

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

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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

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

Mika Brzezinski: Let's get now to Mayor Bill de Blasio, who is joining us now. He has a big announcement to make exclusively with us about New York City public schools. Mr. Mayor, thank you. What's the news?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Mika, it's good news. New York City public schools, one million kids, will be back in their classroom in September, all in-person, no remote. That's the news I think parents, kids, everyone's been waiting for, to know we're going to be back strong, ready, safe. COVID is plummeting in this city, I'm happy to say. We're almost at eight million vaccination doses since day one. And it's just amazing to see the forward motion right now, the recovery that's happened in New York City. But you can't have a full recovery without full strength schools, everyone back sitting in those classrooms, kids learning again. So, that's what we're going to have in September.

Brzezinski: That's going to make a – it's going to make a big difference for a lot of struggling parents, too. What's the model for other cities to make this possible? What has it taken to make it possible to get kids back in the classrooms?

Mayor: Mika, we set a gold standard really from the very beginning, taking the health and safety measures from around the world that we saw worked in schools. Kids had masks on in all our schools the whole time, lots of cleaning, lots of ventilation. We layered all these approaches and it worked really powerfully. We've had much, much lower levels of COVID in our schools for months and months, much safer than any other place in the city. And the city has been getting better now for quite a while. We're at the lowest COVID positivity in seven months right now in New York City. So, what really worked was to layer on those health and safety measures. We're going to be doing that again, a version of that, a different version for different times, but we're going to do that again in September. And, look, we know, especially now more and more kids and staff will get vaccinated. We've made vaccination available everywhere. It's time. It's really time to go full strength now.

Joe Scarborough: So, this is great news for so many New York City parents, none more than Jonathan Lemire, who can go back to watching soap operas in the afternoon and start his online betting app –

Mayor: He needs it, Joe. It's part of – it's part of his [inaudible] –

[Laughter]

Scarborough: He needs it for his reporting. It's like his Hemingway [inaudible] is the soap operas. You get to watch your stories again, Jonathan, next year, isn't this great news for you?

Jonathan Lemire: Days of our Lives has been a staple for me for a long time, Joe, and I'm glad I'll have be able to re-engage with this now, thanks to this news. Mr. Mayor, great news to be sure, but I wanted to ask you, you know, currently with now in September, there will be no remote option. Right now, though, fully 60 percent, 60 percent, of city students are doing it remote. How do you overcome the hesitancy of their parents to convince them to go, to send their children back to school? And how do you physically do it if there are still social distancing requirements that could lead to crowded classrooms? Hesitancy, social, distancing, how you handle those two things?

Mayor: Jonathan, by – a lot of information, a lot of communication is the answer to the first. We're going to welcome parents to come into the schools starting in June, see how much has been done to keep them safe, get reacclimated. We're going to do that throughout the summer, coming into September. Anyone has a question or concern, come into your child's school. See what's going on and get the answers. In terms of the overall approach, look, we have proven we can beat back COVID all over this country. And school opens four months from now. So, I absolutely believe COVID will continue to go down. Vaccinations will go up. Recovery will be strong. I think the CDC will be changing those rules quite a bit between now and September, but right now, in New York City public schools, we could have every child three feet apart. We could make that work if we had to, but I actually fundamentally believe by August, the CDC will relax those rules further to recognize the progress that we've made in this country.

Scarborough: Fantastic. Tell me, Mr. Mayor, there's a race going on in New York City. I'm just curious what your thoughts are about the participants. Is there anybody that you support, is there anybody who concerns you?

Mayor: Joe, I'm only going to say this. We have a recovery going on right now in New York City and it has to be a recovery for all of us. It really has to be inclusive. It has to be a recovery that does not just replace the previous status quo before the pandemic, but takes us somewhere better. On December 31st, I'm handing the baton to someone. So, they have to be ready to deepen that recovery and just take it to full strength all along. I'm not going to comment yet on this race, but I'll say this much, it's very close, voters have not yet paid a lot of attention. I think you're going to see in the last week or two before June 22nd, they'll finally consolidate, but this is not like most elections. We also have ranked choice voting for the first time in New York City. So, I think it's going to be a much tighter election than most were used to.

Scarborough: Are you concerned about the candidacy of Andrew Yang?

Mayor: Look, Joe, I'm not going to talk about any individual candidate. I only know Andrew Yang a little bit. I find him a very likable person, but here's what I'd say about all the candidates. This is a really tough moment. New York City is coming out of arguably the biggest crisis in our history. And we've got a lot of things we have to get right at this point. So, the next mayor better be ready to hit the ground running. I think that's something the voters are going to weigh heavily. Unlike a non-crisis environment, I think this time voters will weigh experience, understanding of the city, a sense of how to actually get things done, I think that's going to weigh heavily in their minds.

Brzezinski: All right. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. By the way, Morning Joe's Dr. Dave Campbell enjoyed spending time with you and your wife last week when he was up interviewing you. Thank you very much for that.

Mayor: We love Dr. Dave.

[Laughter]

He said – he said, Joe can have as many hamburgers in the morning as he wants, that it's actually a new diet trend. It's okay.

Brzezinski: No, no, it's just so gross.

Mayor: Maybe I'm stretching –

Brzezinski: Alright, Bill de Blasio. Thank you.

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