Lamb from WCBS Radio.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everybody on the call.

Mayor: How are you doing, Rich?

Question: Good. So – I'm doing all right. You're characterizing this as our last big push, but how long do you think that last big push is going to last? And what is it going to consist of?

Mayor: I'll give you my view, Rich. I think we've got a few tough months ahead. I mean, we see these numbers, these indicators – December is going to be tough, January is going to be tough. I think the more work we do the more we can knock this down. And once we get past the holidays, obviously you're not going to have as many gatherings, which is helpful. But the real issue is getting the vaccine in, getting it to as many New Yorkers as possible. That's going to take months. I think the way to think about it is, December, January is going to be a lot of challenges, as we get into February and beyond it gets easier and easier. Go ahead, Rich.

Question: Mr. Mayor, second question, completely different. The man on Staten Island, the bar owner, Daniel Presti, who has now been arrested twice and apparently ran into a Sheriff's Deputy with his car deliberately and has been charged, but was released on his own reconnaissance – what do you think about the fact that he was released, number one, and number two, how about his actions?

Mayor: I think his actions are extraordinarily disturbing. I think they are disgusting. I think it's just – there's no excuse for someone doing something that might threaten the life of a law enforcement officer. And that's what he did. Our Sheriff's Deputy, his life was in danger because of what this guy did and it's absolutely unacceptable and he should pay very, very serious consequences for what he did. Look, I am always concerned that we have to make sure consequences are clear. So, I respect that the law enforcement system has a way of determining who can get released and who doesn't. But what I care about the most here is that it be very clear

there are serious, serious charges, and that this guy did something extremely dangerous and he needs to suffer the appropriate consequences for what he did.

Moderator: Next is Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. On the school reopening – out of the 850 school buildings reopening this week, can you say how many of those are going to be offering in-person schooling all five days this week?

Mayor: I'm going to see if the Chancellor has exact numbers yet. Or if not, we can get them to you, Shant. What I do know is it will grow with each week. The example this morning in the Bronx, M.S./P.S. 5, they don't have the ability this week, but by next week, the principal believes they will be at five day for their kids. There's work to be done to get the final numbers right and get the staffing alignment right. For some schools that's this week, for some schools it's next week. You're going to see some schools it's going to take until the beginning of January, but what's clear is we're pushing every school to go in that direction. And of the schools, the vast majority can get to five-day-a-week, either for all their kids or for a lot of their kids. One more point, Shant. We're going to prioritize – again, for the schools that can't do five days a week for everyone, priority will go to kids with special needs, kids who are homeless, or in temporary housing, kids who live in public housing. We're going to be very clear about prioritizing the kids who need the help the most. Chancellor, can you speak to the numbers?

Chancellor Carranza: We don't have specific numbers just yet, but it's well over 150 schools today that are in full five days of instruction, but we will have much clearer numbers by tomorrow morning.

Mayor: Thank you, Chancellor. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Yeah. Thanks for that. And just more broadly, on the coronavirus outbreak, I understand the State is doing some of its own retooling, re-evaluating the thresholds for closing down things like non-essential business. Given that the City has surpassed, you know, the initial three percent threshold for becoming an orange zone, what do you think – at what level do you think the City and State should do things like shut down non-essential businesses and indoor dining, etcetera?

Mayor: So, Shant, I've been having this conversation with the Governor over the last few days. Our health care teams have been talking as well. Everyone takes this situation really seriously. These indicators are troubling. The situation is definitely getting more serious. Look, I think it's as simple as this. If these numbers don't level off soon, then all options have to be on the table. That's the decision the State will ultimately make, but I think everyone is seeing the trend and very concerned. And again, if we don't see improvement soon, all options have to be on the table.

Moderator: Next is Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. My first question has to do with the vaccine. So, we've been told December 15th. In terms of its arrival in New York City, can

you paint us a better picture about exactly where it is, about exactly where it goes first, or is that something that you and the Governor still have to work out?

Mayor: A lot of work going on, Andrew, with the CDC, with the State to work out the final details, but I think Dr. Chokshi can certainly give you some of the sense of how this is going to work. And we're going to be updating you regularly as more of the details get firmed up. Go ahead, Doctor.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thanks Mr. Mayor, and thank you, Andrew, for the question. Yes, as the Mayor said, we still have some things that remain to be clarified, particularly from the federal level, with respect to authorization from the FDA for a safe and effective vaccine. We are anticipating that that is likely to happen as soon as this week for the first vaccine in the pipeline which is manufactured by Pfizer. That vaccine requires what's called ultra-cold storage. These are temperatures of minus 80 degrees Celsius. They require special freezers for storage. So, that is part of what determines where those vaccines will go. There are at least 44 sites across New York City, primarily hospitals, that are equipped for that ultra-cold storage. In total, there will be about 54 hospitals that will be able to access the vaccine from those 44 sites for the first phase of distribution which will be for high-risk health care workers, primarily within those hospitals.

Mayor: Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Second question. Mayor, I don't know if you've seen any of the video or still images of people gathering for a glimpse of the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree, but particularly on the Fifth Avenue side, over by Saks Fifth Avenue, there's obviously been a crowd over the weekend. They are outdoors, but not everyone is masked. And, in fact, we've seen videos of police having a tough time, convincing a group of folks who weren't wearing masks to put them on. Is there any enforcement going on and how concerned are you when you see large groups unmasked at this point?

Mayor: Oh, tremendously concerned. I mean, I don't know what people need to hear to understand that putting on a mask is just basic to keeping everyone healthy and keeping you and your family healthy. So, of course, anytime we see that we're going to educate people, we're going to provide them with masks. We're not going to allow crowds to gather, obviously. So, I'll follow up with our team if we need to put additional measures into place. But look, the vast majority of New Yorkers have gotten the message and they're living it every day, the right way. But for those who haven't, we're going to have to aggressively make clear how important mask wearing is. It's the thing that's keeping you safe. And I think the CDC is doubling down on that now. Now that they are much freer to speak, they're making very clear how important it is for everyone to wear that mask.

Moderator: Next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. I have a question in regard to testing locations. I'd asked the Test and Trace Corps about this, but, you know, according to last week's data the 11697 ZIP code has the highest by a lot. I think on the map, it doesn't even look red anymore. It looks like black. That's Breezy Point and Rockaway Point Roxbury. But the closest testing site is like four ZIP codes away. Is there any plans to, you know, I mean, it seems that when there were

[inaudible] cases, there was a blitz of tests and there were more mobile testing sites? So, what is the plan? And is there a plan soon to add mobile testing site [inaudible] or anything nearby?

Mayor: Katie, thank you much for the question. Clearly that's a place that needs more testing, so we'll work to get that done right away. Dr. Long isn't here with us, but I can affirm that any place that we're seeing a higher amount of testing, or excuse me, a higher amount of infection and doesn't have testing nearby, we'll move the mobile vans into place or pop-ups or whatever it takes. So, we'll get to work on that right away. Go ahead.

Question: Thank you. And my second question is I feel a lot of concern coming from your announcement that you're going to kind of change and retool the indicators, just people sort of saying, well, now that the numbers are higher, you know, I guess conspiracy theorists, but I guess they have the right to question the change of indicators, particularly removing the daily average. I don't know if you wanted to shed a little bit of light to make sure that these figures will be reported accurately, and it's not just kind of moving the goalposts now that, you know, we're not beating back the three percent, that will make a lot of changes. If you just want to provide a little bit more clarity, either you or Dr. Chokshi to explain that –

Mayor: Sure. I think there's two things here. We saw, I mean, first of all, to all the conspiracy theorists out there, we're portraying more information as we have confidence in it. And clearly the information continues to tell us we have a real challenge. So, I don't know where the conspiracy theorists go when we're giving more and more information and it's helping to show the extent of the challenge. What the daily was being, in some ways, hindered by was the amount of time it took to get the results in each day, not giving us as accurate a picture as we wanted first thing in the morning, and the seven-day being more consistently accurate and indicative. And then on the probables, that's all about what Dr. Chokshi said. The improvement in some of the testing that we thought was important now to reflect, that previously, it was more questionable because the quality of the testing was more of an open question. And Dr. Chokshi, why don't you speak to that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, Sir. Thank you. And thanks for the question. As a Mayor said, this gives us a more comprehensive picture. But also, one that allows us to discern the trends over time in a more stable and consistent way. Specifically, about the testing, we know that antigen testing has become more common over the last few weeks, and we want to reflect that in our data, both in terms of the number of tests that are being done via molecular versus antigen tests, as well as when we see positive results, either on molecular or antigen tests. So, this is additive. It gives us a better sense of what's going on overall.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: Next is Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I would like to ask you about the crime statistics which were released Friday. This is the sixth consecutive month that shootings have gone up by more than a hundred percent from the same month, the previous year. Like, can you please comment on the statistics?

Mayor: Yeah, we're going to do a lot to turn that around as we go into 2021. It's really straightforward to me. We went through arguably the hardest year in New York City history, tremendous challenges for all our communities and for the NYPD but what you've seen in recent months is more and more work between the NYPD and neighborhoods through neighborhood policing and more and more gun arrests. And we're going to go strong in 2021, and turn that trend around because we're going to, in the course of just the next few months, turn the whole reality around. The vaccine is coming. We're going to be able to get our economy back. It's going to be a very different reality in 2021. Go ahead.

Question: Until a few months ago, when the crime statistics were released you had the Police Commissioner at the press conference. I'm wondering why for a few months now that stopped and if we might get that back.

Mayor: Again, thank you. What we used to do is different press conferences, different days, different weeks, about different topics. Now, we do constant press conferences about one major topic, which is the fight against the coronavirus and bring in different commissioners and different leaders, depending on the issues we're talking about. But the focus every single day, the most important thing, the thing that will allow us to fix everything else is to beat back the coronavirus once and for all.

Moderator: Next is Nolan from the New York Post. Good morning, everybody.

Mayor: Morning, Nolan. How you doing?

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

Mayor: Good man.

Question: If we could just circle back to the Staten Island bar owner real fast, there are a lot of people who are looking at what unfolded in Staten Island and wondering what would have happened if the barkeep weren't white. Would he have been released on his own recognizance and would someone who had – who ran over a sheriff be treated in a similar manner, if they weren't white?

Mayor: Nolan, look, we should always ask if people are being treated fairly and if there's equality in the way we enforce our laws. This is such an important topic. In this case, I want to hear from the law enforcement leaders, NYPD, the district attorney, et cetera, on the decision and why it was made. And how it fits with the overall rules of who gets released and who doesn't. But let's be clear. The most important thing is what this guy did. And it was absolutely unacceptable. I'm sure this is a guy who would say he's all in favor of law and order. And you know, he's making a big deal about what's happened with his bar. Well, guess what, law and order means when the State of New York says your bar needs to be closed, your barn needs to be closed to protect people's health and safety, no excuses. And when you violate the law there will be consequences. And then if you take an action against a law enforcement officer, there'll be even more consequences. So, this guy is a hypocrite and he's about to pay the price for his hypocrisy. Go ahead, Nolan.

Question: And back on the subject of schools. You guys are celebrating the return of elementary school kids to classrooms today. Is there a date for when middle school and high school students will be able to return to class? And secondly, on the topic of remote learning, I asked this last week, there have been reports out of two major Washington D.C. school districts that say the number of kids that are failing their classes or not getting sufficient instruction – that number has soared. Does the school system here have any metrics by which it's measuring the quality of the education kids are getting through remote learning?

Mayor: Yeah. So, I'll be very quick because those are two very different questions. My goal is to get middle school back as quickly as possible. Practically, that means January. And then when we have that secured to move to high school. On the question of constant evaluation, yes, we do constant evaluation and constant efforts to improve remote learning. Chancellor, you want to speak to that?

Chancellor Carranza: Sure. Mr. Mayor, you're absolutely right. That is a constant and consistently evolving process. Teachers are engaging with students. Principals are involved as well at monitoring the instructional delivery and what's happening both with in-person and with remote learning and blended learning. There are school grading policies that are in place and actively in place. We have not seen the kinds of disparate learning outcomes that you just referenced. And I'm in constant contact with my colleagues from across the country, other large urban school systems. And generally speaking, overall, we are seeing obviously with this very different kind of learning environment, that not all children are doing well in that learning environment. I'm very proud of our teachers in New York City, however, because they're working very hard to intervene when they see that students are either not doing well or not doing as well as they can do. So, we're being very active. But again, every phase of this pandemic has meant that it's an imperfect way of teaching and learning. And we just can't hardly wait to we're all back in person, 100 percent.

Mayor: Amen.

Moderator: We have time for two more. And first we'll go to Aundrea from WCBS.

Question: Good morning. I wanted to follow up actually on that question. So has the Department of Education identified areas for improvement for the remote learning environment?

Mayor: Well, I'll tell you one of the things, and I'll turn to the Chancellor. But one of the things Aundrea that we think is so important is that the more we can move to five day a week in the schools, we will then no longer have blended learning for kids who are attending in-person. We'll just have kids attending in-person. And then the other kids, of course, who choose – the families who choose remote, will be remote. So rather than having sort of three elements of our education system, we'll be able to make it two. That's going to make things a lot more straightforward. That's going to allow us to use our teaching talent more effectively. I think that's one of the things that's going to allow us to improve remote learning as well. Chancellor, go ahead.

Chancellor Carranza: Yes, Mr. Mayor, I agree with that. I would also say that again as a process of continuous improvement, we're looking and developing more digital curriculum. We're capturing best practices from teachers out there that are doing exceptionally good work in this virtual learning space. We're also networking with not only schools across the city, but

borough offices across the city, to have I would call them collaborative groups. Where teachers and educators are able to share best practices as well. On the device front we delivered over 60,000 devices. We are well on track to making sure that every student that's told us they need a device will have that device before we go on winter break. So, but I also think it's important to understand that parents, teachers, students, everyone is just exhausted. We had to transition into this new way of teaching and learning in a very short timeframe, a matter of days. And it hasn't relented since March. People are just tired. So, I can understand the frustration that folks feel believe me, everybody is feeling that. But as the Mayor has continued to say, there is tremendous hope on the horizon. And we need to push, be able to push through so we can get to a place that feels much more like what school usually feels like, the social interaction, the social, emotional learning, et cetera.

Mayor: Excellent. Aundrea, go ahead.

Question: And so, continuing with that. Is there a plan for maybe the summer or the fall to really start dealing with this substantial learning loss, especially in communities that – communities of color, low-income communities that are hardest hit?

Mayor: Aundrea, you're reading our minds. We're going to have a lot more to say in the next week or two about those plans. Because clearly despite the heroic efforts and I mean it, heroic efforts of our educators, our parents, our students, there will be learning loss this year that has to be addressed. So we're going to start to talk about what that looks like and how we're going to go into September with a very aggressive plan to address that. And I am increasingly convinced that we will be back in-person in September across the board, five days a week, all kids. Again, I'm even seeing the possibility that as the vaccine distributes, we might be able to make some major, major improvements in the number of kids who can be in our schools in-person in this school year. But any way you slice it, we're going to have a lot more to say on that in the next few days.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing today?

Mayor: Doing well, Henry, how are you?

Question: I'm doing pretty well. You know, one question that has occurred to me since the get-go with remote learning is why hasn't the City Department of Education reached out to all of the talent in the city that produces programming for children, that produces all kinds of ways in which children every day are getting entertaining information that is, that's teaching them lessons? I mean, you're a fan of The Simpsons. The Simpsons actually has taught a generation or two of kids a lot about the world that they inhabit. And when I see and talk to teachers about how remote instruction is given in this city, it's so flat for many people. It's so – it lacks engagement for so many kids. And I'm just wondering why there wasn't a lot of attention paid to how to make kids want to run to their devices in the morning and watch what was going to appear on their tube for them to learn?

Mayor: I am a fan of The Simpsons, and I think you're right that there's a hell of a lot of creative talent out there that can contribute. And Henry, first of all, I would say, I know this is an area we can do more. And we want to do, you know, even though we're in kind of a wartime condition,

we got to constantly keep improving and bringing in more and more talent to help us do better. I agree with you. We want to make it as exciting and as engaging as possible. That said as I turn to the Chancellor, I'd say I have the very strong feeling that DOE has been working with educational experts and content experts to figure out since that sudden turn to remote back in March, how to make it as engaging as possible. And that is just a constant work in progress because it's a huge, huge endeavor. Chancellor, you want to speak to that?

Chancellor Carranza: Yeah. So, again, understanding that there's always room for improvement. We actually have been doing that. We partnered with WIET and we produced a whole series of early childhood TV programming, where students got lessons and they had interactive activities. They even got to do physical activities with some of their favorite characters. That was completely produced in partnership with the DOE and with local artists. We've been partnering with community-based fine arts programs, our museums, our libraries you name it, we've been reaching out and partnering to get as much content in as much I would say child-friendly content as possible. The bottom line is that remote learning is not the ideal way for any child to learn. And there are always going to be limitations on remote learning, which is why we've really moved heaven and earth to create a safe learning environment for children in-person. That being said I also speak to lots of teachers and principals. And negative impression that you've conveyed Henry, I'm not questioning. But I'll tell you, I can tell you about a lot of teachers that have done really incredible things to make remote learning the engaging experience that you yourself have described.

Mayor: Go ahead Henry.

Question: Okay. Thank you for that answer. I guess the other question I had went to the City budget. Completely different discussion.

Mayor: You've got range, Henry.

Question: It appears that the latest stimulus package is not really going to contain money for State and local governments to balance their budgets. Is this going to cause you to reevaluate and reassess how you're going to balance the 2022 budget?

Mayor: Look, I'd say a couple of things real quick. I am very, very concerned about the situation with the stimulus. It's months and months overdue. Remembering that the House of Representatives acted, you know, six months ago. And it's crazy that we have not seen a further major stimulus. What's on the table can best be described, most charitably be described as a down payment. Well, certainly every city and state in America would take an infusion of help right now, but this could only be seen as a small beginning to what we really need. Which is a huge stimulus that would put us all back on our feet and move the economy forward and move the recovery. We're going to be building our budget, knowing that the stimulus is a question mark. We don't know if there's going to be a vote this week or before this Congress leaves session. We don't know what happens once Joe Biden becomes president. We have to take care of our own people as best we can and keep fighting for the best possible stimulus. But Henry, I think the reality is it's going to play out over time. What we do with the budget in January may be very different than what we do with the final part of the process in April and June. Because that's a long time and a lot opportunity for Joe Biden to do the work I know he wants to do to get us a better stimulus. So, the jury is certainly going to be out on that for a while.

Everyone, look, let's finish up today with this point. It's a good day when kids are going back to school. It's a good day when you see those smiles and that joy. Kids even with a mask on, you could see the smiles because they were so happy to be back, to be back with their friends, with their teachers. Parents were so relieved to have them back. This is a good day for New York City. Even against a tough backdrop, a good day because New Yorkers are making things happen. And it's clear. We've heard the voices of parents. They want their kids back in school. We've heard the voices of our children. They want to be back in school. Our educators love being with the kids. And there was so much energy this morning, just seeing the joy in their eyes, the opportunity to be back with the kids as well. We need our schools open. We need to take care of our kids and we need to build our future. Even in the midst of this crisis, we need to constantly be working on our future. So, this is a good day. We got a lot more work to do to keep reopening our schools and always, always keep them healthy and safe. But this is part of how we bring back New York City. Thank you, everyone.

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