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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON PIX 11'S MORNING NEWS

Dan Mannarino: Over the last five days, New York City has had its highest number of deaths. However, there does appear to be a flattening of the curve. But New York City Mayor, Bill de Blasio, is still proceeding with caution. So, he joins us live this morning. Good morning to you, Mr. Mayor. Good morning, Dan. Hey, I want to begin – we'll get to the flattening of the curve in just a second – but I want to begin with New York City public schools. This affects so many people here. You announced that schools will remain closed for the remainder of this school year. Governor Cuomo saying that that was your opinion. So, first and foremost, can you definitively say that schools are closed 100 percent?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Yeah, Dan, look, we've made very clear, this is about the safety of 1.1 million kids, of so many parents and family members of hundreds of thousands of educators and school staff. What I said, what Chancellor Carranza said is, we're keeping these schools closed. It's not safe to reopen them and it's not smart to reopen them. We have to protect against a resurgence of this virus, we have to make sure we don't take our foot off the gas here and end up regretting it. And even if we tried to bring them back, it would only be for a few weeks and it really wouldn't help our kids that much. So the logic is clear. Look, the Governor said yesterday, he understood what I was saying and I believe in the end, understanding that he has to think about the whole state and I respect that, but I am quite certain our schools will remain closed.

Mannarino: So, I understand you told the Governor minutes before they actually made the announcement, in fact the New York Times said that it was via a text message, the Governor said though a decision can't be made without coordinating metropolitan regions, right, New Jersey, Connecticut as well as the entire State of New York. So, did that conversation between you and the Governor happen to coordinate this or [inaudible] just informing him as a courtesy here?

Mayor: Dan, I would just say it differently. Again, I respect the role the Governor has to play, the president has to play. They all have different roles to play. My job is to protect the people of my city and that means the kids, the parents, the educators, everyone. And I am, of course, concerned that we all recover together. But really my issue is not what happens in the rest of the state or the rest of the metropolitan region. If the New York City schools cannot be safely reopened, we're not going to reopen them. It's 1.1 million kids. It's a huge endeavor and it has a lot of impact on everything else. So, look, I don't think we should get too deep into the process here. I think we have to get to the bottom line and the most essential matter, which is very human, which is about protecting people, keeping them healthy, ending this crisis by being smart and being cautious. So, again, I've said what we intend to do. I'm quite certain that's what's going to end up happening.

Mannarino: Yeah. The reason why I'm focusing and zeroing in on it, because it does get to the crux of the matter about reopening the city as a whole right now. You know the Governor said that if you close schools until mid to late June, then you're essentially also saying that businesses are closed through mid to late June. So, let me ask you this, do you anticipate businesses will actually be closed through June? Is there a conversation ongoing now with the Governor about reopening?

Mayor: Dan, there's a constant conversation with the Governor's team about the big strategy. And again, if you look at the facts over the last few months, we have agreed on the vast majority of approaches and strategies. I know the media likes to fixate when there's a difference, which is normal in human life that there are some differences and that the media goes for the exceptional rather than the norm. The norm over these last couple of months is the State government and City government have worked well together, agreed on the vast majority of approaches. I've said very publicly, I think the Governor's doing a good job and we're all working together. But I don't agree that you have to see the schools issue in the prism of the economy. That's not the first way to look at it. The first thing you should be asking is what about the health of our kids, our parents are educators, and what about making sure this disease does not reassert?

That's the first concern. Now you could start to reopen the economy even if schools are shut, there's not a direct, necessary connection between the two. Dan, what I've said is to make sure we beat back this disease, we have to see at least 10 days to two weeks of consistent progress on key health indicators, which we're unveiling today in just a few hours, and that's going to give us very publicly – you'll see it, I'll see it, everyone will see it – the ability to track what's going on. When we see sustained progress, then we can talk about relaxing at least some of the restrictions and opening up step-by-step, carefully. If we don't see progress, you might have to even have tighter restrictions, but the schools issue should be seen really in its own light about the safety of children and families and educators.

Mannarino: Yeah, and I'm focusing in on it only because so many of our viewers seem – were conflicted this weekend saying are they closed, are they not closed? And rightfully so. They wanted to know the definitive answer. And speaking of the –

Mayor: And Dan – I'm sorry to interrupt – they should simply plan on the fact they'll be closed because again, I'm quite convinced they will be and that's the right thing to do from a health and safety point of view. But that does not mean that if we get into May and June and see the opportunity to start to relax other restrictions and open up the economy some more, of course, we want to do it, but the schools are a very specific reality, and the health and safety issues there need to be paramount first in our minds. And so again, plan on them being closed because I believe fundamentally that's what's going to happen here.

Mannarino: Understood. Now, I want to talk about the flattening of the curve right now. Obviously, we're seeing less cases being presented, but the number of deaths is still very high right here. So, I want to talk about field hospitals like the one in Central Park. Obviously a storm is rolling through today. There's a concern there, but there are more testing sites that are going to be opening this week, which really like you say, help in this battle. So where would those be?

Mayor: Okay, so Dan, let me just frame it real quick. We need a lot more testing to go to the next phase. Right now we're in a widespread transmission phase of this disease. It's exactly where we don't want to be, where we're losing so many of our loved ones, where so many people are getting sick. We need to get out of this phase. To do that you need a lot more testing. We all know the federal government over months and months has never delivered the amount of testing that this city needs or any city needs. And they've got to use that Defense Production Act and all the tools they have to change that reality. And we've never seen that done. Not for a minute. So to get to that next – that real change where you start to normalize, a lot more testing is needed.

In the meantime, testing's been focused on those who are very sick, where the testing is crucial to figuring out how to save their lives, focused on protecting our health care workers, making sure they can stay on the job or those who have to go off the job for a period of time to be isolated. The same with first responders, of course. What we said is that later this week we're going to open five testing centers in communities that have been particularly distressed. We know there's huge health disparities here. It's really, really tragic, Dan, that on top of all the pain this disease has caused we're seeing the poorest communities, the ones that have the least health care hit the worst by this crisis. So, we will be in communities – five communities all over the city so long as we have enough testing capacity and PPEs to protect the folks who will give the test. And that's always a struggle. But we're talking about – we'll be in Upper Manhattan, we'll be in East New York in Brooklyn, Morrisania in the Bronx, Jamaica in Queens, and the Vanderbilt Clinic in Staten Island.

Mannarino: And I also, real quick, I understand we're out of time here, I want to talk about the trains right now. We're still seeing crowding on some of the subways. You were calling for the MTA to add more trains and buses to help alleviate this, especially the first responders who are there on the crowding. Has the MTA been responding to that because they've been hit pretty hard by the virus?

Mayor: Yeah, and they do have a real problem and yes, they are being responsive. I still want to see more results and the NYPD will help every single time to address those crowding issues.

Mannarino: Okay. Mr. Mayor, I do appreciate your time this morning and I'll let you go this morning and stay safe to you, as always. And thanks again for your time.

Mayor: Thank you, Dan.

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