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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. Happy Monday. And it is a happy Monday because we have a lot of good news today. It's really a particularly good news day. So, first of all, thank God, the U.S. Senate has acted on the stimulus. And I want to begin at the beginning by thanking the Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, our own Chuck Schumer, who played such a pivotal role in bringing this stimulus together. Tremendous, thanks to him. Thanks to President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, everyone in the U.S. Senate who stood up for the people of this country and certainly for the people of New York. Every senator who voted for this deserves our praise. Thanks to Senator Gillibrand and all the senators who made this happen, because look, this is the decisive moment we've been waiting for. Now, we know it has to go back to the House. We know it has to go to the President for signature, but this was a great hurdle. Now we can finally start to imagine what a full recovery looks like because we have the missing piece. Now, we have the one thing that was held back from us for months and months and months when it was needed most. And it's amazing when you think of just the few weeks that Joe Biden's been in office the few weeks that Chuck Schumer has been Majority Leader of the Senate, what a momentous achievement, so quickly, so powerfully. So, this now supercharges our recovery. This is the thing we needed. So, that's tremendously good news. And we'll be talking about it more in the days ahead as we wait, of course, for it to be 100 percent signed, sealed, and delivered with the President's signature. So, that's great.

We had a great weekend in our vaccination effort. Again, this is the largest vaccination effort in the history of New York City. Well over 100,000 New Yorkers got vaccinated this weekend. A lot of times weekends are slower. But this was a strong weekend for vaccination and an indicator of the shape of things to come, that we've got more and more capacity. We still need that supply. I'm going to say it every time, supply, supply, supply. This is still the piece that we really need from Washington. We still need more help from Washington. We still need more help from Albany. We still need more help from the manufacturers. But our capacity keeps growing, strong weekend. Where does that bring us to now? Since the beginning of our vaccination effort 2,325,811 doses have been given. Again, I love to give context. That is more than the total population of Houston, Texas, the fourth largest city in America. So, this effort is just growing and growing. But if get the supply we need, it goes to a higher, higher, higher level. At least half a million vaccinations a week, when we get the supply we need.

And I'll tell you, I had a great experience in Co-Op City in the Bronx on Saturday, amazing vaccination center, that's been set up there by the Department of Health, tremendous enthusiasm. And real interesting, a lot of folks saying now they're ready. Now they want to get vaccinated. They had hesitation before, but now they're ready. And actually Dr. Dave Chokshi and I went around, talked to a lot of people getting vaccinated. One of the most consistent things we heard is

people want the Johnson & Johnson vaccine because it's one dose and you're done. Now, we were using Johnson & Johnson up in the Bronx, a lot of energy around the fact that after one shot, you're safe and you can go forward. So, I think you're going to see this vaccination effort take off more and more, but we need that supply.

Now, as we think about vaccinations, we are focused on the folks who are most vulnerable always, our seniors, folks with pre-existing conditions. But some of the folks who are the very most vulnerable are homebound seniors. And we have been creating a plan to reach them. But what we really needed was the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Because think about it, if you're a homebound senior, think about someone who cannot get out of the house, think about their loved ones and the fear and anxiety they have for them. And they just want them to be protected. Finally, we have a vaccine that can do that in one shot. And a vaccine that's actually flexible enough that we can use even going door-to-door in a building and not have to worry about the refrigeration issues and everything we've dealt with before. So, finally we have the vaccine we need, we've started right away reaching homebound seniors. We began up in Co-Op City, an immediate effort, a tremendous appreciation up there from seniors and their families. We've now gone to Brighton Beach, Far Rockaway.

This effort is going to continue across the five boroughs very rapidly. Now this week, it builds up. Next week, we go to fuller strength and we will be doing at least 1,200 vaccinations a week. Now this remember, is meticulous. It's door-to-door, one patient at a time, a team has to go in and they need to stay to make sure someone reacts well to the shot. So, it takes a lot of time and energy. We want to get this number up constantly. We'd like to see that get up closer to 3,000 per week as we go along. The providers, we're working with Northwell, Mount Sinai, Montefiore are all doing great work. Our goal is to reach all homebound seniors, all homebound seniors in this city who want to be vaccinated between this month and next month. So, over the next seven weeks or so, we believe we can reach every single one. And I want folks who want to get vaccinated who are homebound or their loved ones who want to set up the appointment for them, you can go to our normal vaccination application, sign up places to 8-8 – excuse me, to 8-7-7-VAX-4-NYC, 8-7-7-VAX-4-NYC, or online vax4nyc.nyc.gov. Go to those sites. You'll see if you need the specific support for someone homebound, how to sign up for it. But again, we're working with community-based organizations. We're working with senior centers, we are working in naturally occurring retirement communities. We believe we can reach literally every homebound senior. And we welcome anyone who needs the vaccine to come forward. And we are going to come to your door and give you the protection you need.

Okay. Now let's talk about where we go from here. When I talk about a recovery for all of us, it means a recovery that reaches every part of New York City, every family, regardless of income, regardless of race, regardless of neighborhood, regardless of ZIP code, we need a recovery that reaches everyone. And there is nothing more essential to our recovery than bringing back our public schools. This is the essence of why New York City is great, our public schools. Families depend on them. Everything revolves around our public schools. So, we're moving aggressively to bring our schools back now and fully in September. I'm going to turn to Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter in a moment, and you'll hear her focus and enthusiasm for bringing back schools.

But first, let me give you some really important announcements. Obviously, we've had kids in younger grades in school throughout this year. When most cities in America didn't dare to try. We've had our schools open in a variety of forms throughout the year. Heavy focus on younger grades, heavy focus on kids with special needs, brought our middle schools back very successfully, recently. Now it's time to take the next steps. So, high school – high schools will reopen on Monday, March 22nd in New York City. And we're really excited about this. We are ready to go. We have all the pieces we need to bring high school back and bring it back strong. And of course, to bring it back safely. Why do we know this? Because we set the gold standard for the nation and our rules became the blueprint for the Centers for Disease Control, for the CDC's own plan for bringing back schools.

So, that's exciting unto itself. I told you we had a lot of good news today. That's good news, but here comes some more good news – school sports. We're bringing back school sports. So PSAL, Public School Athletic League, we're going to bring back all sports with strict safety protocols. So, let me get it right, everyone. All sports – I want you all to hear it, all sports, but with strict safety protocols, with a phase-in to make sure our student athletes are ready, to make sure it's done safely, a heavy emphasis on moving sports outdoors so everyone is safe. And we're going to extend our seasons into the summer. We're going to go all the way to August, to give kids who have missed out on sports, a chance to catch up and have a much better experience. So, this is really exciting. Now parents, I'm going to say to you upfront, we need to understand that this is for the kids. And even though I was, for years and years, a sports parent. I love going to the games. This is not that kind of situation, because we can't have big crowds. We have to protect everyone. So, this is about giving the kids a chance to participate. And then as things get healthier and healthier in this city, we'll be able to open it up even more.

But look, the last thing I want to say is, think about our kids. Think about our high school kids. So, you know, not long ago, I had two kids in high school. And I can tell you that in normal times for kids in high school, it's really tough, right? It's a, it's a formative time in life. It's a time of a lot of excitement, but also a lot of challenges, a lot of emotions, kids worried about where they fit in, worried about their future. That's normal times. But then you put a pandemic into it. Think about what our kids have gone through? For the first time in generations, their lives, entirely disrupted. Think about the kids who haven't seen their friends for a year. Think about the kids who have been suffering emotionally and are worried. Think about the children we've lost to suicide. There are so many reasons that we need to bring our kids back. There are so many reasons we need them to be back where loving, caring, adults, trained professionals are there to support them. Think about that child that right now is feeling a little hopeless and lonely, what it's going to mean for them on Monday, March 22nd, when they walk back through the door of their high school, see their friends, see their teachers, and have hope again. That's what this is all about. Here to tell you about these great developments, our Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter.

Incoming Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter: Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Let me just get in the room all the way. Here we go. Good morning, everyone. So, first of all, thank you, Mr. Mayor. And over the past week, I've been saying to everyone that my priority as Chancellor is to open, open, open. And I am thrilled that we are making good on that with today's announcement. As the parent of a 10th grader, I can tell you firsthand how exciting

it is that we are reopening high schools on March 22nd and resuming PSAL programming in early April. My daughter is over the moon about being able to reconnect with her teachers in-person, reunite with her friends, and just to be able to walk the halls of her high school, sit at her desk in a classroom, and rejoin the amazing learning community at Frederick Douglas Academy. My Jayden, along with up to 55,000 high schoolers will be doing the same. And beginning March 18th, our teachers and staff members will enter their buildings and start preparing classrooms.

With a 0.57 positivity rate, our schools that are safest place to be, and we are ready to reopen schools for our high schoolers. Approximately half of our high schools will be offering in-person learning five-days-a-week to all or a majority of their students. And we will continue to ramp that up the same way we did with the elementary and middle schools. We will also be bringing back all sports in April and offering additional PSAL opportunities throughout the summer. My email and social media have been flooded with this request and I'm so happy we are able to make this announcement today. To all the coaches who have emailed me, I thank you for your deep commitment to getting back with your athletes. Our coaches know, as we all do, that, this is so essential not only for academics, but also for mental health. Sports in particular provide a much-needed outlet for our kids and they have been without that for nearly a year at this point. Having important offerings and opportunities, like sports, that are driven by student interest, we can expect to see students more engaged and excelling in academics. And we are going to continue with what we know works, weekly in-person testing for our students, educators, and staff, and now our student athletes as well, 30-day supply of PPE, nightly deep cleanings, mandated social distancing, and mask wearing, and support and monitoring from our situation room. This is a proven approach to safety and the CDC recently released guidance that mimics our approach to reopening since September. None of this – absolutely none of this would be possible without our school staff and educators, the hardest working people out there. They have the greatest responsibility of making sure our District 75 schools, elementary schools, and middle schools reopen safely. And now, we're going to do the same, preparing our high schools, fields, and courts for high schools and sports to begin. We are so grateful to them and we are grateful to our families who have continued to be patient and flexible.

So, thank you all. I'm truly honored to be taken the helm during such a promising time. Let's go. Let's do this. We are ready. And with that, I'll turn it back to you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Chancellor. And Chancellor, I can hear your enthusiasm. And I know we're going to do this, and do it well, and do it quickly – get our kids back, get them back in the classroom, get them back on the playing field, bring our city back. And the Chancellor and I are going to be talking about September more and more as well. And I want this to be loud and clear. We are bringing our schools back fully in September, period. I want everyone to understand everything is working, all systems go to bring our schools back 100 percent in September. So, this is a major, major step. And that's going to be an amazing day when we bring our kids back fully and we can just feel the city moving forward. But I'm really happy, we can celebrate this step today, Monday, March 22nd, a very big day for New York City.

Okay. Let's talk about another important day. And this is a day that's a somber day. This is a day that we need to reflect. It's coming up on Sunday – on this Sunday, March 14th, the one-year

anniversary from the day that we lost the first New Yorker to COVID. And we're going to mark Sunday with a COVID Day of Remembrance. We're going to mark Sunday with a sense of respect and love for the families who have lost loved ones in this crisis. We're going to remember the people we've lost. We're going to hold them close. But it's also a time to think about everything that this city has gone through and the strength, and the compassion, the love that New Yorkers have shown. So, on that day, we're going to have a memorial that really focuses on the memories of the people no longer here. I want to offer to everyone, family members, neighbors, coworkers, those who lost someone you love, someone you remember in your heart. If you want to submit a loved one's name and their photo to be part of the ceremony – we're going to be putting up many photos of our loved ones – you can do that, nyc.gov/COVIDMemorial. And Sunday at 7:45 PM, the ceremony will commence and you can watch it live nyc.gov/COVIDMemorial and on all the social media channels of the Mayor's Office. We constantly talk about moving forward and our recovery, but we've got to take time to remember the people we've lost and everything they gave to us and everything we owe to their families as we come back together. This year has taught us the power of New Yorkers standing together and the compassion of New Yorkers for each other. We're going to need that, going forward. But we can't move forward until we remember the people who meant so much to us.

Okay. Let me go over today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 207 patients. Confirmed positivity of 64.68 percent. Hospitalization rate, 3.97 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 3,213 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing positive city-wide for COVID-19, on a seven-day rolling average, 6.23 percent. A few words in Spanish on the topic of reopening our high schools.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Chancellor Ross Porter, by Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, Commissioner Dan Negro, by Michael Ognibene, the COO of the Department for the Aging, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today, it goes to Juan Manuel from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, Juan Manuel. How have you been?

Question: Very good. Thank you. So, about high schools – you're saying are going to be reopening it on March 22nd. Only 55,000 students, about 20 percent of the high school population will be able to attend in-person. With more and more people being vaccinated, are you considering adding another opt-in period for students?

Mayor: Yes. Juan Manuel, we're not there yet. It's a conversation I had yesterday with the Chancellor and with our Health Commissioner, but the day may come. We are all going to focus

on the data and the science. This is a decision that would be made carefully with our health leadership. And we are very concerned about the variants, as we've discussed, but it certainly is possible that the health situation in the city continues to improve, positivity levels go down, vaccination levels go up, and we may have the possibility before the school year is over of doing another opt-in. So, that's something we're looking to, but we're not there yet. In the meantime, we want to bring back all the kids we can for a high school right now, and, for the maximum number of those kids, give them five-day-a-week instruction. Go ahead, Juan Manuel.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I'm wondering if your position on the Governor – investigation, resigning, all that has changed? And also, how do you feel that when people talk about the possibility of you in the future running for governor, they laugh at that idea, or they think that it's a crazy idea?

Mayor: I am focused on what we're talking about right now, Juan Manuel. I am bringing this city back, working with all New Yorkers. A full recovery for New York City, fighting back COVID, that's what I'm focused on, not what different pundits are saying. Look, the situation in Albany's very sad. Just – it's gotten to be worse by the day, and fewer and fewer people believe the Governor, and that's a very sad state of affairs for our state, but, you know, we're going to overcome it and we're going to move forward.

Moderator: The next is Alex Zimmerman from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Alex. How have you been?

Question: I'm well. I just wanted to follow up on that question about the opt-in window. And was just curious, is it just the variants that are causing concern here? Or are there other reasons why, you know, there can't be a new opt-in window for high schools? You know, there's still a few months left here in the school year. There's still a bunch of time. And, you know, I've been talking a lot to people who, you know, understandably feel like they've been locked into a decision that they made, you know, months and months ago when the virus situation was pretty different.

Mayor: Okay. I'm going to break that down a little bit. Alex, first of all, we gave parents an opportunity at beginning of the school year, then we gave them another opportunity to opt in. But we said we had to get some final decisions from people, because we needed to give the kids who wanted to be in school, the parents who wanted to have their kids in school, we needed to give them as many days in school as possible, and that's how we structured things. Now, when you say, is it just the variants, I want to be careful you're not underestimating what you're saying here. Variants are a big question for us. Positivity levels, still higher than we want them to be. Case levels, still higher than we want to be. We cannot take this disease lightly. We sure as hell have learned that. It's just too early. And this is what our health care leadership says clearly, it's too early to make that decision. But we'd certainly love to get there. There's a lot of time left on the clock – there's most of March, all of April, all of May, all of June, there's a lot of time. But

we're not going to do it until we're sure we are safe and that's going to be the bottom line. The health and safety first, that's what's made our schools so safe all along. Go ahead, Alex.

Question: So, this might be a question best directed at incoming Chancellor Porter. But given that just the vast, vast majority of students are learning remotely every day, and, you know, that has obviously been the case for about a year now, what is the status of the City's efforts to improve remote instruction? You know, we've had almost no press conferences in the last year about what's being done on remote instruction. And so, I'm curious, you know, what the City is doing and whether you have any plans to improve remote instruction for the rest of the year?

Mayor: I'll just say one thing before turning to the Chancellor, Alex. We've talked about it in so many press conferences, in fact – the fact that there's been constant effort on a systemwide level, but also school by school, teacher by teacher to improve the remote experience all the time. It never stops. There's an absolute commitment to improving it. But we also have said honestly, there's a lot that educators cannot do remotely the same or as well as they normally do. So, I don't know an educator who is not trying to make it better, but I also know that what we really need is to get our kids back in September. That will be the difference maker. Go ahead, Chancellor.

Chancellor Ross Porter: Thank you. And so, I would just say that we are definitely looking at how to leverage what we've learned from remote instruction to bring into our classrooms. But I would agree with the Mayor, I think that the best instruction is that between a student and a teacher in a classroom. But we're definitely leaning into the lessons that we've learned from remote instruction and thinking about ways to leverage remote instruction as an innovative practice as we move into the next school year.

Moderator: The next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hey. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: I'm doing well, Juliet. How was your weekend?

Question: Good. Busy. And it was great that the weather was fantastic. Thank you for asking. What I wanted to ask you about were these variants that we're talking about. What more do we know about the New York variant? And yesterday, Dr. Scott Gottlieb, a former FDA Commissioner spoke about two New York variants. What can you tell us about that?

Mayor: Okay. And I think we were going to keep doing our variant tutorial, too, because it's really important to put in perspective that variants come with the territory and they need to be taken seriously, but we want to make sure people understand what they are and what they're not. First, Dr. Varma, a little bit of the big picture. And then, Dr. Chokshi on the research that's being done on the New York variant and anything new we're learning, including any new developments, new variants, and the timeline that we'll be able to get more information on. Dr. Varma, go ahead.

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great. Thank you very much for the question. And yeah, since this is a very complex topic, I'll just give a little bit of brief background. I mean, as we know, viruses mutate all the time, that's just what viruses do as they're in the human bodies and that's why the single biggest priority is to prevent people from getting infected, prevention through the ways that we know, hand-washing masks, distance, getting tested, and then prevention through the most important intervention, which is getting vaccinated when it's your turn. There've been – these mutations arise all the time, and that's why it's going to continue to be confusing and get even more confusing. But what we know so far is that, again, the methods that we have all have an effect on reducing infections. So, it's very important for people to be aware of variants, because they do present a future risk. It is possible we may need to give new guidance in the future. But, right now, we really need people to double down on what they're doing. In terms of the variants that were reported – that were first identified here in New York City, we are currently actively researching those. I'll pass over to Dr. Chokshi in a moment to give you an update and when we're going to give you more information. But what we know right now is, again, all of the interventions that we can take are critically important, but that the only way that we can prevent these variants from becoming a problem is really doubling down on all of those interventions aggressively. And I'll stop there and pass the Dr. Chokshi to give you an update about where we're at with the evaluation of what the public health impact is of the variants that have been found in New York City.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you so much, Dr. Varma. And you explained it well with respect to the big picture around variants. As we've spoken about before, there are three variants of concern that we know about from what has been investigated globally about the coronavirus. That's the B117, or UK variant, the B1351, or South African variant, and the P1, or Brazilian variant. We are – we've been actively looking for all three of those, and we issue weekly reports about our findings with respect to those three variants of concern, and we'll do that according to the regular cadence later this week. Also, later this week, we do anticipate having some more information to share about the science that's being done around the B1526 variant, which is sometimes known as the New York variant, as well. The disease detectives here at the Health Department have been working around the clock to figure out some of the key questions about that variant, such as whether it's more contagious and spreads more easily, and whether it changes the nature of the illness caused by the virus that causes COVID-19. So, this is all happening on an hour to hour, day by day basis. But we plan to share at least some of the initial findings with the public later this week.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: Yeah, okay. So, to follow up on that, so it – have you identified, or have there been a second variant identified, and also, when everyone goes back to school, as you anticipate in September, do you plan on continuing social distancing and classrooms and mask wearing?

Mayor: Okay. Those are very different questions but let me see if I can quickly get through that. Dave – I'll speak to the schools piece. Dave, just on the is there a second new occurrence in New York? Would you just speak to that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sure, sir, I'll be happy to. So, there are multiple, you know, different variants that are being identified around the country and around the world. So, Juliet, I'm not sure what the second variant is specifically that you're referring to. We do know that the B1526 variant that is mentioned, some of them have a particular mutation that is concerning and some of them do not. So, perhaps those are the two flavors of that particular variant that Dr. Gottlieb was referring to. But we'll have more details on all of this later this week with respect to what we're finding about that and the other variants.

Mayor: Thank you, and Juliet, the simple answer to your question is, look, we want every kid back in school in-person. We know some kids, some parents may not be ready for that. I would expect at this point, we're certainly going to need a remote piece as well, but the goal is to just have kids in school or just remote, no attempt at a blended-remote, which was really challenging, and look, I think it would be a much, much better situation by September. I expect to see five million New Yorkers vaccinated fully by June. That's our goal. We are on pace for that goal. Even more, by the time you get to September, I expect to see this disease beat back, you know, very, very far. Able to do a lot of things we can't do now. So, I do not expect the same exact rules as we have now, but I expect a lot of smart health and safety measures to be in place in September.

Moderator: Go ahead. The next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hi, good morning. My question is about – you mentioned the COVID Day of Remembrance on Sunday, and I've seen, you have some reporting and some people discussing that the city doesn't yet seem to have plans for a permanent memorial to the victims of COVID. You know, Sunday obviously is the first reported death day, but I'm sure people would perhaps want a permanent space. So, do you have any information you can share any plans? I know the state may have something going on, but what the city is looking to do for something more permanent?

Mayor: We absolutely want to have a permanent memorial and a place that people can gather and remember their loved ones. We don't have a specific plan yet. Obviously, we're still fighting this battle right now. But in the months ahead, we'll develop that plan and start acting on it. It's very important for people who need to grieve, and that will go on for years, to have a place where they can. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Thank you, and I have an education related question in regard to its policies for quarantine for, you know, people who've traveled or perhaps have been exposed. I don't know. I know the CDC has updated the length of quarantine. But I don't know if the DOE has. So, can you speak – I don't know if [inaudible] the interim Chancellor – incoming Chancellor wants to discuss a little bit about any of those changes pertaining to the quarantine policy?

Mayor: That's really the – our health team, the Chancellor can speak to as well, but it's really our health team that – when the CDC went to 10 days, we moved to the 10-day standard. It's really as simple as that. Dr. Chokshi, you want to speak to that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sir, I don't have anything to add. That's correct.

Mayor: Simple and clear. Okay, thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

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

Mayor: I'm doing well, Henry. How are you?

Question: I'm doing well, thank you. Congratulations on students returning in March. I think you're owed congratulations on that.

Mayor: Everyone, Henry. Everyone in the schools who's making it happen. They get the congratulations but thank you.

Question: With the students returning, I mean, you mentioned the stress that they've been under for the past year, and you've talked about emotional supports being in place in September. Now, you've got a situation where these kids are returning this month. How prepared is the city to support these students emotionally now?

Mayor: Yeah, a great question. Thank you, Henry. This is something I feel very passionately about, as a parent, having some sense of what kids are going through now and how intense and challenging it has been, we got to be there for them. I'll turn to the Chancellor, but I'll just say upfront. Our educators love their kids and our guidance counselors, social workers, you know, everyone in the school community wants to be there for the kids that they feel a deep connection to, and so in fact, finally being able to have them come back and support them and check in on them, and if they need more help knowing we now, you know, as part of Thrive, every school in New York City has access to mental health services. That was not true in the past – it is now. even more intensive mental health support if a child needs it through Health + Hospitals. So, I think for kids coming back, they're going to see that the adults in the building are very attuned to their mental health needs and ready to support them. Go ahead, Chancellor.

Chancellor Ross Porter: I would absolutely agree with that, and I just want to thank all of the teachers, principals, counselors and all of our community schools supports – all of the supports that have been really being thoughtful about how we wrap around social-emotional services as our students reenter the building, and I have to say that this isn't a reenter the building moment. It's something our schools have been doing all along. It's something we've been really conscious and thoughtful about – that in this moment, that we will all thrust into, completely unexpectedly, that we had to, in order to teach our students really meet them, where they were both socially and emotionally, deal with the trauma that we are all facing, but especially how it's impacting our students, and so we are looking forward to welcoming them back. That will be a part of being a stabilizing force for students, but we are very clear about the needs to meet them where they are both social emotionally in order to bring them where we know they will be and can academically.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Okay, I was hoping maybe there'd be something a little bit more specific on that, but I'll accept that as the answer. Let me ask you this. There are going to be seniors coming back in March. They're going to be juniors coming back. They've got futures ahead of them, college, graduation first. How are you going to make sure that these kids are on track to first of all, graduate credibly and go to college credibly? How are you supporting them in those issues?

Mayor: Let me speak to that, and I'll turn to the Chancellor. But before we do that, I want to double back on the mental health piece. I think – Chancellor, look, you've been teacher, and principal, and superintendent. Now, Chancellor, I think everyone would benefit from a little bit of the ground level view of what a teacher, or a principal, or a social worker would do as a child returns to school. If they see in their dialogue with a child that there's an issue or problem, or a child, you know, says they need help. I think if you could just give people a little bit of the real life of what happens next and how educators in school communities support a child with a mental health need – I think it would, it would help explain what's about to happen.

Chancellor Ross Porter: Sure, certainly. So, first of all, I will say that our schools have already been engaging in ensuring that we have advisory in our schools, that students are getting one-to-one check-ins with an advisor. Our counselors have been superheroes, really monitoring and students, just emotional health and wellness. We have social-emotional assessments that we're going to be using to leverage, to just check in on where our families are, our students are, as we think forward to the school year. But there are so many things that are happening specifically in schools. Again, advisory – again, academic planning, our college advisors are meeting with our students now to help map out their college application process, which they are full into, and doing the same for our 11th graders as we prepare for next year. So, there are very many things happening in our schools to really connect directly one-to-one with students, to see where they are and to think about the path to where they want to go.

Mayor: Yeah, and I'll finish it and see if there's anything else on the specific graduation point. But let me, let me just say this to wrap it together, Henry. Look, again, you spend time in New York City public schools. I spent a lot of time in our public schools. You've got a lot of very caring professionals who feel a deep connection to the kids and responsibility for the kids, and they know – they know if a child's struggling. They know if a child has dealt with trauma. They know if a child had a loss in the family. They're for how they can support that child, and now the, again, they have much more access to mental health services, and if it's situation that requires more support, they know they can turn to those specific mental health professionals, and principals have been trained in that too. To get a sense of if there's a child in their school that needs additional help, that is playing out in every school right now and has been throughout the year.

But to your question about graduation – two things I think have changed to compensate for the extraordinary dislocation of the pandemic. We've stretched out the timeframe. So, we're using not just the time up until June, we're using July, we're using August, if we need to for some kids and the reality and the possibilities created by digital education. We've lost a lot because a lot of kids aren't in person, but we've gained something in that we can do a lot of flexible and creative things with digital education to help keep them on track. So, Chancellor, if you could pick this

piece up again, I think what would be helpful for people to hear about is your commitment, and the DOE's commitment to making sure that every child who is planning on graduating was planning on graduating, gets there. Every child planning on going to higher education can stay on track. I think understanding the extra efforts that are being made all the way up to August to make sure that still happens. Why don't you run through that, Chancellor?

Chancellor Ross Porter: Yeah, sure. So, that work doesn't stop and hasn't stopped. Guidance counselors, and college advisors, our community schools partners are meeting one-to-one with students to develop their college plan, and that is from soup to nuts. That is from the application process, which happened already to application – financial aid application processes, to how are we connecting our schools directly with the schools that they will be attending, again, in this remote space. And so, all of those things will continue to happen in a more intense way because we all – we have been, you know, removed from the in-person way in which we've done things, and as students come back to school, we'll be able to do that at a deeper level. We know so many of our students are excited about the next level of their education, but they've also been worried about what that means in this time. We are also really working with our CUNY and SUNY partners. Those are great and have always been amazing options for our students, and so as folks, as young people start to rethink, you know, how far they want to go, we're working to identify and partner and make sure our students land in those places that in some cases may be closer to their home. And so really having a comprehensive conversation with students about where they are now different than maybe where they were a year ago in terms of their plans but making sure that they land in the places that are going to get them where they want to go.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is James Ford from PIX-11.

Question: Thank you, good morning, Mayor, and everyone on the call. I appreciate your taking my question.

Mayor: How's it going today, James?

Question: It's going pretty well, thank you. It's a start of a good week. First, may we start with this: last week, you said that you didn't see how Governor Andrew Cuomo could carry on in that position. Since then, he's made it very clear he has no intention of resigning despite this call from the Senate Majority Leader for him to do so. Can you react to that situation and talk about how assuming the Governor stays in place, how your relationship and interaction with him will go forward?

Mayor: Look, James, we're going to keep doing the work that needs to be done. We're still fighting COVID. We have to bring this city back strong. I mean, obviously today's announcements prove that whatever challenges are happening in Albany, New York City's keeps moving forward. We're just going to keep doing the work and we're vaccinating more and more people we're getting our schools back – our high schools back on March 22nd. We're just going to keep moving forward, regardless of who's governor. You know, our teams, City Hall, agencies are always talking with state officials, we'll keep doing that. We'll keep making things happen.

But like I said earlier, you know, it's a sad situation in so many ways. But people have to believe you to be effective as a leader, and obviously, you know, what the Senate Majority Leader said was a powerful statement. Unfortunately, you know, it's a situation where fewer and fewer people are believing what the Governor is saying, and that has to be addressed. Go ahead, James.

Question: Also, you said that athletics – school athletics will reopen with proper safety and health protocols without elaborating it. If you would, please, can you give us more details about what those safety and health protocols are and how they relate to the ones that you intend to use in the classroom as high schools reopen?

Mayor: Yeah, I mean there – look, I'll start, I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and again, reminding people that Dr. Chokshi is not only a parent, his wife is an assistant principal, so he really, really understands our public schools, but I'd say the key is gold standard everything we do, in the classroom or in athletics, we're going to apply the gold standard. That means taking the best health and safety practices from around the nation, around the world and combining them. So, for example, our kids that participate will be wearing masks while they go through their athletic activities. We're not going to have crowds and audiences. Certainly not initially, maybe that will change over time, and we're going to do a lot of the indoor activities are going to move outdoors where it's safer. Those are examples of how we make it work. We know because we've been able to keep the schools so safe, we know what works, we're going to apply it here as well. Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. You covered it. I'll just elaborate briefly. We know that the layers of safety that we've put in place are the most effective way to curb the spread of the coronavirus. So that's the core four. That means masking, distancing, washing your hands, staying home if you're feeling ill, on top of that, we add getting tested regularly as well. And then the final important piece, you know, specifically for school sports is to really avoid indoor gathering. So indoor gathering can be avoided by one, making sure that as much as possible is actually happening outdoors, and then there will be specific prohibitions on, for example, the use of locker rooms and other ways where we know that if people are congregating indoors, it would facilitate the spread of the virus.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Erin from Politico.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, with regards to the Governor, as was mentioned the Senate Majority leader put out a sharp statement yesterday calling on him to resign. Are you at that point, do you think he should resign at this point?

Mayor: Look, I'll say it my own way, Erin, you know, I just don't see how he can govern effectively when fewer and fewer people believe him, and I think there's more information that's going to come out, that'll just make it harder and harder. So that that's the way I see it. Go ahead, Erin.

Question: Okay. Thank you. And then the legislature went through with voting to repeal or their version of a repeal of the Governor's emergency powers, what exactly would you like to see happen next on that front as far as restoring local control?

Mayor: Thank you, a really important question. I'd say, look, I appreciate the action the legislature took, it is definitely a step in the right direction, but I think we should go to full restoration of local control. We've got more work to do to fight COVID, but we're certainly moving in the right direction as a City, as a State, as a nation. It's time to restore the democratic process fully, it's time to restore local governance. There's a reason for hundreds of years we've had an approach to governance that gave such ability of local governments to control their own affairs and protect the lives of our own people because we're closest to the ground. So, we really need to get back to that especially while Albany is going through some turbulence, it's especially important to re-empower localities. We're strong, we're stable. We're moving forward. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to Arthur Chi'en from FOX-5.

Question: Hi, good morning, everybody. Hope everyone's well, my first question is –

Mayor: Hey, how you doing Arthur?

Question: I'm doing great. Thank you, Mayor. I was wondering if you would answer this and maybe one of the doctors too, in terms of taking a look at what the future looks like, what the, what the likelihood is the resurgence given the fact that numbers that went down or plateauing, and even as you've vaccinated over two million new Yorkers are positivity rates still at 6.23. So, based on the data that you see so far, what does our future look like in particular with respect to whether or not we face a resurgence?

Mayor: Well, I want to get Dr. Katz into this, and of course welcome Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi as well. I think the important point here is that we know what works. We have consistently determined the best ways to keep people safe and when we tell the people in New York City, what matters, they really overwhelmingly listen and act accordingly. That's why we're able to keep reopening schools more and more, for example, because everyone heard the guidance and acted on it. Our parents, our students, our teachers, our staff, everyone's been doing the right thing, and that's one of the things that's distinguished in New York City in the last year, why we've had such a strong situation overall is that New Yorkers have really answered the call. So, I'm confident we can keep moving forward, but we do take the variant seriously, and we know it ain't over 'till it's over, but I want to hear from Dr. Katz, because he has a very direct finger on the pulse running the nation's largest public health care system that we do see, of course, real changes as the vaccinations are happening. We do see the reality in the hospitals changing. Dr. Katz, you want to speak to that.

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Yes. Thank you so much, sir, and I share your optimism and here is why. While we have not seen any further dramatic drops on the case numbers, which have plateaued, we've seen a huge, huge drops in serious hospitalizations and deaths among nursing home occupants and other elderly persons. The

vaccines are working exactly as we said, they are extremely effective at preventing serious disease and death, which is the thing that, of course, we most worry about. So, I feel very hopeful. We need, as you said sir, to maintain the core four, the variants may make the virus more transmissible which means that unvaccinated people are at greater risk of getting infected, but because we are successfully vaccinating those who are most vulnerable, the people over 65, those with underlying illness, I have great optimism about the future. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, anything you want to add?

Senior Advisor Varma. This is Jay. I will just say that, you know, I concur with Dr. Katz that the future is very optimistic. I think the reason you continue to hear caution from all of us, of course, is that we're still at a, you know, tense moment. We have the virus evolving and trying to challenge our defenses, but we now have the vaccines, which as Dr. Katz said, are showing a remarkable effectiveness at bringing down severe illness and death, particularly among those people who are most vulnerable. So, it is a tense time, of course, because we don't have the supply of vaccine that we really want and so I do think that things will change dramatically once we get to a situation where we have, you know, a complete abundance of vaccine. We will also have the advantage of seasonal temperature changes to help benefit us as well. But we still do have to persist for the next several weeks until we get to those places where we actually have the upper hand on the virus as opposed to kind of a constant, tense battle.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Chokshi, anything to add?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir, Mr. Mayor, just briefly. You know, I would say that we are at a juncture where we want to see cases and hospitalizations plunging rather than plateauing. And that's why, just as my colleagues have said, we can't let our foot off of the gas right now, and instead to recommit to those things that have worked as we allow vaccines to take their course.

Moderator: Go ahead, Arthur.

Question: Okay. Thank you, guys. And last question is, we've seen some lines build up and not just at the state sites, but then at the city sites we've seen, and you yourself has talked about how you've tried to address any problem spots to try to fix a problem. Given the fact that if there's overcrowding at a city site, that people are they're scheduled to come back exactly at 21 days or four weeks for the Moderna shot, how do you fix that problem so that when the, you know – when the massive number of people who overburdened a particular site on a certain day, when they're coming back for their second shot where we know that it's going to be smoother?

Mayor: It's a good question and what I'd say is, you know, every week our team has learned more and more about how to do this right and how to build the capacity. Again, right now we are absolutely confident we could do a half million shots in a week and it looks like we can do substantially more. So, we can always be expanding capacity and more sites, we want to add sites, we just added Co-Op City in the Bronx, major site, you're going to see a lot more like that as we get supply, and that helps spread out the, you know, the demand more so that people do not have to deal with this many delays, but I'd like Dr. Katz to speak to this on a sort of operational, logistical level how we balance second doses, people coming back, versus first doses

and make sure that we cannot have lines, and Dr. Katz, as you speak to it, one of the challenges of course, is folks wanting to be really careful in showing up super early for their appointments, which we don't want to encourage. We don't want a lot of folks waiting in line and they can have confidence in their schedule but talk about how you balance the logistical needs of second dose versus first dose.

President Katz: Sure, sir. Thank you so much. Well, it is easier for us to balance second doses because we know ahead of time, part of the challenge on the first doses since the start of vaccination efforts is that each week, we learn from the State what our allotment is and how many vaccines are going to which sites, the first doses, which makes it extremely difficult to plan schedules significantly in advance since each we have a different number of vaccines going to different sites. When it comes to second doses, it's very predictable because a second dose will always follow a first dose, and so we know exactly when the person needs to be vaccinated and we can space that out throughout the day so that we don't have a clump of people all at one time. Also, if we know that we have a lot of second doses that day, we'll make fewer first dose appointments at that same time so that people do not wait. To say more about the other two issues, you mentioned, we have had an issue with people coming three and four hours early for their appointments, and it's hard for us – to be in does guarantee a line. If people are coming earlier than their appointments, they are going to clump in line. What we have been doing is we have people walking through the line, identifying people who are older or disabled and need a chair, need a warmer place to sit, and accommodating them so that they are not uncomfortable while we are vaccinating everyone. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Mitch. And Arthur, thank you for raising the concern. I want to say to you and your colleagues in the media, it always helps us – if you learn of a site where there's a particular problem, we need to act on it quickly. Obviously, we have our own quality control approach, but we always appreciate when our colleagues in the media identify something that needs to be addressed, we will do it right away. In the vein, also giving credit where credit is due, want to thank folks on the line from the fire department, of course, Commissioner Nigro is with us and the Chief Operating Officer, Michael Ognibene from Department for the Aging. This amazing homebound effort, something that has not been done before, fire departments been leading the way, Department for the Aging is leading the way, I want to thank you both and thank all your colleagues. This is truly a labor of love going out there to protect our homebound seniors, going literally house to house, apartment, to apartment, and we're going to do that this month and next month, and our goal is to reach every single senior who wants the vaccine.

And look, as we wrap up today, I think this is an example. This is the New York City way of doing things. We're going the extra mile. We're, we're going to reach everyone. We don't leave anyone out. We believe we can do it and then we prove we can do it. You know, we said we could put together a vaccination effort that would reach five million people fully by June. We are on track now, and if we got the supply, we might even surprise you and get there early. We said we could reopen schools, open them at the beginning, keep them open, continue to open up after even problems. We bring back our kids and then we're going to have a full reopening in September. This is the New York City way. This is why our recovery is going to be so strong. So, I said at the beginning, it's a good day, and it's an amazing day having the news from Washington about the stimulus. But the best news is always right here in New York City. The

incredible effort of New Yorkers talk about can do attitude, that's what you've seen throughout this whole crisis. That's what's going to be the key, the key to bring us back. That's why it's going to be a recovery for all of us. Thank you, everybody.

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