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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, CHANCELLOR CARRANZA TOUR VILLAGE  
ACADEMY IN QUEENS AND HOLD MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well, everybody I'm really encouraged by what I see here at Village Academy. So, we're out in Far Rockaway. We are at a school that really speaks to me because this is a school created by an educator who wanted to do something different, wanted to do something better for the kids in this community. This is a community that's had its share of troubles and challenges over the years. But what Doris Lee has done is create a school that really responds to the needs of the community and uplifts the kids and Doris, I really want to thank you. It takes a lot to be an educator. It takes even more to create a school, to found a school and then make it something great. So, really want to thank you for all you have achieved, and then on top of that, when the Chancellor and I talked to Doris about what it's going to take to get ready – look, we have a month to go now till school begins, and I said, Doris, how's it looking? What are you doing? And she said, we've got a lot of educators who care about kids. They want to be there for the kids. We're going to make this work. It's going to take creativity and flexibility of course, we're dealing with a lot of things we've never dealt with before, but what I heard loud and clear in this leader's voice is we're going to make it work for the kids and we're going to make it safe and healthy for the kids, and that is the spirit you see here in this school.

So, as the Chancellor and I walked around, you see a lot of things that are different. You see the hallways are marked, so you go one way on one side, the other way. On the other side, you saw the spacing of the desk. I've never seen a classroom was so few kids who will be in it. I mean, think about it. We saw classrooms that are going to have no more than 10 kids in them. So, you're going to have the distancing. We saw the electrostatic cleaning. This is a game changer. The custodian told us that he can clean that room in two minutes or less and make it, every day, safe for kids. I mean, these are the powerful tools, and of course everyone with a face covering, the fact that kids are going to be eating at their desks. They're not going to the cafeteria for lunch. They're going to be eating at their desks. There's a lot of things here that are being done and they're common sense plans that are going to keep our kids safe.

So, I'm just really impressed that it's a whole month until school begins, and this much is already ready here at the Village Academy, and this is happening all over the school system. Principals, administrators, teachers, they're all working hard right now because they're entirely devoted to their kids. That's what I've learned over the years as a public school parent myself, and here's what I want to finish with before I turn the Chancellor. What is the alternative? The alternative is to deprive our kids the very best education available because I haven't met an educator that believes you can do the same things with remote learning that you can do in person. Even if you only do it a few days a week, the amount of education you can provide a kid, the amount of

support and tutoring, the amount of mentoring, the amount of attention you can provide to their health, including their mental health needs in person is a measurably more than you can do remotely. We owe it to our kids to get this right. So, we're moving forward with that spirit of devotion to our children, and now turning to the man who has stuck with it every step of the way and is inspiring a team to move forward and get this right, our Chancellor Richard Carranza.

**Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I just want to start off by absolutely adding to what you said about this incredible principal, Dr. Doris Lee, what an amazing job you're doing here. So, thank you. Thanks for taking us on a tour. I know that the students here at the Village Academy will be in very good hands when school starts in September, and the other thing I wanted to say is for a whole group of individuals that don't always get the recognition they deserve. I want to give a huge shout out to our custodial engineers, right here at this campus. What we saw here today is a lot of hard work, a lot of thoughtfulness and a real dedication to make sure that this site is safe for children and those that serve the children. So, the custodial engineers, I just want to say thank you for your hard work, and it sure feels good to be back in a school. During normal times, I'm usually out at schools at least twice, three times a week, and what I saw today is one of the things that I know is absolutely true. The people that know their schools the best are our principals, and what Doris and her team are doing here is possible because of the circumstances that they have in the configuration of their building and what the families want and how students will be in their buildings. That's what we've tried to do to, give guidance but then give the flexibility for principals who know their school sites best to actually implement all of those best practices. So, what do we see? Every classroom will have a hand sanitizer and a disinfectant available, face coverings are going to be required, and those who don't have a face covering, we will provide one for them. Social distancing, which the Mayor spoke of. We saw it in two different configurations in two different classes, but it's mandated, and as we saw rooms will be configured in different ways to accommodate for this using tape and markings and making sure that it's very clear where people are to go and not to go. Students will have individual spaces. So, there's no possibility of overlap between students, and we saw a demonstration of the electrostatic cleaner actually in use today. It was pretty amazing, right, sir. I think the Mayor and I geeked out a little bit on that because it's a neat new tool. But as the Mayor said in under two minutes, you can sanitize completely disinfect and sanitize a classroom, which should be a real sign of comfort to our parents wondering how are you going to do this every single night.

We're also here to thank our educators and school leaders for the tremendous work that they're doing in a school year that is unlike any that we have ever, ever faced before. Now, speaking to families, I want to be very clear to our families. This fall will be unlike any other fall we've ever experienced where students run into school and they hug each other and they're jumping over each other and they congregate in the cafeteria and they're hugging on the way to classes in the hallways – that will not happen this year. It will be very different. So, for parents, what can you do to help us as true partners? Start having those conversations with your children, start talking to your children about why it's important – it may be inconvenient, but why it's important that you wear your face covering all at all times. Why it's important that you maintain distance between you and your super best friend. It doesn't mean they're not your best friend. It just means you're keeping the distance to help them stay safe and help you stay safe. Why it's important that you follow the directional signs on hallway floors, all of those things that will be different. We

should start talking to our children now, before they ever get to school, because it's important for students to understand that this fall will also be very different than anything that they've experienced and undergirding all of that is that we will continue have the strictest regimen for cleaning and for making sure that as we keep the virus in terms of community spread suppressed, it's only going to be possible by all of us continuing to do our part, and that includes our students, our parents, and our educators in all of the safety protocols that we have in place. So with that, I just, again, want to thank our principal, Dr. Lee for the tour. Mr. Mayor, thank you for coming out and seeing this firsthand and I'll turn it back over the Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Questions?

**Question:** So, the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators wrote a letter today on behalf of 6,400 school administrators saying that they did not feel it was possible to implement this plan in the next month. Given, as you've said, that these are the people you're putting in charge of enacting this plan, who are really handling the groundwork and the day to day, what does that say to you about the feasibility of this plan?

**Mayor:** Look, first of all, we've had a constant dialogue with both the CSA and the UFT, literally every day our teams are talking, and the last few days I've sat down with both of the union leaders at length. I've talked this through with Mark Cannizzaro and I appreciate he's raising real concerns, but I've also said to him, we have been systematically addressing those concerns and we have a whole month till school opens and we're going to do a lot more. So, I hear their concerns, but this ball game is far from over. We're going to make these schools safe and I'd like the principal just to speak from our own point of view just for herself, because I think it's important. Why you feel you can get this school ready? I think people need to hear from an actual principal about her own school, please?

**Principal Doris Lee:** I think it's going to be a challenge for a lot of schools. We're definitely going to be doing things differently and in ways that we've never done them before. So, it definitely is going to be a challenge to open. By the same token, I feel like my children need me and if there's a possibility to open safely, I want to take advantage of that possibility. So, right now, we're working on developing a plan to have students come back safely. And the big idea is to be flexible, think outside the box, and be familiar with what the guidelines are, and just continue to engage a community about what some of the struggles might be to get their feedback and to mostly be flexible – that's the biggest thing. So, there are a lot of things that are thrown at us each year when we opened school. It's always a challenge. This year is one of the biggest challenges. But, as an educator, I feel like it's our duty to do what's best for kids and I know there's a lot of research that says that kids should be in school if at all possible. So, if that's what's best for kids, we're going to try to make it happen. And, so far, we have a great plan. And I am nervous and excited to see my kids and to implement the plan, but we're going to continue – we're going to continue to communicate with families over the summer and the fall. We're going to train students and work with them so that they understand the protocols. And we're going to keep open communication, continue to take advantage of the resources that we've been provided and work together to be problem solvers to make sure that we can have our kids back in school, even if it's for a couple of days.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, I understand that not every teacher or every administrator is going to agree with their union leadership, as you've just demonstrated. However, there seems to be some clear amount of them who do. And I'm curious what you make – or how you see that playing out as the school year begins. If there are a lot of teachers and a lot of principals and people behind the plan who don't feel comfortable and then – you know, how do you see that working when those people come back to school a month from now? Are they going to be on board with what you're asking them to do? And how is that going to sort of trickle down to the children that they're educating if these people clearly don't want to be there and, in some cases, they're saying they're afraid for their lives.

**Mayor:** Look, you're talking about professionals. Unions will always sound various alarms and unions will say things sometimes have very dramatic fashion, this is nothing new in New York City. But the question is really, what is the mission? The mission is to take care of our kids. You know, you just heard a beautiful statement about why people do this work. I don't have a question in my mind, I've spent a lot of time with educators over the years, they are in it to help kids. And, right now, the way to help kids is to get back in person with them and give them the support they need. Kids have been through so much. So, folks who have a medical accommodation, they were given that opportunity, it's been well publicized – 15 percent chose to apply for that. That says something. The others are going to be there and I'm sure some people are going to be worried and I'm sure they want reassurance and the evidence of the measures being taken, but they're professionals just like our first responders, just like our health care workers, our sanitation workers, all the people have been showing up from the very beginning. Teachers are going to show up and get the job done. That's what I feel. And we have a whole month to show them all the additional measures we can take to get it right.

**Question:** Just following up on that, what would you say to parents who are maybe feeling a little concerned right now if, again, there's their child's principal who knows the building better than anybody else, who is the person responsible for trying to figure out how this is all going to work – if their principal doesn't feel comfortable going back and says they can't do this safely until maybe late – you know, a one month delay. What would you say to those parents?

**Mayor:** Again, what the union says and what each individual principal says or feels can be very different things. In the end, principals work for the people, they work for the parents and the kids. They are doing this work right now. It's happening all over New York City. So, while the unions saying what it feels is right to say, the work continues. This is almost like the difference between words and deeds. The deeds are happening as we speak. You just walked through that school, it's a month out and you see all this, which is the kind of thing – if I said to you, this is what's going to happen the week before school begins, you would say, okay, that seems right. No, it's happened a month before. So, this work is happening everywhere. Parents know their kids best, so, yeah, a lot of respect for educators, but, I'll tell you, as a parent, I would make the decision based on the needs of my kids. I would say my kids are not going to get educated if they're only all remote, it's just won't be as good. They could get something, but it won't be as good. My kids need the support of professional educators. My kids need the social development that comes with going to school. As a parent, I wouldn't have a hesitation. I would see all these precautions and I would send my kid to school. Now, if my kid was sick, I would keep my kid at home. And I would respect to also that there are rules that say if for any reason it's not right to

open schools, we won't; or, if a school has an individual problem, we're going to address that problem. But, as a parent, the notion of holding your kid away, I couldn't do that. Go ahead.

**Question:** I interviewed a high school teacher today who says, you know, it's not like their teleporting kids from their safe home to schools. [Inaudible] they're still taking subways, they're taking the buses to get there. There's a possibility that they can come in contact with someone who does have COVID and potentially spreading it in the classroom. What are your concerns there? And also, on a high school level, how do you control the process because kids are going from classroom to classroom, or subject to subject, the teachers are coming in and teaching. So, there's contact [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** Sure. Because you asked several things, let me try and keep up with it. First of all, we've got a group of kids who won't be going to school – about, let's say, 26 percent of the kids based on what we know now will not be in school. So, put them aside. We've got all the kids who are going to a neighborhood school, walk to school, which is a lot of kids. We've got kids who their family is going to drop them off with their own vehicle, that's a lot of kids. But, unquestionably, you're right, you're going to have some kids that take mass transit. Now, I would say, mass transit is in much better shape than we've ever seen it. And I said, one of the best things that happened in this very painful reality is the City and State got together, doing the same kind of electrostatic cleaning on the MTA, the overnight cleaning. People have been very, very clear that the subways and buses are much cleaner than they were and more and more people coming back to them. So, I have confidence that's a better situation. But I also want to say, if you're not in school, you're also out in the world in different ways. I don't think – I think your question's very fair, but the alternative is not a perfect model either. If a kid is not going to school, they will be engaging other people in their life. So, then it begs the question, where do we stand in general? We're in a city right now, today, we had one percent of tests come back positive. We had a few hundred new cases in the last 24 hours against 8.6 million people. So, you know, there's been research that shows a lot of schools are not going to have a case in the beginning. They'll maybe eventually have a case in the school – you know, we'll deal with that. But the notion that we're starting from scratch, I want to really argue against that. There's probably millions of people already who have had this disease who are not contracting it again. The spread is different – we see it for two months, it's been different. So, if a parent feels it's not right for them, they absolutely have that right. But I'm starting again with the kids, that I think we have to recognize, will we be at this for six months? Will we be at this for seven months? We don't know, but it might be the whole school year. The notion of kids losing a whole school year after what's already happened last year and only getting the remote learning, we just can't see – that's the moral question for me, was that the best I could do for the kids in New York City? I say, no, we could do better than that. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

**Question:** About the process, I was trying to figure out how's that going to work in a high school level. Looking at elementary and middle, you can keep kids in one class and have one teacher. High school level it doesn't work that way.

**Mayor:** Well, it can work more that way than what you are traditionally used to. Very good question – again, you're going to have a certain number of students who are not in school. You're going to have a premium put on trying to create as much of a pod dynamic as possible. So, one

of the things we're working on right now, and, again, with a month ago is how can we compress things so even at the middle school and high school level there's less movement. And it might look different than a normal school year, but it's the – we just need to get one school year in, in this fashion. I believe at some point in this school year, this issue will be resolved with a vaccine. I think if we can really make some smart modifications at the middle and high school level, we can greatly reduce the amount of exposure.

**Question:** I just want to be [inaudible] the unions, as I understand it, are basically asking for a delay. Are you locked into September 10th is the first day of school? And, if so, why not give them a couple of days, weeks, whatever it is –

**Mayor:** Well, there's different – yeah, it's important the way you said it. Some people are saying days, some people saying weeks. Certainly, I've heard from one of the leaders, why don't we go into October? And the reason is, it gets back again to why do we even have a school system? You know, if remote learning was so wonderful, why didn't we do it a long time ago? So, again, I don't need to be heretical, Richard, I'm not an educator, you are, but we're going to do the very best – for any kid who's just doing remote learning, we're going to do the very best we can. And it's certainly better to have remote learning than nothing. But I'm sorry, I actually believe in our traditional public schools, I believe in our educators, and I believe what they do in a classroom is irreplaceable. So, my sense is, if you want to take away another month of a kid's education, you could do that, but that's not where I start. I start with, let's answer the valid concerns that teachers and administrators are raising with a whole month to go, right? I've had this conversation with Michael Mulgrew. I've had this conversation with Mark Cannizzaro. Keep bringing me your concerns. We're going to keep answering them. So, parents, right now, can't wait for their kids to get back to school. Kids want to see their friends again. Everyone wants to get something back to normal. I don't want to delay that if I can answer the underlying concerns effectively. Last call –

Yes?

**Question:** I'm wondering if you could – I mean, one of the things that seems like it could be a time crunch here is like really making sure all these ventilation systems are in shape. And we've talked about wanting to be really transparent to families about how you're assessing those systems. Could you just be a little more specific about like, are family's going to get something in writing? Will [inaudible] help? How is that going to work?

**Mayor:** It's a good question. So, I'll start, and, Richard, will you jump in on this one? We've said – I want to say it again, if we've got a classroom that we do not feel can be safe enough, we're going to take that classroom offline. If we had a building that we didn't feel confident about the ventilation, we would take the building offline. Remember, what the doctors are telling us. Ventilation systems are one piece of the puzzle. The doctors actually usually say, could you please do the first thing and open the windows? That's the most amazing thing about all this is in all my conversations over months and months and months, fresh air, just direct fresh air is one of the single best things you can do. But you've got ventilation and windows, you've got the electrostatic cleaning and you've got all the other precautions. They all work together. I want to do exactly what you said. I want any parent to be able to go online and see an update on what is the status of the ventilation system in their school, but I want you to know that a lot of those

systems have been worked on now already over the last few months and they're still a month ago. So, this notion that, you know, there's not a full mobilization, that's a misunderstanding, School Construction Authority, DOE, are on it now on a very big scale, but I think we should show our work and report our work to the parents.

**Chancellor Carranza:** So, what I will add to what the Mayor said is that over the entire course of the summer, but actually starting back in May, we started looking at all of our ventilation systems. So, they're replacing the filters to a higher quality filter that captures more of the airborne particles, there's an assessment that's being done. In fact, some of the union are actually accompanying us on some of those walkthroughs as well, particularly, and we've asked the unions to identify for us from their perspective, what are the buildings or where are those classrooms that they have a concern with? We've looked them. As the Mayor has said, we're making sure that windows are able to be opened, and let me be very transparent, there are going to be some schools with some rooms that are going to be problematic. We are – that's why we've also said that we are looking for additional space, additional swing space, the Mayor's talked about conversations we've had with the Catholic Diocese with some of their schools that are no longer going to be up and running. So, there is a full board mobilization around ventilation. But if I could just echo what the Mayor has also said, because I haven't sat in as many of the medical briefings as the Mayor has, but a good percentage of them, and the doctors are very, very clear with us. You cannot hitch your horse to the ventilation pony, it's the PPE, it's the masks, it's the social distancing, it's the handwashing, it's the sanitation, it's a deep cleaning, it's controlling the movement, it's controlling of the movement of who comes into the building. It's all of those things along with the ventilation that creates the optimal conditions for safe learning environment. So, we – and then to answer your question very specifically as well, principals will have a report on their school that we're asking them to share with their parent community, and that'll be part of the meetings that they're having with their parent communities on return to school.

**Mayor:** Okay, last call.

**Question:** Mayor, one of the things that we know is the most vital for keeping the coronavirus at base is handwashing, some New York City public schools have sinks in classrooms, many of them don't, none of the ones that I attended on Staten Island had sinks in the classroom –

**Mayor:** And you turned out okay, still alive –

**Question:** Like, you know [inaudible]. But you know, how is this going to work? I think a lot of parents are looking at this and saying, and certainly teachers are saying, you know, we didn't have soap half the time before. I remember one in March a teacher sent me a photo of a soap dispenser with a cockroach in it, like, how is this going to work?

**Mayor:** Look, I was, again, I'm public school parent and I was a school board member when we used to have them, and I certainly saw my share of bathrooms that weren't perfect and things that need to be made better. I will say it's gotten better with each year, for sure, but this is different. This is an urgent dynamic that has caused a whole host of things to be different. When you saw that electrostatic cleaning, that's not something we would have done a year ago. When you go

into the classrooms in this school, you saw the hand sanitizer there. That's going to be where there's a sink, that's great, but otherwise there is going to be hand sanitizer in every classroom and we are going to budget whatever it takes to make sure those supplies are strong and available in every school. But again, that's just one of so many of the other pieces. I mean what have we learned in this whole long struggle we've been through that who knew that this wasn't always the single most important piece of the equation, right? But we're going to do all the above. So I would say to anyone, we're going to use handwashing, but we're also going to back it up with a whole lot of hand sanitizer around all the time. Okay, everybody. Thank you very much.

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