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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 18, 2020, 3:00 PM
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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good afternoon, everyone. Everyone has been working so hard to fight back the coronavirus. New Yorkers continue to do the right thing, getting tested. So much going on, but this morning we had bad news. We spent some time confirming it and double checking it, because it is exactly on the number of 3.00 percent. But unfortunately, as of today, on our seven-day rolling average for corona virus positivity, New Yorker City had exactly 3.0 percent, and, as a result, we do need to close our schools for the coming days. No one is happy about this decision, we all in-fact are feeling very sad about this decision, because so much good work has been put into keeping the schools open – and opening them up to begin with, let’s start there – opening the schools when almost no other major school system in America opened making them so safe. But we set a very clear standard and we need to stick to that standard, and I want to emphasize to parents, to educators, to staff, to kids that we intend to come back and come back as quickly as possible. We are working right now with the State of New York, and that was a lot of what we talked about this morning. I had a number of conversations with the Governor and our teams have been talking throughout the morning on exactly what it would take to come back and bring our schools back quickly. And it will be a higher standard. I want that to be clear. We have a stringent health and safety standard right now. We’re going to have to raise that up even higher to be able to bring our schools back but that’s exactly what we intend to do. We’re going to have to focus even more on testing. And I want to emphasize, testing is going to be crucial to the successful reopening of our schools and everyone has got to get engaged even more on testing. I guarantee you that part of that plan will be an even heavier emphasis on testing and therefore want to say to everyone in the school communities, starting with parents and kids, we need to get those testing consent forms even as we’re in this moment of pause. We need to get ready to come back. We need everyone to get those testing consent forms in so we can get into a deeper testing regime.

The State – the Governor and I spoke several times. Obviously, he has laid out some of the additional measures the State likely will be taking quite soon in New York City. Additional restrictions across the board that will affect a number of different industries, a number of different parts of life in this city because we are dealing with a bigger problem all over New York City and state, all over the country, the region. We have to do more to fight back this second wave. So, the State has made very clear additional restrictions are coming and coming soon. But we’re focused on now is making sure that we are working with all families to get them the remote learning they need in the interim, that we’re putting more stringent measures in place so we can get schools back up and running soon, that we can protect New Yorkers across the board working with the State to take the right steps to make sure that we address the kind of activities that might create a particular danger and keep people safe. It will come back every

single time to the basics, to the mask wearing, to getting the tests. We're going to keep going deeper on that.

But I want to affirm, before I turn to the Chancellor, I want to affirm that as much as we are unhappy today that this moment was reached, we are resolved to keep fighting. That is what New Yorkers do. And we will overcome this moment. Remember, thank God we're having this conversation with the backdrop of not one but two vaccines now on the horizon and the fact that we expect to get a lot more support from Washington going forward on a variety of fronts. So, we're going to fight this back. This is a setback but it's a setback we will overcome. And I know our Chancellor and everyone at the DOE today is sad that this moment has come but now are resolute about making sure we serve families and kids in the meantime and then getting back up and running with our schools as quickly as possible. Let me now turn to our Chancellor, Richard Carranza.

Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza: So, thank you, Mr. Mayor. You're absolutely right, this is not a happy for us in the Department of Education. It's been an eventful and very challenging year in so many ways and to say the least. And our schools have opened and been remarkably safe with a 0.19 positivity rate. They've also been safe havens for our children, and we know our students need that interaction so we feel a deep sense of commitment to making sure we can open for in-person learning again as soon as it is physically safe to do so. Just this morning I was visiting at P. S. 73 in the Bronx and I want to give a shout out to Principal Vivian Bueno. And the smiles and the interaction of her teachers and the students and the love and support that those teachers were showing for those students is something I cannot wait – and I know you can't wait, Mr. Mayor – to see again very soon.

And we carry that same urgency with us today as we announce this temporary closure. And I want to emphasize that we are looking at this as a temporary closure. We will get students back in buildings as soon as we can safely. This is our number priority and our number one focus to get our students back in person as soon as possible. We're committed to making sure that our students have what they need to be successful and I want to remind everyone that is listening here today that school is still in session. We are pivoting to remote instruction rather than the in-person instruction that some of our students have been receiving. So, school is still in session and students will still continue to learn and be supported by our teachers. And I also want to remind families that we will continue to communicate with families about device support and tips for remote learning.

In addition, free meals for all students will still be available, and this is critically important. Principals will work with their staff to make sure that there are windows of time to pick up materials at buildings over the next several days and as needed throughout this time period. We have focused on these challenges before and we've learned a great deal together. New Yorkers have proven that they are ready and willing to do this fight against this virus. We need to ask you that again it's important that we follow all of the safety protocols. With the holidays coming, please, we understand but it's important more than ever that we follow the advice of our medical professionals so that we're able to get back to in-person learning as quickly as possible. That is how we will get our schools back open in person learning. So, again, I'm grateful for the tireless efforts of our educators, staff, and I know our students and families as well. So, please let's

follow the advice, let's follow the guidance, let's take on this challenge as we've done all along and together, we'll get through this and we'll all get back to in-person learning as quickly as possible.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Chancellor. And everyone just to put in perspective, we made a decision to have the most stringent standards in terms of the, as I like to call, the gold standard that we put together to bring back schools, the health and safety measures we put in place. They obviously have worked. They've kept our kids, our educators, our staff safe but we also said the three percent standard mattered. Now to put that in perspective and to remember that New York City is in the middle of a battle, we are at three percent. New Jersey, our neighbor, unfortunately, now is at eight percent. Chicago, third biggest city in the country, 16 percent. We are in the midst of a challenge and we cannot let this challenge deepen but we also need to take heart from the fact that we have held off this second wave as well as we have so far, and there's still more work to be done. That's why we will need additional restrictions, that's why we're going to need everyone to participate even more – everyone to get tested, everyone to pay attention, and act on those core four precautions we're asking everyone to be a part of. It will make a difference. So, we have a challenge. We're going to fight back this challenge.

Let me go over today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Threshold, 200 patients. Today, 114. So, we've seen some increase there but again, thank God that number still remains lower than the other indicators proportionally, and we still see our hospital system doing well. But the confirmed positivity rate continues to go up again. It is at 43.86 percent among those patients. Okay, number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average. Threshold, 550 cases. Today's report 1,212. Again, much, much higher than we want it to be. Number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19. Threshold five percent, today's daily report is 2.75. But the number we've looked at the most consistently is the seven-day rolling average and that is literally exactly 3.00 percent. I'll say a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder we're joined today by Chancellor Carranza, Dr. Chokshi, and Senior Advisor Dr. Varma. First question today goes to Jen Peltz from the AP.

Mayor: Jen?

Moderator: Jen, do we have you?

Mayor: We'll try one more time there. Jen Peltz, can you hear us?

Moderator: We'll circle back –

Question: Hi, thank you very much, sorry about that. I think I'm actually going to withdraw my question and allow my colleagues. Thanks a lot though.

Mayor: All right, Jen.

Moderator: Next, we'll turn to Emma Fitzsimmons from the New York Times.

Question: Good afternoon, Mayor. So, we've been waiting a while for this announcement. Can you explain the delay? Do you want to apologize to parents who have been waiting anxiously for an answer? Were you trying to find a way to keep schools open?

Mayor: Emma, look, I think parents know and they've certainly watched me and the Chancellor, that we always have been trying to find a way to keep schools open throughout. This morning getting the data exactly on the nose of 3.00 percent, we wanted to make sure it was 100 percent accurate and there was time spent confirming that. There was time spent working with the State on what it would mean, what the next steps would be. But it also got to a larger discussion with the Governor and his team about what we're going to have to do overall in terms of restrictions for New York City, and what it would take to bring back our schools. And we will have an update in the next couple of days on the plan to bring back the schools, what additional standards will be needed, as I said, certainly involving more testing. We warned parents days ago that this moment might come but we had to be 100 percent sure we were accurate this morning, and we had to have that conversation with the State. They have the ultimate authority. We had to have that conversation with them to get everyone on the same page. Go ahead.

Question: We were also wondering about devices. How many kids still don't have devices? And what are you going to be doing in the next few weeks to make sure remote learning is better. I think that the Chancellor said that the system still needed 77,000 devices like iPads.

Mayor: Yeah, I'll turn to the Chancellor and say the iPads continue to be delivered. We can get the update from the Chancellor, but we continue to work literally student by student. If there is a problem with service, we've had a lot of concerns about our kids in shelter. We have had technicians going out to the shelter working family by family making sure their service is working. And that doesn't end, Emma. That continues throughout the school year. Whenever a kid needs a new device or there's a problem with a device that service, that support is going to be provided. Anyone having a problem should call 3-1-1 still. But Chancellor, why don't you talk about the numbers and also the effort today to make sure kids who needed devices got them going home.

Chancellor Carranza: So, thank you. So, Emma the issue continues to be the supply-side issue. So, New York City along with every school system in America, probably in the world, is ordering devices from every manufacturer. We have, in many cases, been at the top of the list so we have approximately 40,000 devices that have either arrived or will arrive by the end of this week. We have lists that have been prioritized that schools have provided to us given the information that families have provided to schools. So, we're getting those devices out as soon as we get them. We get them set up. We have the LTE cards installed. So, that number is closer to about 60,000 devices that we know in the orbit of students that have said that they need a device.

And again, we've ordered a little over 100,000 devices to be able to be prepared to meet that need.

In the interim, though, schools have had some time to prepare – have prepared paper packets of assignments and different kinds of things that students have to complete to bridge that time gap between a student that needs a device and actually gets a device as well. So, again, it's going to be incredibly important to families to stay very, very close to their schools. They can also go onto our Department of Education website, schools.nyc.gov, and there is a link there where they can also connect with any support that they need for either logging on or their email account or any of the kind of issues as well. This will be a continuous process of getting devices into the hands of students. We know that schools have also assigned some of their own in-school devices for students to take home during this time as well. So, all of that is happening as we speak. It's happened as well and we continue to, as we receive those devices, get them back into the hands of students.

Mayor: Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Rich Lamb from WCBS880.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, and everybody on the call. Mr. Mayor, it appears that you and the Governor are using two different sets of numbers in regard – how is that possible at this point and why can't you get on the same page? [Inaudible] make sense –

Mayor: Rich, the State and City, throughout, have had a different system. It's not news. It's been reported before. I'll have Commissioner Chokshi speak to it, and it's not surprising that different levels of government might have different approaches. They lead us in the same direction consistently. The State and City strategies have been very highly aligned throughout, but each entity and this is true with federal government or any other part of government is going to have its own approach. What we know is that we put forward a standard related to the schools-based on the city's way of counting testing, and that is based on the day the test was taken, not when the test result arrives, the day the test was taken. We simply believe that's the best approach. That's the standard we use with our indicators. That's the standard we set related to our schools and the State understands that and we all have communicated and they understand that's the approach that we're taking. Go ahead, Commissioner.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Yes, our commitment is always to provide the most accurate and valid data that we possibly can because we know what momentous decisions are made based on the accuracy of that data. One of the major differences, as the Mayor has already pointed out in the way that we count test positivity, the percentage positive positivity is by ensuring that we count based on the date that a test is taken rather than the date that we learn about the result from the test. This becomes particularly important when we are seeing an increase in cases as we are right now, because it allows us to see the trends over time, and that's one of the key things that we have to discern to make good decisions based on the accuracy of the data.

Mayor: And, Rich, just to say, I think it's important – the State of New York and the City of New York, both squarely fall in the health care conservative philosophy. There's just not a doubt about it. When you look at the whole history of the coronavirus and the whole country, New York City, New York State have been amongst the most cautious, data-driven, science-driven entities, jurisdictions in the whole country, and both our standards are interpreted with a very focused approach to protecting people's health and safety. Ours are particularly conservative as the Commissioner have just pointed out, but again, the State and the City have really followed the same path as you know, a lot of other places have not, and unfortunately to their peril. Go ahead, Rich.

Question: Mr. Mayor also, could you give us a sense of – you're talking about more stringent standards and you did say more testing in the schools, but does that mean you would roll back those – rolling number would actually have to be lower than three percent for you to bring the schools back? Is that essentially what you're saying?

Mayor: No, it is not that – what I'm saying to be clear, I appreciate the question, Rich. We're – look, we understand that there's a bigger problem in this country and it's affecting us. We also understand our schools have been extraordinarily safe. To protect school communities, we're going to have to put a different, additional measures in place. We're talking right now with the State on what those should be. One thing I can tell you up front [inaudible] be an even heavier emphasis on testing, and one thing that I'm going to be adamant about is that when we reopen everyone who comes into that school building, all the kids have to have a testing consent on file so we can test them whenever we need to, because testing is going to become more of the norm and that's been crucial to protecting everyone, but exactly the point Rich that we were having conversations with the State in detail today about what that reopening standard will be. I expect that announcement to be at some point this week of what the reopening standard will be, and then we're going to apply it as quickly as we can put the pieces together so that we can get to that reopening. But those details are being worked on. The one thing I can say for sure is a lot of testing will be necessary.

Moderator: The next is Christina Viega from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi, Mayor. Thanks for taking my question. I would love to hear a little bit more about how long this might last. We keep hearing that this is temporary, but we're also hearing that the requirements to reopen are still being developed. So, can you give us a sense of what – how long this might last?

Mayor: Absolutely. I think speaking to my fellow parents about how to prepare – you know, I said last Friday get ready for this and get ready to have alternative arrangements. I know that's not easy. It's very tough for parents and for some parents, single parents in particular, really, really tough. I don't say it with anything but sorrow, but we gave people a warning to think about it for the remainder of this month. So, certainly, through Thanksgiving school will be closed. We're going to see with the State how quickly we can finalize those standards and then what we'll have to do to meet those standards. That week after Thanksgiving is the earliest, but we're not yet able to say that will be then or a point thereafter, but we have real work to do, which I think we can do quickly to finish those standards and then put together the action plan to make

them come to pass. Again, heavy emphasis on testing, and we're going to be deploying a lot of our testing capacity towards the schools under this new model, even much more than we've done previously, but certainly parents should assume, obviously we're closed for the rest of this week and the days leading up to Thanksgiving. In the meantime, we'll fill in that blank, Christina and make very clear what the plan is to come back. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks, and my next question is about you know, the last time we had a city-wide school shut down, there were the emergency rec centers in place. I know you've said that Learning Bridges will remain open, but can you talk about how enrollment is going to work in those and how much space you have and whether people will be able to attend full time, because those were set up only to serve children on a part-time basis when they weren't in schools?

Mayor: Correct, and this is a different model. You're absolutely right Christina, but I think it will help us achieve some of the same things. So, I'll get the specifics in front of me. I know there was some city testimony earlier to give some of the details on what attendance has been so far, but I can tell you, the bottom line is essential workers will have a preference for the Learning Bridges seats for their kids, and there's other folks who are prioritized. Families in shelters, for example, and families that have particular challenges. So, we're going to make those seats available. We have seen surprisingly little uptake on the Learning Bridges seats so far. Obviously this moment will mean more people will want them, but we don't know how many, but we certainly feel confidence based on the experience we had with the regional enrichment centers that we'll have the seats for essential workers who need them, and then if we need to keep adding, we can quickly ramp up toward the number we originally projected. But so far, Christina, it's actually been very low enrollment in the scheme of things. So, there's certainly a space available right now for the families who are going to need it right away.

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

Question: Hey, good morning. Mayor de Blasio. My question, I guess, following up from Christina's question is why wasn't there a reopening plan [inaudible] first created or came up or agreed upon by the city at other entities? It seems I know that we had a [inaudible] decided, but shouldn't every possibility have been explored, but [inaudible]?

Mayor: Yeah, Katie perfectly fair question. I think – look, we set a very stringent standard with the three percent – extremely conservative standard. We've now seen a lot of changing conditions. Some things that have been much better than I think a lot of people projected in terms of the safety within the schools, the very low positivity level, but then we've seen this unfortunate resurgence around the country which has added additional challenges. So as we were going about the work of our schools, initially, honestly, this day seemed far off, thankfully. As it has come closer, there's been a lot of moving parts and a lot of changes. What we do know is under any scenario to turn to a new system, it takes a little bit of transition time and we know it has to be a more stringent system. So, these next days, none of us is happy about, but these next days will be that retooling time to figure out how to most quickly get school back and with whatever standards we need and to work with the State to make that come to life. But I think there's some cases where when you're dealing with changing situations, you actually need the

best information, the most recent information, and now we certainly know what we're up against and what it's going to take to bring back our schools. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: My second question is about [inaudible] threshold [inaudible] date when it comes in, looking at this updated number [inaudible]—

Mayor: Yeah, Katie, can I just stop you for a second? Your voice is skipping a lot, so I'm not getting your whole sentence. Could you try again?

Question: Sure. So, my point is about the City's data. It gets back-filled with [inaudible] we [inaudible] city two percent or three percent [inaudible]. How can this threshold [inaudible] when you're updating the numbers we actually hit it last week [inaudible] and if that [inaudible] coming in, but does it again give the most accurate measure to do this thing that affects so many people when the numbers fluctuate and [inaudible]?

Mayor: Yeah, I could hear, I could hear most of it. I think I got enough and I'll start and turn to Dr. Chokshi. Look, let us all acknowledge that none of these measures is perfect by any stretch. You're exactly right that even when we provide a morning update there still is information comes in after, but we tried to create the standard that whatever the numbers were that morning, that's what we were going to be governed by. In the end, these are still choices. They're not perfect choices, but they're directional choices. We wanted to take a very cautious approach to protect the health and safety of kids and educators and staff. That was from the very beginning – the Chancellor and I said more times than we could count that we would be prioritizing health and safety in the reopening of schools, and that's what we did, and that's what we did by setting that three percent threshold. So, the standard we said is the day that we hit that based on the indicators we have that morning was when we would act, we did not expect it to come down to exactly 3.00 percent, but that's what happened. But I think the important point to say is that – the question is direction. The question is what is the basic approach you're trying to take? And clearly, we have seen an uptick steadily. Unfortunately for the last few, clearly, we saw that this kind of level was being reached. That's why we were warning people late last week. It's not perfect, but it does tell us where we are and what we need to know. Commissioner?

Commissioner Chokshi: The Mayor covered the high points. We're always striving to find the right balance between providing the most recent data as well as the most accurate data. If we were purely going on having, you know, the utmost accuracy, then that would mean that we would be reflecting the reality from several days ago. So the balance that we strike is making sure that we're providing a picture of the most recent and most accurate data together, but I just want to underline another thing that the Mayor said, which is let's not miss the forest for the trees here and really focus on what are the concerning signals in what we're seeing with test positivity and with cases as well, which really demands all of us to redouble our efforts so that we can focus on what's most important over the coming weeks, doing the things that we need to do to get schools back open as quickly as possible, as well as protecting our fellow New Yorkers.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: The next is Narmeen from PIX 11.

Question: Hi, good morning – it's not even morning anymore, it's afternoon, sorry about that. You know, the Governor said that if New York City gets to three percent, then we go to the orange. Now, I now understand how that the City and that the State determine their numbers differently, but whose are we going by at this point to determine when we will go to orange, that point seems to be a bit confusing. Mayor, and also, should we get on the same page when it comes to determining some big changes for the city?

Mayor: No. What I mean, I totally understand why it feels confusing and we have tried intensely to put information forward to help people understand. Again, it is always true – I've never seen a situation where, you know, federal government, state government, local government were always perfectly, seamlessly on the same page. It is not the reality because they're all built differently. They all have different missions. The question is not a sort of a legalistic are we always say exactly the same thing at the exact time. The question is, are we moving in the same direction? That has unquestionably been the case. Again, I give the Governor and the State credit, they've been cautious and conservative and data-driven, science driven throughout this process. That's what we've strived to do as well. But it is also understandable that our job is to protect the people of New York City. We're going to collect the data and the way we think makes the most sense, we're going to take the measures that we think are important, and we've done that consistently. So, we said, here's what we want to do. We told the State in the initial submissions about our schools, here's our safety plan, here's our plan for cleaning, for testing, for ventilation, for social distancing, mask wearing. And we said, we have this three percent standard and it's based on our data. And the State has, across the board, consistently deferred to local jurisdictions on a lot of the decision-making about school systems, which is consistent with how school systems are handled in general. They're not run by any state, they're run by localities. But on the question of the zones and the phases before that, that we talked about, those have always been the State's domain to make the ultimate decisions on. We proposed an idea to the State when we saw Brooklyn and Queens happening that focused on ZIP codes. They came back with a variation on that. That variation proved to be very effective. They came up with the red and the orange and the yellow zones – it worked. Brooklyn and Queens were surging in the wrong direction – those neighborhoods. I put forward my proposal, the State turned it into something that they thought was going to be particularly effective. They applied it, we worked with them, and we pushed down the positivity in Brooklyn, Queens in those neighborhoods very clearly. And, really, there was a sea change. The same history applies to the phases – phases one through four. The State determined when we move from phase to phase, we worked with them to make that happen. It worked – every phase was done on time, two weeks between each one, and we progressed through them. So, there's been a lot of coordination – there continues to be. But now, the numbers that the State will use to determine if we go into an orange zone or a red zone, that's their numbers, and we respect that. And they're being very clear about get ready for that, because that's something that is likely to happen – at least orange zone – likely to happen based on their numbers and the timeline they've laid out. Go ahead.

Question: We've been talking a lot about children and testing in schools, and while the random testing has been occurring there, I do have a question for you in terms of children who have been remote. What's your recommendation to families, while you're urging all New Yorkers to

continue to get tested, what do we do with our children who are in remote? They're obviously not locked up in their homes. They've been out and about as well.

Mayor: Get tested. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, who is a dad and happens to be married to an assistant principal, so you can do it better than me. But I'll start – everyone got tested. Whether you're doing remote learning or in-person, everyone gets tested. Go ahead.

Commissioner Chokshi: I don't have much to add to that, sir. I agree with that recommendation. If children are getting remote learning, they should also get tested. And the reason is, the one that you mentioned, Narmeen, you know, people are interacting out in the community. And we also know that there is transmission that occurs within households, you know, among family members. So, we're encouraging everyone to get tested. This has been our consistent message over months now, but it's particularly urgent as we see a spread continue to increase.

Mayor: Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Michael Garland from the Daily News.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, Michael. How are you?

Question: I'm good. So, a couple of questions on the school closure. We'd heard that for a long time some of your top health advisors had been questioning the threshold, you know, given the fact that the three percent citywide threshold is – is where we're seeing something different than what we're seeing is for transmission in schools. And I was wondering if, you know, Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma could address that, if you could address that. What has been going on behind the scenes as far as the discussion on the use of that three percent threshold and whether it's – you know, I mean, clearly, we're closing schools now, so it's applicable, but, you know, I mean, can you tell us about that? You know, we're hearing there's been some debate within your administration about the use of that.

Mayor: Yeah, Michael, there's definitely been some debate, but healthy debate. You know, everyone – so many – I shouldn't say everyone, but to so many of the folks in this discussion are parents themselves, or aunts, or uncles, or grandparents or whatever it may be and cherish public education. Also, our health care team is a very cautious, conservative team, and they're built that way. And so, the whole conversation has been filled with that natural tension that we've followed a cautious, conservative strategy. It has served us well in terms of the focus on data and science, leading us to decisions that brought the City back from being the epicenter, that allowed us to open our schools, that allowed us to keep the schools safe. But you, sort of – you know, you live by a standard, and sometimes, you know, it feels better and sometimes it feels worse, but it's still a clear standard. And so, that three percent was a really conservative standard. And, of course, we've all felt some pain that the last thing we wanted to see is the schools close, but there's been resolve about the fact that the game plan so often has worked of sticking to those tough standards. And that's why I'm resolved about the fact that to bring schools back, we can do it –

we've done it before, we'll do it again – but we have to come up with even tougher standards. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Well, look, as the Mayor and the Chancellor have said, this is a tough day from the education perspective. But I would just say, as a doctor, it's also a tough day from the health perspective, because we know how important education is to a younger New Yorkers, not just for their development but, frankly, for their health as well. And so, you know, as the Mayor has pointed out, I think we have to be forward-looking in this moment. One of the things that I love about being a doctor is not just being rooted in science, but also, you know, having the humility to say we have to learn from experiences, we have to learn from evidence as it emerges so that we can make the best decisions on behalf of the people that we're trying to serve. And I think our focus, going forward, will be on ensuring that we bring to bear the rigorous safeguards, but also standards that help us to maximize the health of the children of New York.

Mayor: Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great. Thank you. And I think what the Commissioner and the Mayor have said is really spot on. And I'll go ahead up front with my own biases – you know, my three children attended New York City public schools for seven years, so I have a deep and strong connection to them. And I've also said, my life, working around the world, trying to prevent infectious diseases. So, this is a very difficult decision, and we made it with, as the Mayor has said, intense debate about how do we ensure that we have the most rigorous health and safety precautions possible, and how do we make sure that we're also delivering the education that we can to the kids, and establishing the trust that's needed from parents, from, from the staff from the whole community about this. And so, we did intensely debate and have continued to debate this. And I think the value of that debate is that we're going to look at ways at which we can strengthen and revise our protocols so that we can get the schools back to in-person learning as quickly as we can.

Mayor: Amen. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: The other thing I want to ask you about is just, kind of the – a little bit of the tick-tock on what happened from 10 AM this morning to 3 PM today. We'd heard that, you know, earlier this morning – that the Schools Chancellor had reached out to, you know, the unions, or the administrators and said, you know, schools are going to shut down. And then, soon after that, basically pulled it back and said, well, no, hold on, we're in a holding pattern. So, you know, I mean, given the delay we've seen, like with this briefing today, you know, what was going on as far as the discussion? It seems like, you know, there was discussion right up to kind of, you know, when it became public as to what, you know, your administration is going to do on this. Can you kind of fill us in on that?

Mayor: Sure. Michael, I think the two key elements – one, as I said, the data came in right on the razor's edge, that caused some understandable pause. We wanted to be 100 percent certain. You know, coming in at 3.00, we wanted to make sure 100 percent that, that was accurate. I wanted that checked again before coming to a final conclusion. And also, I wanted to have a

thorough conversation with the State, including several conversations I had with the Governor, because it was about what happens immediately as a result, what does it mean for getting schools back, and how are we going to get schools back quickly? I was important to talk that through before either he or I addressed the public. And we had several good conversations and we agreed on the kinds of things we're going to have to do. And now, we have to codify that and make that a formal announcement. But that's what we really wanted to think through, because it's the natural next question. Are school is going to come back? We believe we can get them back and get them back soon. What's it going to take? It's going to take some additional measures and we believe we can achieve them, but we've got to codify them and make them real. And we also talked about the restrictions that are coming, And, again, no one is happy about the notion of any other restrictions to our economy or to our lives, but the numbers are speaking loudly and additional restrictions are coming. We talked about what the State is thinking about, how the City could implement it. And so, all of these pieces interconnected, but, clearly, a lot of folks have asked, you know – talked about schools, talked about other parts of our economy and different things happening, different activities. All of those things about to be affected, obviously, by this growing challenge and we're working through with the State exactly how much and when, and that's what those conversations were about.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. And the next is Jenna DeAngelis from CBS.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah. How are you doing?

Question: Good? How are you?

Mayor: Good.

Question: We're faced with the second wave and more people getting tested, but are running into incredibly long lines, especially at Urgent Cares. So, what's your recommendation to those who are facing this issue, especially if they have symptoms and may be worried about being in line or taking public transportation to get there?

Mayor: I've got some simple advice and I'll have Dr. Chokshi amplify it – turn to our Health + Hospitals sites. You know, just by calling 3-1-1 you can find a site near you. Overwhelmingly, our Health + Hospitals – we have the hospitals, we have the clinics, we have the pop-up sites. They generally have not had longer lines. They've had very fast turnaround with results. So, it's right there for people as a great option. Doctor?

Commissioner Chokshi: That's right, Mr. Mayor. I'll just add to it by saying that we're working every day through the Test and Trace Corps., through Health + Hospitals, as well as the Health Department to expand our capacity for testing for New Yorkers. But we already do have many options that are available. You can find them by going to nyc.gov/covidtest, or calling 212-COVID-19 to find the most convenient testing site close to you.

Mayor: Go ahead.

Question: So, for those who don't live near a Health + Hospitals site, and they think they've been exposed and have symptoms, are they supposed to stay home and order an at-home test, stay local and wait in the lines, or take the train to another location? Because that's an issue that some people have expressed to us.

Mayor: Very good questions. Go ahead, doctor.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you. These are very important questions. And I just want to pull out – you know, particularly, you're talking about people who are experiencing symptoms. Those are absolutely the most important people that we want to get tested, to get tested quickly so that we can take steps to make sure that they isolate – that helps us break the chains of transmission – understand who their close contacts were so that they can also quarantine. So, to your specific question itself, they should find the closest site to them from any of those resources that I've mentioned. If they do have to take public transportation to get there, they should, of course, you know, make sure that they are wearing a face covering to and from that. But the most important thing is to get tested very soon once you're experiencing symptoms.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to Jake Offenhartz from Gothamist.

Question: Hey. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, Jake. How are you doing?

Question: I'm okay, just trying to get a clear picture of what happened today really. Did you make clear to the Governor that you planned to close schools, because he seemed pretty surprised by this during the presser when – he went out.

Mayor: I spoke him before. I didn't see his presser, but we had, you know, a number of conversations in the course of the day. We've been talking over the last several days about this possibility, obviously. And this specific exact moment that the press release was going out, he might not have known about because we had to get information out to schools before they left, but he understood it was coming, for sure. Go ahead, Jake.

Question: Okay. And, I mean, on the testing discrepancies between the City and the State, you're saying that, you know, the City and the State are really closely aligned. I think for a lot of parents and people in New York, it doesn't really seem that way. It's been a pretty head spinning day. We heard from parents this morning who heard – was a real that schools were closing? And there were delays in your briefing repeatedly, several hours in which we heard nothing from City Hall. Then, Cuomo held his own briefing. He said the City positivity rate was 2.5 percent, acted surprise, as I mentioned. I'm not really hearing anything in your presser today that suggests this was mishandled or perhaps not fair to parents –

Mayor: Jake –

Question: So, I mean –

Mayor: Go ahead, go ahead.

Question: Were you going to disagree with the premise? I mean, I suppose, is it fair to say that nearly nine months into the pandemic there are still issues with the way that the City and State are not on the same page? And do you think that's hurting New Yorkers?

Mayor: No, is the simple answer. And, again, I don't – you do know me well, Jake, and there are times where I'm going to question the premise. And I think when I question the premise, it's to try and help truly answer the point. This is a very big decision. We had to make sure it was right. But, again, you know what, when a decision happens, you guys rightfully are going to say, well now, okay, what's next? And what's the plan to bring it back, and all those. And we had to get clear and make sure City and State really had talked all that through. It doesn't always happen on, you know, the exact timeline that we normally keep to, because it's complex stuff. Very good, very productive conversations. We have warned people. I mean, New Yorkers are smart. They've been watching these indicators for days and days unfortunately go up. I gave a very explicit warning on Friday, that people have to get ready with alternative options for their kids. The vast majority of every-day people are smart and they understand when they're given a warning like that, that they have to get ready. But, again, today, the information coming in right on the razor's edge, really important to confirm that, really important to talk through with the State the exact next steps. I found the conversations very productive, very consistent. And I would say, if you just take the eight months, I will put the whole thing up – again, there – sure, there are a few times where disagreements – absolutely. If there were never any disagreements, that would be very surprising to me. But if you go directionally, have the City and State both been data and science driven? Yes. Compared to a lot of the places in the country, extremely data and science driven. Have we consistently got to the same directions? Yes. Have we worked together, in a sense that a lot of times the State will come up with a concept, we have to implement it – we found a way. There's got to be tensions, but the job's been getting done. And we came back from the worst of this disease, overcame that, became one of the safest places in the country, opened up the nation's largest school system, made it extraordinarily safe, but we also are living by those cautious conservative standards, and we hit this day, and we're falling through. But now, we turn to the exact focused strategy for how to bring them back.

And I'll conclude on that to everyone. Look, there's going to be – obviously, so many parents right now are saddened, are frustrated that their kids can't go to school tomorrow. So many kids want to be in school. So many educators want to be there to greet them. But now, we put ourselves to the work of overcoming this challenge and we apply ourselves with everything we've got. And that's what New York City has done time and time again. I know our schools are going to come back. Why do I know it? Because they come back from a lot worse than this. We were told a thousand times we couldn't reopen in the summer. Richard and I, wherever we went, were told we were crazy to talk about reopening schools. We did it. We will do it again. If it takes tougher standards, we will live by those tougher standards. But this is how we will deal with the immediate term. I want to turn people's attention to what comes thereafter, because there are fully seven months ahead. After this month, there are seven more months ahead in the school

year. And during that time, we will get the vaccine, and we will distribute the vaccine, and we will make the city safer and safer and more and more kids will be able to come back. We are going to be able to do a lot more in this school year.

So, today's a tough day, but this is a temporary situation. Our schools will be back and our school year will get better and better as we go along and this disease will be beaten in the course of this school year, I have absolute faith. And we will make this a year that works for the parents and kids of this city. That's what we're committed to. And to, everyone, keep fighting, because if you're hearing this news today and you're feeling at all let down, that the thing to do is to fight even harder. Make sure everyone's getting tested. Make sure everyone's wearing the mask. Everyone's practicing social distancing. Be smart about the holidays. This is what's going to allow us to overcome this moment, bring our kids back to school, bring our city back.

Thank you, everyone.

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