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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. On Friday evening, I was on a conference call with a number of colleagues from the Department of Education, and we were talking about all the preparations for school opening this morning. And the school opening this morning was a beautiful thing, and I'm going to talk about that in a moment. But in the middle of the call, we were all jolted – the Chancellor broke in at one point and said, he just received news that this nation, this city had lost Ruth Bader Ginsburg. And I got to tell you, for all of us, I know I felt it, it was like a gut punch. There was just silence on the phone, everyone taking in something that we feared would happen. But I think we all have had such profound respect for Justice Ginsburg that we always believed she would find a way to keep fighting through no matter what was thrown at her. And God bless her for the fight she fought in so many different ways in her life. I have to tell you I don't know the details of all the pain she was going through, all the challenges she was going through, not just in recent months, but in recent years, but the fight that she waged on behalf of all of us was unbelievable. Just miraculous and what a saint who walked among us because she kept fighting. She kept fighting to live, to serve, to protect us all no matter what. And that strength, that tenacity gives us a possibility that justice may be served and that she may be replaced by someone worthy of holding her seat.

But remember that strength, that tenacity, it's who she was and why we admired her so much. But it also comes from her roots in this city, proud daughter of Brooklyn, someone who learned as a child growing up in New York City to be strong, to be resilient, to take what was thrown at her and then fight back. And she did that fighting for the rights of women. And she did that to ensure that justice would be done by our courts. And she did that to ensure that the Supreme Court would be a place that actually reflected the lives of our people. So, we miss her deeply. We're pained by our loss, but we're inspired by her. And we're going to talk about schools today. It's really important to remember, this is a story of what New York City public schools mean, because Ruth Bader Ginsburg is a proud graduate of James Madison High School in Brooklyn and the New York City public schools gave her some that greatness and some of that strength. And she made us proud every day of her life. So, we miss her, may she rest in peace, and may she guide us through her example.

Now, everybody, that's a sad topic, but this morning, the Chancellor and I, the First Lady, we were given the opportunity to see pure joy, pure hope, pure possibility at the Mosaic Pre-K Center in Elmhurst, Queens, to see kids ready to get into that school and see their friends and get all the blessings of a pre-K education. Teachers, educators, staff, everyone ready to go, ready to serve those kids and families, excited to get back to work the way they know works best, right there in person with kids, parents feeling such excitement as well. I talked to a number of parents

and the word I heard the most was excited. And I said, you mean the kids are excited? And the parent was like, no, I'm excited too, because I know this is good for my child. So, there was an air of energy and spirit. And the Chancellor and I have had the pleasure of going to opening day many times, and this is probably one of the best days of the year, maybe the best day of the year, but this year was special, this year was powerful because we've had to overcome so much. The first time our kids are going back into a school building in large numbers since the middle of March, and to see those children so engaged, so happy to be there, it was truly inspiring, truly inspiring.

We talked with some amazing professionals, Beth Tekverk, who is the director for early childhood there, and Nancy Calabrese, the assistant principal, and a lot of other great, great, great professionals. And all the conversations were filled with energy, focus, purpose, but one conversation sticks with me. A pre-K teacher named Sarah, and she used to have a different profession and she decided she wanted to do something particularly rewarding so she went into teaching just a few years ago. And she was out there expressing her enthusiasm, talking to her fellow teachers, talking about how great a day it was. At one point, she just said out loud, let's get this party started. It was that sense of, like, we're doing something important here, we're doing something great here, let's do this, and it's going to be exciting, it's going to be fun, it's going to be positive. And I was just – I heard that, and I said, there's the theme for the day. Something great is happening today in New York City.

This week, 90,000 kids will go back into classrooms between 3K, pre-K, and our special-ed classrooms in District 75. Next week, hundreds of thousands more. But what we also saw was a real devotion to health and safety, a devotion to social distancing, a devotion to the temperature checks, all of the smart measures to keep people safe. And the masks, everyone was wearing a mask. And those four-year-olds were wearing their mask with no problem at all. That's one of the things that was most striking. They were – we saw them out there in front of the school for a while, in the school, they were wearing those masks. It was natural for them. That's going to be crucial to everyone's health and safety. Even four-year-olds, three-year-olds can do it. I want to thank all of the team at the Mosaic Center. I want to thank all the team at the DOE, everyone at the Tweed building, all the educators and staff out in the schools. Everyone's working hard. But I also want to thank all the other agencies that are helping, the Department of Health, and Health + Hospitals, Test and Trace, Buildings Department, Fire Department, you name it, School Construction Authority. Many others are chipping in to help because everyone believes this is one of the most important things we can do for our children, our families, and our city.

So, as we get ready now to see a lot of kids coming back to school, here's a message to parents – you're being sent, or you have been sent already, forms to fill out every morning. The health screening forms for your kids. That means you check their temperature and just give the status. It's really important to do that every single day. We'll make it easier. You can do it online. You can send in a piece of paper. Remember, every parent, we need you to do this, this is something we're requiring of every parent, check your child's temperature in the morning. If they have an unusually high temperature, please keep them home. Let's make sure they get well. But by doing that, we're going to help everything keep moving forward for everybody.

Okay. So, today and this week, we have 734 schools that are opening for live instruction, in-person instruction this week, 734 schools. And on top of that, 1,050 community-based early childhood education programs. So, again, think about this. That's a huge number of schools up and running with the kids coming in, educators ready, 734 schools, 1,050 community-based early education programs. So, what does it take to keep building this out and keep moving? Well, first of all, we've all learned that sometimes the best thing to do is to have a war room and the DOE has a great war room up and running at the Tweed building. I visited with the folks in the war room. The visual I'm seeing here is of actually the situation room at the Buildings Department. That's a different thing, but the DOE war room where the Chancellor and his whole team gather together constantly to check on all the key needs, makes sure each school has what it needs. They go literally school by school. And then on top of that, the situation room at the Department Buildings, and this brought together a lot of professionals from key agencies, from DOE, from the Health Department, from all – Test and Trace – all of the agencies all in one room led by the Buildings Commissioner Melanie La Rocca, who is a great leader at Buildings but before that was a great leader at the School Construction Authority, knows our school system well. I want to thank all those agencies, DYCD, Youth and Community Development, also a key player in this effort because of childcare. Everyone together in one room. When there's an issue, when there's a problem to be addressed, everyone can address it in common, and that's a great tool.

And speaking of childcare, the childcare program also starting now, the Learning Bridges initiative, free childcare, supervised learning for kids from preschool up to eighth grade. This is meant to help working families, to help families dealing with some of the greatest needs. It will be determined on a priority basis, which families need the help the most, but this is now building out, and, again, free to all. We have 3,600 preschoolers will be in the Learning Bridges program from the beginning and families can apply and as seats continue to open up, they'll be assigned to them. You can apply at schools.nyc.gov/learningbridges. Again, schools.nyc.gov/learningbridges. And if you have any questions about the status of your application for childcare, go to learningBridges@schools.nyc.gov.

Now, let me turn to another important initiative that's all about supporting and helping our young people. And we know young people have been through so much, the Chancellor and I've talked about this a lot – very, very tough year, 2020, for the young people in New York City. And we're not going to ignore the challenges they're going through. We have to take them head on and we have to protect this generation that's been through so much. And who's been through the most? Our children of color who have gone through this crisis in a disproportionate way and felt the pain of their families and their communities the most. And that's particularly true for young children of color, particularly young boys, because they have been put through so much in the crisis – but before, because of the challenges and problems of this society that we must address head on. One of the things we can do most is provide mentorship – provide not just role models, but mentors who really provide support and guidance to children and particularly young boys to give them a sense of all of their greatness and all their possibility. So, there's a great set of initiatives that have been put together to make sure that we provide that support. And this program we're launching now is called the Mentors Matter initiative. It says it all, mentors matter. They make a huge difference in the lives of children. They elevate kids and give them hope. And this is going to be a difference maker for a lot of New York City kids. So, here to tell

you more about it, as someone who's devoted to our children and their future, the Executive Director for the Young Men's Initiative, Jordan Stockdale.

Jordan?

Executive Director Jordan Stockdale, The Young Men's Initiative: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. As a former East Harlem middle school teacher, I can understand the challenges our students and families are facing during this time, during this crisis. We know that many Black and Brown boys struggle with school and have the highest dropout rates in education and rates of educational disengagement. We know that mentoring and particularly mentoring from adults who look like us can provide a transformative experience that propels us to our potential. That's exactly what the young men's initiative is about. Helping our young people reach their potential through funding, evidence-based mentoring and employment programs and programs to help our justice-involved brethren. Today's announcement, the Mentor's Matters initiative has three parts. First, a hundred black men and YMI will partner to expand its Junior 100 program to at least 750 Black and Brown male students this year. The program will provide mentoring and educational enrichment as well as expose students to career opportunities and offer financial scholarships for postsecondary education. Second, we will expand CUNY Tutor Corps to offer academic tutoring and near-to-peer mentoring to 3,600 additional DOE students. CUNY students who are with it within the New York City Men Teach program will be prioritized for this paid opportunity. These students are all males of color who are succeeding in their college programs and who are ready to impart wisdom on a slightly younger version of themselves.

Lastly, YMI will issue \$500,000 in grants to local community-based organizations that offer tutoring, mentoring, and social emotional support to at least 4,000 students during this difficult time. The application period for the funding opportunity opens September 21st and closes October 5th. You can learn more at nyc.gov/ymifunding.

Mayor: Thank you very, very much. Jordan. Thank you for all you are doing. And everyone who's going to be a part of this initiative, just want to say thank you. It takes a lot of heart and a lot of love and a lot of commitment to help bring along our young people. But they feel that sense of investment and concern. They feel when adults believe in them, they really can tell – and they can tell when they are not believed in and that's one of the problems – the negative signals that our society for too many years, decades has sent to young men of color. This initiative is part of turning that around and showing they are loved and they are believed in and it makes all the difference. So, thank you. Thank you very much.

Now, everyone, we talked about a lot of things going on with our schools and our young people, but now it's important to be reminded of something that affects all of us – the Census. Look at this clock running right here – nine days left. The Census that determines so much of the future of this city, our communities, things that will affect your life directly – we only have nine days left. Now, the Census team has been fighting the most extraordinary odds in the middle of a pandemic with the federal government trying to undermine the Census, with the President of United States trying to discourage immigrants from participating. All of this has been thrown at our census team, but this team is tough and resilient. Just like New York City, they keep fighting back. They're doing an amazing job, reaching people all over the city on the ground. Chirlane

and I had the joy of being with the census team out in Canarsie a few days ago in Brooklyn, and it was a really exciting, positive, experience, because when people felt the energy of the census team, they were willing to take the time to fill out that census. When they heard how important it was, they got involved. So, we're doing that now all over the city.

Now, New York City keeps moving forward. Now, our self-response rate is at 60 percent. We have got to keep going. The national average is 66 percent. We've got nine days left to see how far we can go, to push farther. Now, here's an interesting fact – and you could see on your screen there where New York City is this year compared to 10 years ago when there was no federal government trying to stop the census, no attacks on immigrants and attempts to scare them off, no pandemic – you can see this team has gotten New York City almost to the point where we were 10 years ago and they have still nine days and they're fighting hard to go even farther. But look at the rate for the country against 66 percent – now, that gap was much greater 10 years ago, and that's what matters. Remember, the census is graded, ultimately, proportionally. How do we do compared to the rest of the country really determines the levels of representation in Congress we get, the amount of funding we get. Again, don't think about it abstractly – think about money for your kid's school, money for your subway line, money that makes sure people can get affordable housing. Think about the people in your life who need affordable housing and the federal money that comes in for that. It's all determined by the census. So, how you versus the rest of the nation determines your share. 10 years ago, look at that, of gap of almost 14 percent between New York City and the nation. This time, only six percent. And we were the epicenter of the crisis and yet we've fought back. So, kudos to the whole census team. But again, everyone, we've only got nine days left. Everyone needs to help now. Nine days to go. The team is out across the five boroughs. They're taking all sorts of actions to draw attention to the census, get people involved – 100 different events and actions planned in the next nine days, focusing on neighborhoods that have the lower response rates in the city. That includes Wakefield, Corona, Richmond Hill, Jamaica, East New York, Cypress Hills, Canarsie, and the North Shore of Staten Island – all those areas we're going to put extra attention into. So, that means anywhere people are – the subway, the bus, if they're at a shopping center, if they're at a food pantry, wherever people are, you're going to see the census folks out. And they are doing an incredible texting campaign, texting three-quarters of a million New Yorkers – a digital campaign, TV radio. A whole host of approaches – 25 different languages. I mean, this is an amazing, amazing effort. So, again, everyone, you can make such a difference here. You, yourself, by simply taking that 10 minutes to fill out the census. And if you want to help, if you want to help us get this done and make sure the census comes in strong. A lot of people say, what can I do to help? How can I help New York City? Here's how you can help – you can join up to help us get people involved and engage and get them to take the time to fill out that census. Go to nyc.gov/gotc – nyc.gov/gotc. And you can help with your family, with your neighborhood to get people to sign up for the census, and we can go farther and we can make sure New York City gets our fair share.

Okay, let's talk about our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold is 200 patients and today's report 51. And the positivity rate among those patients is 11.5 percent. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold is 550 cases – today's report, 316. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, threshold is five percent – and look at that chart,

look how this has stayed so low thanks to your efforts. That's a beautiful representation of what the people of New York City have achieved. So, today, one percent even – literally 1.0 percent. Let's keep it at that level or even drive it down further. We have shown we can do it, let's keep going.

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, Commissioner La Rocca, Dr. Katz, Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson, Census Director Julie Menin, the Deputy Chancellor for Early Childhood and Enrollment Josh Wallack, Jordan Stockdale, the Executive Director of the Young Men's Initiative, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Andrew Siff from NBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Last week, before you push the start of school back, I asked you how confident you were that things would begin on time, and you said, of course, things were going to open. We now know, after your meeting with the labor leaders, it got pushed. So, I'm going to ask it again with regard to next week, now that you have the situation room, the emergency command center, the new protocols and the labor leaders' conversation. How confident are you that September 29th will be a go for the higher grades?

Mayor: Very confident, Andrew. We have seen some really, really good results over the last few days. And this morning, strong liftoff, and you heard it's a huge number of schools and early childhood programs and they're starting strong. So, I feel very good about the trajectory we're on. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Yes, can you still hear me? Hello? You still there?

Mayor: Yeah.

Question: Okay. Different topic. This is about New York being designated a jurisdiction of anarchy. This was of course on the Justice Department website this morning. I'm wondering what is the net effect of that? Is it sure politics or does this actually mean something from New York City since the federal funding had already been withheld?

Mayor: I'm going to start and I'm going to turn into our Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson. Why don't we cut off that background noise there? You know, I was out in Elmhurst, Queens this morning. I saw peace, tranquility – I saw people going about their people excited that it's the first day of school. I saw anything but anarchy. So, this is just another one of President Trump's games. It's thoroughly political. It's part of his campaign strategy. It makes no sense. It has not – it's not based in the facts in the least. It's insulting to the people in New York City and his effort to withhold our funding is unconstitutional. And with that, I'll turn to a real expert, someone

who, before he became our Corporation Counsel, serve at the highest levels of the federal government and fully understands the relationship between the federal government and our cities – our Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson.

Corporation Counsel James Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And you are absolutely right, the President does not have the authority to change the will of Congress. We are preparing to and will be prepared to fight this in court, if, ultimately – because this has to go through a number of steps – he actually takes concrete steps to withdraw federal funds. And not only is it an unconstitutional, the designation of anarchy doesn't even pass the common-sense test. And if need be, we can send, in addition to our legal filings, a dictionary, because what we have in New York is not anarchy. What we have is a city moving forward under difficult circumstances, made more difficult because of the threats to withdraw federal funding.

Mayor: Thank you, Jim.

Moderator: The next is Brigid from WNYC.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, Brigid. How are you doing?

Question: I'm good. Just some follow up questions on schools today. I want to just start with Learning Bridges, the childcare program that was supposed to be priority for DOE employees. We've been hearing from some teachers who actually have to teach today that they haven't gotten the updates they need to the program and our own inquiries haven't really gotten any response. So, I'm just wondering, beyond the email address you shared, is there some – can you tell us more about what's happening and what advice you have for teachers who are maybe scrambling for childcare today?

Mayor: Yeah. Brigid, look, we want to make sure that we accommodate as many people as possible. It's a brand-new initiative that was built in response to the pandemic conditions. And, you know, we've dealt with the challenges we've dealt with everywhere else, having to create the social distancing and find the appropriate space, make sure it's healthy and safe. So, everything's harder in a pandemic, to say the least, but the team has really worked hard to build out tens of thousands of seats for kids in childcare, in Learning Bridges. And that process will continue and will keep growing over these next few months. So, I'm going to turn to the Chancellor and to the Deputy Chancellor Josh Wallack, and they can talk about how we're going to do everything we can to accommodate teachers and to make sure people have someone they turn to, to get the answers to their questions.

Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. So, I'll start and then I'll ask Deputy Chancellor Wallack to add. There are 3,600 early childhood Learning Bridges Seats that are available right now. So, notifications should have already started going out and I'm going to ask Deputy Chancellor Wallack to talk a little bit more detail about what folks can do if they're looking to find out where is my application. Josh?

Deputy Chancellor Josh Wallack, Department of Education: Thank you. That's absolutely right. We started this week with our preschool slots and, by the beginning of next week, we will have services available for tens of thousands of families. We'll be up to 30,000 Learning Bridges slots across the city, sites in every borough – we have 57 operating today and there'll be more by next week. I think if families are asking questions, offers will be going out this week – more every day. We are, as the Mayor and Chancellor said, working nonstop to get these sites stood up and we will have thousands more stood up with each passing day. So, if you have a question about your particular application and you email learningbridges@schools.nyc.gov, we will get you an update very quickly. And as the Mayor and Chancellor said, we are setting – we are setting up the seats first for the families that need the most priorities – do include families in shelter, families that are working in our New York City school system and others – other families of essential workers. And so, we're working to set those up as quickly as we can. We will get you updates as fast as we can. And we will stand this up over the coming weeks.

Mayor: Josh, let me just – let me just push this question. One more point – on this specific thing of employees of the DOE, teachers, staff, getting an actual specific answer. Can you just give us a sense of the kind of turnaround time, whether they're going to get a specific email back or a call from someone? What's the time turnaround, because, obviously, people are worried right now to get those things resolved. What kind of turnaround time?

Deputy Chancellor Wallack: Absolutely. So, the turnaround time if you email learningbridges@schools.nyc.gov, we'll get back to you with a status update within 48 hours. And children of DOE school and program staff are a priority group, so will be among the first families to be served when we do have seats in your area. And we will let you know where we stand on that and what that prospect looks like when you email us.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Brigid. Brigid, can you hear me?

Question: Now I can hear you, can hear me? Great can either the Chancellor or someone talk a little bit more about this new building captain's role that was announced today and what DOE staff's responsibilities will be. Is it something beyond just taking attendance? We've been getting some questions from folks trying to understand what this role is all about?

Chancellor Carranza: Sure. Brigid. So I don't know what announcement was made about building captains. There really is no announcement. Every year at the start of school we have central staff several layers deep that are assigned to a school site to assist, to problem solve, to assist the principal. They're not there to take attendance. What they're there to do is to facilitate problem solving because start of school, you always have things that will happen. This is no different. So we have a building captains that have spread out across all of the sites that open for in-person learning today. Their role is to be there, to assist, to help facilitate anything whether it's a procurement of more PPE or it's helping with organizing and making sure that they have all of their supplies again, they're there to assist. They're not there to take attendance. Thank you.

Moderator: The next is Yoav from The City.

Question: Yeah. Hi everyone. I wanted to ask about the number of teachers that are going to be needed for middle schools and high schools, trying to figure out why that number is still an unknown at this point. At what point do you intend to come up with a number and is that going to leave you enough time to do all the hiring that's necessary?

Mayor: Yeah, Yoav, look, I think it's understandable anyone would say, why is this so complex? Excuse me, and I think what we have to understand is the realities of the pandemic, meaning we have had an extremely unusual circumstance. Teachers applying for medical accommodation, that's been on a rolling basis. Families deciding whether to opt in, opt out, that's been our rolling basis. The work being done in each school we've had really good results in terms of number of schools and classrooms ready to go we had only one building that wasn't. But still you've had to make adjustments around classrooms, and then when you add in that you have the realities of in-person education, blended remote education, full time remote education. It's a lot for everyone to mix and match all these factors. They never had to do anything like this before, so we all want it to be resolved and it will be resolved. But I do want to say to everyone in the school system, they've been dealing with extremely complex dynamics, but what has been made clear to the principals is they can hire people to fill those vacancies, and if they need help, there are DOE employees being applied to their schools, people – certified teachers being sent in where there's a gap. There are substitute teachers being hired. There are education students being hired and I see the pieces coming together. That's really the simplest way to say it. It's been a lot of complexity, but it's moving. Go ahead.

Question: Okay. I guess on a different issue, I wanted to ask about the food reserve that you established back in April with the \$50 million. So our understanding is that a decision was made essentially to begin distributing most of that food in part, because of the need at pantries. But it also seems like the decision was made that a food reserve of that nature is no longer necessary, and I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about that, get given kind of what seems like an increasing number of kind of emergencies and natural disasters. Are you planning on continuing some kind of reserve along those lines?

Mayor: Yeah, Yoav, it's a great question. I appreciate this question because it gets back to why we established it to begin with. I try to always tell people what I'm seeing, but I also try and help people see the good along with the bad. There was a point in March where I was getting increasingly concerned about the supply chain around the country and what it meant for New York City, and I specifically ordered the creation of the food reserve. I will happily tell you Yoav, that my fears were not realized, that the supply chain held there were, there were some glitches along the way, but nothing profound, a supply chain held. The bigger problem we had in New York City was people buying in large quantities and stores taking more time to get stocked, but not that there wasn't a constant flow of food and other supplies coming in. So it makes sense when we have immediate needs to draw off that reserve to some extent, but we should keep we're, we're not done yet as a city or as a nation with this crisis. So we do need to keep a certain amount of reserve and we will for sure.

Moderator: The next is Mariah from the Washington Post.

Mayor: Mariah. Can you hear me?

Question: Yes. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yep.

Question: So I'm working on a story about the families that have actually chosen remote learning and I was, I was wondering if you were surprised that so many families, particularly in the Black and Latinx community chose to do remote and why you thought that might be?

Mayor: You know, Mariah, it's a good question. I think the whole impact of this crisis is part of the reason. Communities of color have been hit the hardest here and have gone through hell, and if so many families have lost family members – it makes sense that there would be real concern and real caution. At the same time, I will tell you, obviously the vast majority of our school children are from communities of color and we have hundreds of thousands of families like we saw this morning in Elmhurst, Queens that want their kids back in school. So I am not surprised at all that a lot of people wanted to start with remote out of an abundance of caution. I'm not surprised by the many, many people that want their kids back in school for many reasons, including, you know, that they have to get back to work or they really think it's best for the kids' education.

But in November, there is the opportunity for families to then decide if they want to bring their kids back into the school setting and I think some families want to see, you know, at least a month or more of evidence before they make that decision and we're going to be able to show them something that I think will be compelling, and I won't be surprised if a number of families make that choice in November to come back in. Go ahead Mariah.

Question: Yeah, and one of the, one of the things that I've heard from several families is they said that they think that you're putting the economy ahead of their children's lives and that they think that you're using their children basically as guinea pigs, and I'm curious just to hear your response?

Mayor: Mariah, I obviously, if you know the work I've done and the Chancellor has done, and the Chancellor's literally devoted his entire life to kids, and we've talked about this question a hundred or more times someone who has devoted his life to children, if he had said, you know, I'm not comfortable opening schools, that would have been very, very crucial and it's been the opposite. He feels, I won't speak for him. He's sitting right here. You'll chime in, but he feels strongly the value of in-person education.

I feel it as someone as a public school, parent, myself – as someone who worked on education issues now over the last 20 years that we really ended up cheating a whole lot of kids in the last months of last year, not because anyone meant to, but because remote just couldn't give them what they needed, especially less privileged kids, and the notion of doing that again for a full school year to me was really, really unfair.

But Mariah, we set it up as an optional system and that's where I think it's really an unfair criticism. If we said, oh, you have to come to the school building, you know, in September or

you don't get an education. People could make that point, but we've said to parents, it's your choice. It's your choice, and if you want all remote, it's there for you. But we heard, remember we surveyed parents and overwhelmingly, they said they wanted the choice. They wanted school buildings open, and I think the people spoke. The parents had said, no, we want remote. That would have been a very different discussion, but a clear majority wanted school in person for their kids. Go ahead, Richard.

Chancellor Carranza: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I would only add, I agree with everything that you said that the evidence is overwhelmingly clear that the best environment for a child is in a school environment with a well-trained caring teacher and the support systems that come with in-person learning the benefit that we have in New York City. Having been the epicenter of the epicenter in March, but through the hard work of my fellow New Yorkers, we've been able to suppress this virus to a level that makes it possible for us to have in-person learning. We can't squander that opportunity. Children are in pain. They've been traumatized. I get a lot of emails but I'll never forget the email that I got from a parent who has a child with disabilities, who talked about explained to me in great detail, how her child had regressed and how her child was being harmed by not being able to be in-person, not receive those services in-person and how overjoyed she was that there would be an opportunity for her child now to be back in school. So again, we hear from a lot of parents, but it just breaks my heart as an educator, the thought of any child not being served, and as the Mayor has said, this is a choice system that we set up. So parents can make that decision, and we honor that decision. But I can tell you, we saw a whole bunch of parents this morning, the Mayor and I, who were overjoyed with their children, having the opportunity to be in person again, and teachers that were overjoyed to welcome children back strange times for all of us. But that's one thing that just doesn't change.

Mayor: That's for sure. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Bob Hennelly from the Chief Leader.

Question: Good morning.

Mayor: Hey Bob, how you doing?

Question: Very good, sir. I was speaking with Harry Nespoli, Chair of the MLC, and he mentioned that there was a thought among the unions that considering all that's going on now that you consider taking off the table layoffs until after the election, because there could be such a radical change to the atmospherics.

Mayor: Bob, thank you for the question. I think I'm a huge fan of Harry Nespoli. We have worked really closely together for years now and, and under his leadership, the MLC has really worked with us to find savings, including health savings that have been crucial. I understand what he's suggesting to you. I fear that we have to think about this beyond just the election, and so I think the problem we're all experiencing here is that help just hasn't come from where we expect it to. We expect it to come from Washington and the stimulus we expect to come from Albany in the form of long-term borrowing – it hasn't. The clock is running. Now, our labor colleagues have really been stepping up trying to address the situation, all the working with us on

other savings. I don't think we can keep putting off things, you know, constantly we have to find some kind of solution as quickly as possible, and that's what we're still trying to do with labor. Go ahead.

Question: Council members, Borelli and Cornegy did a press conference emphasizing the bipartisan support for a concept known as early retirement incentives, which would save hundreds of millions of dollars because so many of them are senior civil servants – are at the highest end of the salary scale, two, it would be eligible for those in the cohort that are most eligible from COVID exposure and possible death, and three would avoid blowing up the young civil service families, most likely to have small children when you lose your healthcare in the midst of the pandemic, and by the way, tend to be far more diverse because all the good work you've been doing with reaching out to a diverse nature of the population to fill these positions in the civil service.

Mayor: Well, Bob, I appreciate that point and you're right – across the city of workforce, we see more diversity and obviously notable in many places like the NYPD, which is now majority people of color. We need to keep ensuring that the DOE continues to become more diverse in its workforce. So you're right, this has been a central concern, and it does bring us back to the earlier time of question. I think early retirement as a policy is something we have to put into play. So I agree with those council members. In fact, I've spoken to the leadership of the legislature in Albany and many members of legislature, and there's a strong consensus that early retirement will have to be part of this package. Now, the problem is Bob, how much will it achieve given the savings we need? That's still a real open question and it only saves you money if you're going to not replace the line, and this is the reality, if you provide the early retirement option, but then you need to go back and fill that same role with another person and pay their salary. You're not saving money. So it still comes down to how many jobs we're going to be able to save going forward and the services we need to provide to the people. So definitely a piece of the solution, it's not the whole solution, but early retirement will definitely be a piece of the solution.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

Mayor: Henry. Can you hear us?

Question: I can hear you. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yes, sir.

Question: Okay, good. How are you doing?

Mayor: Good, and how are you?

Question: I'm okay. I'm interested in the president's threat and your response to his threat. You said it was a campaign strategy of some kind, could you illuminate on that a little bit, elucidate, whatever the word is. Tell me why, what he's intending to do with this threat politically?

Mayor: I'll illuminate and elucidate. I think that – Henry it's all about race and it's all about attempts to divide and to enthrall his base by attacking “the other.” This is what this guy does. The only trick in his book. You got to go back to the 1980s when he called for the execution of the Central Park Five. This guy, remember who taught him Roy Cohn, Joe McCarthy's right hand, man. I mean, we just got to get real about this guy. It is always divide and create hatred and move people to vote based on that hatred. So, you know, he turns his attention to urban areas, which he wants to associate with people of color, in another way, of course, he wants to associate with Democrats and progressives. He treats them as the other. He tries to convince a lot of people in this country that we all are the problem, and he will save his voters from all of us. There's just no president in history who's been this irresponsible and divisive, but it's the only trick he knows. So he long ago could have decided to serve everyone or try and create a broad coalition. He hasn't, it's just a base strategy. It's the only thing he does, but he can't back it up. He's been threatening to take away our funding more times than I can count and we beat him in court every time or they just go away because they don't have a leg to stand on. So a sure campaign strategy, that's what I'm seeing. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Okay and in terms of this strategy, why would he – let me rephrase this – why – what's the strategy to counter this – his strategy? And if he did withhold money, would New York be pressed in defending his private property holdings that he owns in New York or is New York completely reimbursed for all of the protection that he receives from New York City, please?

Mayor: Okay. I'm not sure I got that fully at the end there. I'm going to turn to Jim Johnson on that piece, and then I will speak to how you address the strategy. But Jim, did you understand that question or you want it restated? The part about the legal ramifications? We can't hear - Jim speak up.

Corporation Counsel Johnson: I am - I'm speaking up. Okay and I'm off mute. As I understood the question, it was directed at a reimbursement of city funds for the – in connection with the protection of the president and typically the MOU is between the NYPD and the Secret Service do provide for some form of reimbursement. More broadly, this is not a case where in exchange in response to a threat of federal funds we could go after the president's personal properties here. But we'll take them on in court and we'll make sure that our funds are our funds and our funding streams are protected. They have lost before, we prevailed before, we will do it again.

Mayor: Hey Jim maybe just another moment on the sort of the constitutional theory here would be helpful, or the Supreme Court decisions or whatever would help everyone to understand why we are so convinced this is unconstitutional action?

Corporation Counsel Johnson: There are actually a few pieces to it. One of which is the president doesn't control the purse strings of the federal government. That's set by Congress. He can't undo those and simply direct funds where he wants to, or withhold funds when he wants to. So that is a core principle that's connected with Congress's control over the federal purse. And secondly, he can't simply use an inactive, essentially, this would be a high tech heist try to use federal funds to coerce cities and states, which is what clearly he's attempting to do.

Mayor: A high tech heist, well said. Jim and Henry to the last piece there, look, I think the answer when you confront hatred is to overcome it with a positive vision, a positive vision of a country working together for a common cause, particularly as we're fighting back through this pandemic, I think people are hungry for a positive vision. They're hungry for a sense of there can be unity. They're just fatigued by all the negativity and hatred coming from President Trump. And of course on top of that, something I think Joe Biden understands deeply, speak to working people about their lives and what they need, and people need to hear a vision of how they'll have health care for their families, how they will have jobs again, that they can live on. This is an area I think Joe Biden can be very, very strong on because everyone understands he empathizes with working people and I think that combination of hope and unity on the one hand and a vision of a nation that's actually devoted to working people again is winning formula.

Moderator: We still have time for two more for today. The next is Reema from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor and Chancellor Carranza and everyone on the call. So my – I have two schools related questions. My first one is just a follow-up on Learning Bridges. I heard the answers from the before. I just wanted though to press a little bit further. I'm just wondering, you know, we knew that this was a general timeline for instruction to begin and I'm wondering why weren't seats opened up, why aren't more seats ready for teachers who are going back to work, who don't have children in pre-K, but still need child care. Like, why has there been a delay in providing those folks with seats starting today?

Mayor: Yeah, Rema, I'll start and I'll turn to Deputy Chancellor Wallack. The fact is, again, Learning Bridges was being created from scratch on a very, very tight timeline and making sure that we could build this out aggressively, quickly, safely. It's been a really challenging endeavor, but we're getting there and the numbers are really going to grow. In terms of the specific timing, obviously the central focus has been students. We clearly want to support the professionals of the DOE that need to have their kids somewhere, but the central focus has been on families and their kids and aligning Learning Bridges to when school programs began and that's where the numbers would be, not as much, of course, with the children of DOE staff. So I think that's the central reason it moved with the opening of each level of school, but the Deputy Chancellor can add to that.

Deputy Chancellor Wallack: No, thank you. I'll just underscore it. The fundamental purpose of the program is to give a safe and nurturing environment for children to be in while they are – who are not able to be in school buildings or programs because of social distancing requirements, and so we brought our preschool programs on that day so that students who are not able to be in their home preschool program, will have a safe, nurturing place to be the rest of the week, and next week, we will bring the school age seats on and we will have opportunities available for close to 30,000 children by next week. I think the other piece to keep in mind is that again, we are targeting certain neighborhoods, neighborhoods that were hardest hit by the pandemic and certain groups. And again, those are families in temporary housing, families residing in New York City Housing Authority development, children in family foster care, or child welfare services, disabilities, children of the essential workers and children of DOE school and program staff, including the staff of Learning Bridges itself.

We'll be working to bring these sites on as quickly as possible. We are trying to match them with particular schools so that we can keep cohorts of children together, and that's another complexity of standing a program like this up in a pandemic that we just need to keep that in mind. When we launched Pre-K for All, we put seats everywhere and any child could go to any seat. In this case on an even tighter timeline we're trying to stand up sites that are matched to particular schools, so we can keep cohorts of kids together. And that being said, we'll still have tens of thousands of seats soon. We're going to be reaching out to families and you'll hear from us within 48 hours and email us. And over the coming weeks, we'll have many, many more opportunities available. We want to serve everybody who needs it. We're going to get there. We're going to get there over time

Mayor: Go ahead, Reema.

Question: Thanks. My second question is about devices for kids. I'm hearing from many schools, principals, teachers, and a couple of parents who have said that their schools have not been able to provide devices for everybody who's requested one for this fall and it seems that some of, you know, a couple of people have said they just can't afford it from their budget. But the other issue I'm hearing about is that school leaders themselves just weren't aware until about mid-August that they'll now be responsible for fulfilling these requests, that it's not going to just come from the DOE and then that sort of delayed their ordering of devices. And now the schools that have been able to afford it are just waiting on delivery, and so it sounds like, you know, there's a chunk of kids at their schools who might be able to use like a parent's cell phone or something, but then there's a number of kids who they're not even sure are going to be able to log on as they wait for the device to come in and it's for a variety of reasons it sounds like broken devices, or they've decided they don't want to share with two siblings anymore. So I'm just wondering here, I know that chancellor talked a little bit about this last week, but can you explain from your understanding, you know, why this device gaps still exists and how is the DOE helping schools figure this out quickly as we start the school year?

Mayor: Okay, I'll start, Reema, and pass to Chancellor. Look, I am certain when it comes to technology, that there'll be times where we got to replace a child's technology or something went wrong with a shipment. Those things are clearly going to happen, and we want to address them every single time, and the Chancellor will speak to the transition of coming back to school, and what was the responsibility of schools versus DOE central. But I want to make sure we put the horse before the cart here. You're talking about, and I find it strange, honestly, the question about the child who either their device isn't working or something was wrong with internet service or they couldn't get a device. Those are all inherently valid questions, but I rarely hear the focus be on the fact that New York City did something that I don't know if it's been done on anything like this scale anywhere else and said, any child who needed a high quality device and the internet service with it for free would get it and that happened in a matter of weeks in the spring, in the middle of the pandemic. And I gave the Chancellor's team a lot of credit. That was a Herculean effort. The sheer egalitarianism of that effort was striking. There was no means test. There was no quibbling. It was just, if you need it, we're going to get it to you, and that spirit continues now. It is different when you have a whole school system up and running than when you're doing everything remotely, but I do want to come back to the sheer consistency of the effort to make sure that every kid has in real time what they need. So go ahead, Chancellor.

Chancellor Carranza: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Hey, Rema, and congratulations on your award. Hadn't spoken to you since you got it. Congratulations. Look, we estimate there's over 900,000 devices, including the 320,000 devices that we've already loaned out to students that the Mayor was talking about, when we pivoted to remote learning. We have more devices that we've stocked for those circumstances in which students need either they have a broken device or for whatever reason their circumstances have changed. We notified schools in July that they would be handling the distribution instead of a centralized distribution that we had in March. Now, just to remind folks, we had to do a centralized distribution and a delivery method because we were all staying at home and schools were not open. So it just makes sense now that schools will be open for in-person learning that they will be the distribution sites. That being said, we also continue to order devices as well. And families, I'm going to encourage families to be in touch with their school communities. In fact, last week, when we had the orientation days, they were precisely for this reason, so that families could connect with schools if they needed a device or they needed anything else, the school would be aware and prepare to provide that for the student. So again, stay in touch with your school communities. We're working very closely with our schools and we will not let a student that needs a device, not have a device.

Mayor: Amen.

Moderator: Last question today goes to Kala from PIX.

Question: Hey there, good morning. The DOE log-in page was down at 9:00 am this morning for 10 minutes, effecting Zoom and TeachHub, and you guys had tweeted that you were able to fix it, but what do you say to remote learning parents and students who are frustrated with technology? Because we heard about some issues last week also with a school working outside because their internet wasn't working for orientation.

Mayor: Look, I'll start and pass the Chancellor. We've really been focused on the whole range of issues around technology. We obviously spoke about getting kids devices who needed them. We've been focused on cyber security. I want to thank everyone who's been a part of that effort to protect the DOE on the cyber level. We also been in touch with the key providers, Zoom and others, to make sure their capacity was sufficient for handling the restart of New York City public schools and all the companies involved have been confident. There's clearly going to be problems sometimes, but structurally, I think we're in good shape. Chancellor, you take it.

Chancellor Carranza: Thank you, sir. I really appreciate that, the context. Yes. At nine o'clock, for about 10 minutes, there was some difficulty with the log-in page. It was very quickly remedied, it's up and running. So Zoom, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, all the other platforms are up and running and we're monitoring that. I think it's a good example of how it's all hands on deck. We had, the Mayors referred to the war room where any issue is immediately escalated so that we are able to get on it. We got on it within 10 minutes. Everything's working. I'm also going to encourage any parents or students that have any questions to go to schools.nyc.gov/techsupport, and that's for any question, whether it's a log on question, whether it's an ID question, a student ID, student email, you'll be able to get the support that you need

there. But again, I think the systems are working, we're identifying any glitches and resolving them immediately. Go ahead, Kala.

Question: Alright. And then Mayor, I wanted to follow up on Bloomberg's question regarding the president and what's going on with New York City. Do you believe that President Trump is racist?

Mayor: I have – I'm very sad, Kala, to have to say this, I've believed for a long time that President Trump is racist and it's sad. It's sad. It's not something anyone should take joy in saying about the person who holds the highest office in the land, but it's true. It's true in what he's been doing throughout his life. He's always tried to racially divide this country and he's trying to appeal to the notion that somehow America is going to go back in time and be an all-white country. And first of all, never was, the second of all, no, we're going to be a more diverse country with every passing day in the not too distant future, we're going to be a majority people of color country. We should be proud of that. We should embrace who we are. We should embrace the fact that this country is great because of all of our people coming together over generations. But no he doesn't like it. He doesn't like that reality. And he's tried to very cynically appeal to people who are scared of that evolution of our country and use that fear to win votes. And it's really disgusting, but that's who he is.

All right. Let's turn to a better topic at the ending, which is our parents, our kids, the fact that this morning we saw again, pure joy. Pure hope, pure possibility. If you want to be inspired, just go outside one of our schools as kids are coming in to start the day, as teachers are welcoming them, as parents are saying goodbye to their kids and wishing them a good day in school, and it's enthralling because you see this city fighting back, coming back and you see our kids getting what they need. They yearn for that chance to get into school again. I mean the kids this morning, they were really, there was something to watch. They were ready – four-year-olds – they were ready. They were filled with the energy. And you know, we all know anyone who's brought a four-year-old to school, is sometimes you get tears and sometimes you get hesitation. I don't know. Maybe these kids felt cooped up over these last months because I didn't see a lot of tears. I didn't see a lot of hesitation. I saw kids ready to go and I saw educators ready to go and school staff ready to go, and it's an inspiration for this whole city. So we're going to start this week strong, and next week's going to be even bigger, and we're going to go on from there and keep bringing this city back. Thank you, everybody.

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