

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

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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. Well, it is a season, a very special season and a time for us all to support each other, believe in each other. And today we prepare for Hanukkah and I want to wish a very Happy Hanukkah to all. This is a time to think about what the holiday tells us. And it talks all about light and hope and faith and perseverance. And it's a time when people support each other and show their love for each other. Obviously, this year, the gatherings have to be different. People have to watch out for each other. That's another way of celebrating the holiday and all the holidays this season. Watch out for each other, make sure you do your celebrations in a way that really is all about the health and the safety of everyone you love. But it's a special time, it's a time to celebrate. And what a perfect symmetry that Hanukkah comes just at the time when we expect the first shipments of a vaccine to give us hope, to shed light, to remind us that our persistence will be rewarded here in the city, and we will be turning the page in the months ahead.

And speaking of turning the page, kids are back in classrooms, turning the pages of their textbooks today. Another step forward for our schools. This week we have seen our younger kids come back to school, pre-K, 3-K, K-through-five. Today, our special education kids in District 75 come back to school. The Chancellor and I were in the South Bronx earlier in the week to see kids coming back, to see parents bringing them to school with such joy. Our educators also feeling such joy to see kids again. We continue to bring our kids back in a safe and smart way and, look, for our special education kids, it's so important for them to be back in the classroom with educators who love them, who care for them. So, this is another good day. And I want to say to all the families of kids in District 75, we have heard you. You said how important it is to have the support, to have the help of these caring professionals, and I'm very happy that kids in District 75 schools will be back in the classroom today.

Now, today, we want to talk about our classrooms, our kids, our families, our parents, our teachers, and what lies ahead because we have a lot more work to do in this school year, for sure. In fact, most of the school year still lies ahead of us. And we'll be talking about that constantly in the days and weeks ahead, but it's also time to start looking to the future. It's time to start thinking about what our city is going to be like as the vaccine is distributed more and more, what our schools are going to be like in the future, how we can address the needs of our kids and families. And it's time to really reckon with a challenge that we're seeing very, very clearly, which is a way that COVID has stood in the way of our kids' education. The fact that there has been learning loss and there will still be learning loss ahead that we have to compensate for and then overcome. In fact, clearly there will be a COVID achievement gap, and we have to close that COVID achievement gap. Today, we're going to outline a plan that will take us forward into the next school year and give us the tools to close that COVID achievement gap. It is absolutely essential.

Today, we will present a 2021 Student Achievement Plan. We want all New Yorkers to understand where we're going with our schools and the foundation, we'll be laying through this school year to get ready for a very different school year that begins in September. In September, there will be a new normal. Let's be clear. Our approach will be based on everything we have learned through this very challenging time. But like with every crisis, we also in a crisis learn how to do new things and sometimes better things. We learn ways to serve our kids that are different and can reach them in a more individual manner. Our kids are going to need that individual help because they're overcoming so much. So, our 2021 Student Achievement Plan will lay out the ideas, the foundations of how we continue to improve the education of all children and build from there. But look, kids have gone through a lot. They have gone through a lot in terms of their education and the disruption to their education. They've gone through a lot emotionally, everything that's happened to them, to their families, to their community. And it's important to think about what has happened to our children. The Chancellor and I have talked about this a lot, the weight our kids are carrying that we must address. Again, that's both on the academic side and on the emotional side.

Let me give you an example. Think about a child in our schools. I'm just going to paint you a picture. Let's call him Robbie. He's a third-grade child. Last year, he's going to third grade, February, things are going great, and then the coronavirus hits. So, his school year gets cut short. He's dealing with a disruption that no child could ever expect, or even could easily comprehend. Doesn't get all that he would have gotten had school been continuing as normal last school year. He starts to fall behind. He starts to experience some of that learning loss. He's struggling a little bit more. And then Robbie, like so many other kids, may have had losses in his family. He may have seen loved ones, get sick, or even lose a loved one. He may have seen families around him lose a loved one. The disruption, the confusion, think of what this does to a young mind. And we're encouraging our kids all the time to be all they can be and reach their potential. But imagine a child who has experienced disruption after disruption, and the traumatic realities that this virus has wreaked on this city and on so many families. Robbie needs more than to just come back to school next year, with the same old approach. That's not going to cut it. Robbie needs a lot more support and help than he would have if there had not been the coronavirus. So, how do we go about that? We provide the tools. We need to make sure that the way we assess where Robbie is, academically is better than ever. And that we understand exactly what he needs. We need to make sure that our teachers have new tools, new training, have the ability to use digital approaches in new ways. And teachers are constantly experiencing that this year and they're doing amazing things.

And I want to just express my admiration for our educators who have had to innovate and innovate and innovate throughout this year. And they keep doing it and they learn new and better ways. Kids like Robbie are going to need that. They're going to need a very individualized approach. We know in a New York City public school classroom, 20, 24 kids, teachers do their best to reach each one, but they're going to need to do even more in this new normal and use the power of digital education to really individualize, tailor-make a plan for Robbie and for all other kids, to help them get the support they need and reach the heights they're capable of. All of these things have to happen. And our parents will need support too, because they'll need to understand how they can help their kids the best. And this is an area where there's long been a gap as well, the ability of our schools to fully engage our parents as academic partners. We're going to do that. We're doing it right now. We're going to build upon it with our Parent University, training

parents how to be the best colleagues to teachers in the education of their child, how to help their child blossom.

And finally, we have to think about the mental health needs of our children and address the trauma they've gone through and bring new tools to bear as we go into the new school year. So, again, our mission is clear, for the child I've presented to you today, Robbie, and for every child, we have to be there for them in brand new ways. We have to close that COVID achievement gap, and we have to have a clear plan going into next school year to maximize achievement. Our schools are going to come back stronger than ever. I don't doubt it. Our 2021 Student Achievement Plan will give us the foundation to make sure that that approach reaches every single child. Here to give you the outline of where we'll be going in 2021 and the years ahead, our Chancellor, Richard Carranza.

**Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. When you put it in terms of Robbie, it brings it home to all of us. We're talking about our children. And while this past several months have been a whirlwind for all of us with constantly evolving public health guidance and a completely transformed school system. It's time that we think about recovery, literally looking up from the here and now and looking forward, where are we going? Every single educator and every single staff member supporting our schools and students has had their heads focused singularly on the work for months on end. With the first doses of the vaccine arriving next week, it's clearer than ever that we will return to a normalcy that is unlike the normal pre-COVID-19. Today, we want to look slightly further ahead and out of the immediate moment and into the path forward. We know that it will require a recovery period. And that's the vision and framework that we're sharing with you today. We have a lot of work to do alongside our brilliant educators and leaders across the Department of Education to build this out to completion. But today we begin by sharing how we'll get started.

We will improve teaching and learning and continue to bring back our students by number one, getting a baseline of what ground we lost with low stakes diagnostic assessment citywide and interim assessments throughout the school year to monitor progress and tailor learning. You can't know where to focus unless you know what to focus on. And that's the whole point of these formative assessments. Number two, increasing access to high-quality digital curriculum at every single school in our school system. Three, launching a one-stop digital learning hub. This will be a new learning management system phased in and developed and customized for New York City schools that houses lessons and tools, and that can be shared across the city to help students, their teachers, and families better understand how a student is progressing. Our teachers have done remarkable work during this pandemic, and we're going to capture that work that's been developed here in New York City and make it available for everyone. Number four, we're deepening our professional development for our teachers, so our educators have the training and tools to close the gaps. We're expanding our Parent University to continue supporting parents with the tools they need to support and deepen learning at home in their language. And number six, we're confronting the trauma and medical health crisis faced by our students through a citywide approach. This vision is rooted in healing and in learning because our students need both. We'll have more to share in the weeks and months to come, but we're clear-eyed about where we need to go. And we're looking forward to building this out.

And Mr. Mayor, if I could just add to Robbie's story, I want to tell you the story of Aashi. Aashi literally disappeared from the Department of Education when we transitioned to remote learning

in March. We couldn't find her. We didn't know where she was. On the very first day of school on September 21st, she showed up at school and it turns out that her parents had both lost her jobs. They were evicted. She didn't have a device, they literally couch surfed, but she had heard that school was back in session and she showed up. And the principal that shared this story with me was so incredibly moved because she is not the only student that has undergone that kind of trauma. So, when we talk about trauma, that's the trauma we're talking about. Robbie and this Bengali student named Aashi, that's who we're fighting for. And thank you for leading us in that.

**Mayor:** Thank you so much to answer. And you could hear the heart in the Chancellor's voice when he told that story. This is exactly right. We understand our kids have been through so much. We talk, I talk to parents, I talk to educators, I hear what it's like for kids this year, everything they've been through. We have to be there for them, but I also have immense faith in the ability of our educators to reach our kids and in the strength and resiliency of our kids and their ability to reach their potential. If we're there for them every step along the way, we can figure out what each child needs to succeed and how to support them, that's what this is all about.

Now, look, this is all going to take a lot of hard work. I don't think anyone imagines anything different and New Yorkers are never afraid of hard work. Our educators have done amazing things in the course of this year, unprecedented things, but we're calling upon everyone who serves us to do that. And one of the other groups that has been absolutely outstanding in this crisis is our Test and Trace Corps. They have worked so hard. And remember, this was a brand-new organization, brand new approach had to be put together from scratch. Test and Trace Corps has done amazing work, reaching out deeply into the city to protect people and has helped us avoid thousands upon thousands of coronavirus infections. Well, here's an update – and you heard from Dr. Ted Long about a record that was set just earlier in the week, 95,000 – 95,000 New Yorkers got the coronavirus test on one day. We've never seen a number like that before. That's a really good sign, both of the reach of the Test and Trace Corps., encouraging people, the fact that so much testing has been made available successfully over the city, but the fact also that New Yorkers are hearing the message get tested. And particularly on Get Tested Tuesdays, people have been out there. 95,000 people on one day – well, that's extraordinary. Also, the week before Thanksgiving, half a million tests were given in a single week. These are the kind of numbers we dreamed of long ago that would really allow us to understand exactly what was happening and to protect the most people. Half a million New Yorkers in a single week got tested. We want to keep seeing that going forward. And I'm proud to tell you that now, based on a lot of innovations, including our extraordinary pandemic response lab – another thing that we started from scratch here in New York City, in the midst of this crisis, we now have a greater capacity to test New Yorkers than we've ever had before – 120,000 New Yorkers can now be tested in a single day. This is, again, a goal that seemed far away not that long ago, but we're here now – 120,000 people can be tested a single day.

Now, New Yorkers, the tests are out there – so many people ready to serve you. We can get you a quick turnaround time on those results. It's fast, it's easy. Get on out there and get tested. It will help this city to move forward, but, more importantly, it will protect you and your family and everyone you love.

Okay. Let's go over today's indicators. Number one, current hospital admissions – daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Today's report, 185 patients. So, we're below that threshold of 200, but it's still a high number. We're going to keep working to get that down. And on the hospitalization rate, today's number, 2.41 per 100,000 New Yorkers. We want to get that number under two, so more work to do there. Next, current new cases – again, this combines probable cases with confirmed cases. Daily number of new cases on a seven-day average, today is 2,614 – very high, very much surpassing the target where we want to be – 550. It's going to take us a while to get back there, but we will. And the daily update on the seven-day rolling average, percentage of New York City residents testing positive – today's report, 5.32 percent. Again, we want to be under five. We're dealing with a challenge right now. What's the answer? Get tested, wear a mask, practice social distancing, do not travel, avoid indoor gatherings. If we keep doing all of that, we are going to get this number back down, especially with the vaccine arriving in a matter of days.

A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. 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, by Dr. Ted Long, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. The first question today goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

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

**Mayor:** Good, Juliet. How are you doing today?

**Question:** I'm fine. Thank you. So, on the education plan that you've just spelled out, are you and the Chancellor considering a remote learning component to this, given that you have had this experience already through this whole virus?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Juliet, thank you for the question. Look, the imperative here, the thing we feel so deeply as we must close the COVID achievement gap, and that's why right now we're building up a student achievement plan for 2021. It means making sure that when kids come back to school in September, we're ready to serve them academically and emotionally. It also means using digital approaches to reach kids in whole new ways. Look, think about a kid who has ground to make up – great things will happen in the classroom with their teacher, for sure, but there's still more to make up. The teacher now can use digital approaches to individualize the program, tailor make what each child needs. I mentioned that child, Robbie – Robbie's teacher can now say, okay, this is what we're going to do in a classroom, but I'm also going to give Robbie this very individualized plan that I want him to follow, and I'm going to bring his parents into it too, and get them involved in our Parent University to learn how they can support Robbie, because digital allows you to expand and extend upon what happens during the school day. So, we think it opens up a world of possibilities. Chancellor, do you want to add?

**Chancellor Carranza:** Sure. I will only add that the new normal that we're talking post-pandemic has really created some opportunities for us to individualize instruction and really tailor instruction for students in a way that we just didn't have the ability to do back in March. So, children will have devices. Children will have connectivity. Teachers have been building their capacity and being really innovative around how they're meeting the needs of students. We don't want that to go away once we have a vaccine, once we're all back in person, and we will never replace a well-trained caring teacher for any other device. But it now gives teachers another set of tools to individualize the instruction for students, and, in some cases, help to accelerate the learning for students in ways that we just didn't have. We really want to capture that and we want to make it part of our approach as we go forward.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Juliet.

**Question:** Okay. Thank you. Well, given that the vaccine is on its way, what are your plans for returning city workers back to their offices?

**Mayor:** Juliet, that's something that we're going to need to deal with after a couple of things happen. First of all, the vaccine distribution really advances, and I'm very confident in the ability of our Health Department to distribute the vaccine effectively, and all of our health care partners. The real question is going to be how many doses do we get each week and our ability to make sure we constantly stay on that plan for distribution. I feel very good about it, but it will take time to play out. The second point will be what's happening with the coronavirus in general. We've seen the second wave bearing down on us now over weeks. This is obviously not a time to have people come back from remote work. We're going to keep them where they are. But as we see improvement in bringing down the infection rate, as we see improvement in terms of spreading out that vaccine, distributing that vaccine, then we'll start the plan for when to bring City workers back safely. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next is Leslie Brody from the Wall Street Journal.

**Question:** Hi, thanks for taking the question. I'm curious, please, if you could talk a bit more about this assessment and what type of test it will be, where kids will take it, how the parents will get the results, how it might be different from assessments that teachers regularly give to the kids? What kind of other information will we get? How long will it take? And how much will all this cost?

**Mayor:** Leslie, I think that was literally a six-part question. So, let me say at the outset, this is the foundation we're laying. This is the basic outline of the plan. In the weeks ahead, we're going to start to fill in a lot more of the details. So, we're not going to be able to answer every question today. We'll certainly have more to say on costs and timelines, etcetera. But I think the big point is important to make, the Chancellor and I are not fans of what happened in the previous administration here in the city, which was, I think, an obsessive focus on high stakes testing and a focus on testing that was counterproductive. We do not want to return to those days. We want to use assessments that help teachers to serve children and that give a clear baseline of where kids are at, especially after all the disruption they've been through, and help children and especially their parents to know what they need. Clearly, this is not high stakes testing. It's low stakes in the sense of it doesn't govern over all sorts of other decisions. What it does do is

provide educators with information so they can make the adjustments and tailor make the approach for each child. That's what we're aiming to do. Chancellor?

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. So, Leslie, I'm just going to set a little bit of context here, because I do think it's an important question that you've asked. We're not talking about testing. Testing in the most traditional sense is summative. It's one point in time and once you get those results, you compare those results to another point in time. That's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is formative assessment. And that means exactly what it says. We want to take a snapshot at regular points so that the information that is gathered, teachers can use that information to make decisions about where they need to intercede in the learning of the student. Of course, we know that students have a body of knowledge that they have to learn every year. Those are called State standards that they have to master. So, we need to know are third-grade students – is that child – is Robbie on track to master the third-grade standards, with enough time to be able to even exceed the third-grade standards? You can't do that unless you know where Robbie is. And the teacher has real information about what are the skills, the discrete skills that he or she needs to work with, with Robbie, to be able to get him back on track. Or, if he's already on track, how do we accelerate him even further? That's what we're talking about. Now, we know that across the city, many schools have many different kinds of formative assessments. So, what we're talking about is having some common assessments that we as a school system can look at and gauge where are students? Where do we need to make some additional investments? Where are those investments paying off? What additional resources do we need to bring to the table? How do we even use our existing resources in a much more strategic way? That's what we're talking about as we go forward.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Leslie.

**Question:** Thanks. I'm just curious if there are any particular types of assessments, there are lots of big companies out there that provide them. So, I think parents would be curious if you have some particular vendors in mind.

**Mayor:** Look, I'll start and pass the Chancellor. We want to build out this plan. You know, it's nine months basically until the opening of school in September 2021. We wanted to start to present to parents and the whole New York City community how we're going to be bringing back our schools strong. We have a lot of details to resolve, but we want people to see this process play out over months and months so they know adjust how able we're going to be in next fall to reach each child in very particular ways. So, Chancellor, in terms of the process you will go through to determine the right kind of assessments that our educators can use. Why don't you speak to that – just initial thoughts on that.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Sure. So, we're going to have a very robust – we already have a very robust process where we're bringing educators to the table, to actually look through and vet and get their thoughts about what is successful for them. That process will obviously involve lots of lots of affinity groups, lots of different grade levels, lots of different subject matters, but the goal here is to have something that is robust – an assessment that is also adaptable so that we can get a true gauge of where students are in their learning. And then, obviously, have conversations with our parents and our parent groups as well, as well as our community-based partners as well. Our union partners will also be very, very much involved with this as well. So, again, we want to have a robust process, but it's important for us that as we're looking ahead, that parents

understand we want to know, because you need to know, where is your student and what is the plan for helping your student as they go forward.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Kala from PIX.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thanks for taking my question. In regards to this assessment, I spoke with a parent this morning who just painted the most beautiful picture of her son who's non-verbal, special needs going back to D75, getting five days a week at Mickey Mantle, and she painted a picture of what he gets from school, and then when school closes what he doesn't get – and it is a huge difference. So, in regards to this assessment, where does D75 fit and how are you going to help those kids? God forbid have schools have to shut down again for them.

**Mayor:** Kala, such an important question. Thank you. And I really appreciate that you heard with real heart what that parent was telling you. We really have to be there for our kids, particularly our special needs kids, particularly our younger kids. So, I want to emphasize from the beginning, we have now reopened 3-K, pre-K, kindergarten through fifth grade, and District 75 special education programs all over the city – 850 schools. We intend to keep them open. We have now the tools to do that – tools we didn't have in the fall, but we now have that we know will work. And we're going to keep them open, particularly understanding the challenges of our special needs kids and parents. With that said, the assessments are something that are going to allow us to think of each child individually. Again, we are so concerned to understand what each child has been through and what they need. And then bring the help to them. And we're going to be talking about the additional mental health resources we'll bring to bear over time. But also this idea that digital education for a lot of kids, not all kids, but for a lot of kids, we'll offer new avenues to augment what happens in school. So Chancellor, as to assessments in terms of District 75 kids, take it away.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yes. I would say that if you look at in general, who are those teachers that have been really good about using formative assessments to tailor instruction? It's our special education teachers. This is bread and butter, what they do in terms of implementing the individual education plan, the IEP for a student. So, they're natural. So obviously we're going to be working very closely with those teachers to get their insight and their expertise as we look at a system-wide approach as we go forward. Now that being said, can you imagine the power of an individualized education plan for every student? Not that they are special education students, but just think about identifying the explicit skills that students need to work on and the plan that we have to help them achieve a mastery of that explicit skill. That's what we're talking about with the digital curriculum. That's what we're talking about when we talk about a one-stop digital learning hub. That's also what we're talking about when we talk about Parent University. That parents have the opportunity now to understand what is happening, how their students are being formatively assessed and what the plan is for them. And then how they can help support what is happening with their students in their own language. That's all part of what we're talking about.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Kala.



**Question:** And speaking of digital, I'm looking for a hard number? Where are we on devices at this point? I know the last number I think I heard was 60,000 still needed?

**Mayor:** Distribution, Chancellor? 350,000 so far from day one, right?

**Chancellor Carranza:** From day one, yes. So, we had approximately a little over 91,000 students that had indicated they needed devices when we started this school semester in September. We've distributed approximately 65,000 devices as of right now. And we are fully on track to make sure that all of the other students that have requested a device will have their device before winter break, which is December 23rd. So, we're well on our way to making sure every student has their device.

**Mayor:** Excellent. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Yoav from The City.

**Question:** Hey, Mr. Mayor. The City Comptroller filed a lawsuit in an effort to get City Hall to provide documents relating to its response to the pandemic back in March, starting back in March. I'm wondering why the City has decided to fight that in court rather than just, you know, provide some of those documents?

**Mayor:** Yoav, we're in the middle of a pandemic. Our City health officials, everyone is out there fighting a crisis right now. That's where our focus is. Meanwhile, the Comptroller is trying to score political points and he's trying to further his mayoral campaign. That's all this is. So let's be clear, when we see a request that's about serving people's needs here and now, that's one thing. When we see someone trying a political stunt, that's another thing. Our focus is on addressing this pandemic right now. Go ahead Yoav.

**Question:** Well, at the same time as you say that, your people – you're dedicating resources to have a legal battle. You know, the same people fighting that legal battle could also be looking through the documents and providing them?

**Mayor:** Yoav, look again –

**Question:** Why did you choose that option?

**Mayor:** It's not as simple as that. And the bottom line here is we need to keep our focus on protecting the health of New Yorkers right now. That is clearly not the agenda the Comptroller has. So we're just not going to fall for it. Right now, we need everyone's focus on protecting people's lives. And that's what we're doing. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Christina Veiga from Chalkbeat.

**Question:** Hi, Mayor and Chancellor. Thanks for taking my question. My first is –

**Mayor:** How are you doing Christina?

**Question:** Can you hear me? My first is can you say whether you've considered a wide-scale tutoring program? I'm hearing a lot from you about personalized learning and that sort of thing. I'm not sure that there's a whole lot of evidence about how helpful that is for students. Meanwhile, we know that tutoring programs can be incredibly effective. And we know that the UK, for example, they are rolling out sort of a country-wide initiative to do that. So where does tutoring stand if at all in all of this? And what evidence do you have that a digital approach will be effective?

**Mayor:** I'll turn to the Chancellor. I'll Just say, I'll speak as a layman and as a parent. I don't have any question in my mind that digital for many, many kids, gives them another avenue and a way to extend learning beyond the school day. And a way to in a targeted fashion, pursue the areas where they need more growth. I think it's another tool that teachers can use to expand upon the work that they do. I feel like that's pretty well established, but I'll let an expert speak to it. Tutoring is great as well. Don't get me wrong. But I do want to say, I think we have a lot of evidence, including since March of how digital can be really helpful to a lot of kids. Go ahead.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yes. So, Christina, we're by no means excluding any possible opportunity to address the COVID achievement gap. So tutoring is absolutely being considered as one of the strategies that we will use to help students. That obviously means that we – there's a lot of work to do in terms of working with community-based organizations, working with our universities, working with our school-based communities, our community schools, et cetera. So there's a lot of groundwork that has to happen for a tutoring program. Not the least of which is we need the federal stimulus package to help to fund all of this. That being said there's just reams of research that show that digital interventions, digital strategies while used in conjunction with good pedagogy, good teaching can have some really incredible effects on the learning needs of students. Particularly students that have ground to makeup academically, and students that can help you know, really propel students forward in terms of enrichment activities as well. So we're not talking about one or the other, we're talking about all of it. Because all of our children are going to need as much as we can possibly get to them.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Christina.

**Question:** Thanks. And my other question is sorry, taking notes here as well.

**Mayor:** We have the same problem sometimes Christina. We're constantly taking notes in the middle of this, and sometimes forget where we just were. So I have empathy for you.

**Question:** My other question is – you know, I've totally lost my train of thought. I don't have another question.

**Mayor:** We'll come back. We'll bring you back in a moment. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** We can come back to Christina. The next is Jessica Gould from WNYC.

**Question:** Hi. So, I wanted to hear a little bit more about the digital curriculum that you're mentioning, because we've heard you say so many times that remote learning really can't do what in-person learning does. But now to address the learning loss we're hearing that a major component will be digital. So, can you just help us square those two things?

**Mayor:** Jessica, thank you. I really appreciate that question because I totally believe that nothing is as good as in-person learning. And I also totally believe that because we have to close that COVID achievement gap, we're going to need new tools, additional tools. So, I think about the power of what a classroom teacher does. And the ability to reach kids in the hours those kids are with them. And then I think about what happens the rest of the day and the night and the weekend. And what I've felt long before the pandemic was we were leaving opportunity on the table to reach kids more deeply. If we could bring their parents more into the process, that's why I'm so excited about Parent University as a way to really empower parents to be educational colleagues. Really helping the teachers to expand upon what happens during the school day. But also we've seen with our own eyes that digital can open up all sorts of possibilities for kids, that it will allow a child with the guidance of a teacher, to go farther in those other hours. And really expand upon their learning or focus on some areas where they need to do more work but the school day alone doesn't allow for that. It's based in in-person education, classroom education, and then you expand upon it with digital and many other tools. That's very different than an all remote structure. Which I have been honest about, and I've heard from so many parents and educators their frustrations with the imperfections of all remote. I agree. This is kind of the opposite, really when you think about it, Jessica. This is the foundation is in-person classroom learning. You then augment it and strengthen it academically with digital approaches on top of that. Chancellor.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yeah, well done Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** I've been listening to you. I've been listening to the class Chancellor.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yeah, Jessica. So, the only thing that I would add to this is that our goal here is not to replace what happens in the classroom, but to provide additional opportunities for the learning to continue. We want students to move from being digital users, to be digital learners. And in order to do that, we need high quality digital curriculum. And I think that sometimes gets lost, the high-quality point of it. So that we want to make sure that what our teachers, what our students, what our parents have access to is of the highest quality that we can all stand behind it and say, yes. For that student that wants to learn even in the evening hours and wants to really activate their intellectual curiosity, they have a way to do it. Because now they have a device and they have a high-quality digital curriculum that they can go farther with as well. You know, sometimes we get caught in talking about what's not working well. And that's important because we need to fix that. But I've also spoken to parents in a lot of town halls where parents have told me stories about how their children have blossomed, where they are learning when they want to learn in the evenings. And they're doing creative projects and they're doing investigations and they're going online and they're finding out more about a subject in a book that they've read about. That's the kind of intellectual curiosity that we want to spark. And that's why it's part of what the new normal will be to address the COVID achievement gap.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Jessica.

**Question:** Sure. So, I also wanted to know where you're getting your guidance about how to overcome learning loss? What are the – who are the experts you're looking to? What are the other events? We've thought about Katrina, Hurricane Katrina before, but what are you drawing on?

**Mayor:** It's a great question. I'll just start and the Chancellor can speak with much greater expertise. But I think it's really good that you point out that there have been other moments where kids have really been put through so much and other places have had to think about both the academic needs and the emotional needs of our kids. But that said, I don't think there's anything that compares to the reality of the pandemic. Because it has played out now over two school years, because it has literally touched every single family, because the combination of the learning loss, but also the trauma that's been inflicted, and the uncertainty. I think it is particular. But what we do know is there will be a COVID achievement gap that needs to be filled. We know that right now. We need to close that gap and we will close that gap. We know we need a clear vision going into September 2021, a student achievement plan that will move the whole system to help kids come back really strong. We'll going to have to do extraordinary work next school year and every month in between this school year. So, we have some models we can learn from I'm certain, but I also think this is going to be built from a lot of what we've learned now. And a lot of what our educators have innovated just over the months of this year. Go ahead, Chancellor.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yes. So Jessica I've lived it. I was superintendent in Houston during Hurricane Harvey and I saw the trauma firsthand. And the recovery from that doesn't happen in a month. It doesn't happen in a year. It doesn't even happen in two years. This is trauma. So that informs a lot of what we're thinking about in terms of a long-term plan. And why we're talking about this right now. This is where we're going. We're literally looking up and looking forward. This is where we're going. That being said, we're looking at where you would – where there's already been literature written about how to help students recover from traumatic experiences. So we're looking at the research. We're also looking and working with our university partners. We have some of the greatest universities right here in our backyard, in New York City. We're conferring with our university partners as well. But in fact, after this press conference, I'm jumping on my weekly call with the 72 largest school system leaders in America. And we have a weekly call where we are talking about this very issue. How are you addressing the learning loss? How are you doing it in your community? Who are you partnering with? What resources have you found? What strategies have you employed? What are you thinking about? How can we work together? So, this is really a collaborative approach that urban school system leaders from across the country are sharing resources, sharing thoughts, sharing research with each other. Because there is no playbook for this, this magnitude of trauma, there is no playbook for that. I will also add that we are also very much looking at what's happened across the world and looking at other countries and in how they've set up different kinds of approaches for helping students with the trauma. So, we're looking everywhere, and, and part of why we're talking about this now is that we want to make sure that our community knows and our parents know that while we're looking down and making sure that right now our children are safe and that our schools are working well, we're also looking forward and we want parents to be part of that conversation and have the knowledge to be partners with us.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Do we have Christina again or someone else?

**Moderator:** We'll go back to Christina for a second question.

**Question:** I am ready. Thank you. So, I'm wondering, is there also a plan for students with disabilities for them to get makeup services? I don't see anything in this plan about that, but I believe that that is mandated.

**Mayor:** Absolutely. Yeah, go ahead Chancellor.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yeah, that doesn't – that's not part of this plan because that's already happening. So, we're already starting to work with our families of students with disabilities in terms of compensatory services. So, we're already working through that, and again, that's already in action.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more for today. The next is Matt Chayes from Newsday.

**Question:** Hi, good morning all—

**Mayor:** How you doing, Matt?

**Question:** —hey, how are you? I heard that you guys are going to be administering these low stake tests in the future, but do you or the Chancellor have current quantifiable metrics you can share now to illustrate the extent of the learning loss?

**Mayor:** It's an important question, Matt. We're going to be talking about that in the weeks to come, both what we are learning about the current reality of our children, but also the ways we're going to keep improving their education throughout this school year. Obviously crucial to that is what happened today. Schools reopening, and we want to keep them open for our youngest kids for our special needs kids and move increasingly to five-day-a-week instruction in-person, which is I think the single biggest thing we can do here and now to address learning loss and help kids to recover academically and emotionally. So, I think that's sort of the first and most important mission, but we're also going to be constantly talking about what we're doing to improve remote instruction as well, and to assess what's been lost. That is something that's work in progress that we will be reporting on along the way. Chancellor.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yeah, so, obviously people obviously think about grades as a metric for understanding how students are doing academically, but grades are very imperfect and they are not the truest way of actually knowing where a student's skill-set is, what they've mastered, what they haven't mastered, and then charting a course forward for what the plan will be to help them master the subject matter. So, we have literally hundreds of different formative assessments that are used by our schools across the city. What we're talking about is that's – we're not talking about getting rid of that. What we're talking about is how do we have some more common – formative assessments, so that not only teachers have more information, but we as a school system can have that pulse on where our students, where are they going and what, where do we need to support what schools are doing as we go forward? That's what we're talking about here is being able to build that infrastructure so that we have the information for teachers, but we also have information that we can use to help schools and teachers as they're meeting the needs of students.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead.

**Question:** Another question on testing, but on COVID tests, and by the way, this isn't my second question and apologies. I was having router issues, but did I miss the daily metrics that you guys gave?

**Mayor:** You mean the indicators?

**Question:** Yeah.

**Mayor:** Yeah, no, we did them.

**Question:** Apologies, I'll go back and get them from staff. My question is to what extent do you see certain communities testing less, or at least discouraging getting tested to avoid a boost of the local positivity rate, and I'm not looking to hear about the longstanding relationships and how extensive your outreach efforts are, but I'm wondering from Dr. Varma and Dr. Long, whether there's any evidence of this sort of testing suppression?

**Mayor:** I'll turn to Dr. Long, but with this statement. I think we're seeing a couple of different things, so I'll be the layman's voice first. I think when we push the idea of testing, when we're out in communities and it's visible and reminding people, I think it does have an impact, and also when people understand that getting tested gives us the clearest view of what's happening. I think going into this crisis and throughout this crisis, there were some places where people thought, oh, getting testing was – getting tested was going to somehow lead to more restrictions. In fact, getting tested means we got an accurate picture of what's going on. A lot of times, it's the reason that restrictions weren't needed when we found out with more and more testing that the amount of spread had been reduced. We saw that in Sunset Park, Soundview. Eventually we saw that in Brooklyn over the last few months. So, as people have heard that and understood that, I think it is encouraged people. Also bluntly as testing has become easier, faster, I think all of these things are affecting the equation. There is some resistance still, obviously – I don't think it's quite the same as folks who have been resistant to masks possibly for ideological reasons, but I think there's some resistance we still have to overcome, but Dr. Long, you want to speak to this of whether you've seen any patterns out there in terms of response to testing?

**Director Long:** Yeah, and I appreciate the question because it is an important one. In a nutshell, I would say, no, we're not seeing a lot of resistance to testing. As evidenced by what the Mayor said earlier, we just hit our record for the number of tests done in a single week, a half a million tests done in one week alone. People are getting that more testing equals better control, and what we do on our end is we do look community by community to see if there are any communities that are being undertested or that would benefit from more testing, and then we bring more resources in there, whether it's our mobile units, or if there are trusted doctors in those communities, we give those doctors our own rapid testing machines so that people can go to doctors that they trust and that they're used to going to. The result of all of that is that we're seeing more testing now than ever before, which I judge to be New Yorkers understanding that the value of testing to keep our city safe and doing their part to stop the spread of the virus.

**Mayor:** Excellent. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Last question for today goes to Rich Lamb from WCBS 880.

**Question:** Hey there, Mr. Mayor, and everybody on the call.

**Mayor:** How's it going, Rich?

**Question:** Fine, let me just get on my headset here.

**Mayor:** We want you to have your headset on.

**Moderator:** Thanks. So, in regard to the schools and this new plan that you're talking about, is there any sense that, you know, the kids are like, I don't know – how – we don't have any immediate sense of how far behind they are. We just have a general idea that they're, that they're behind. Is that correct from what I've heard earlier?

**Mayor:** I'll start and turn to the Chancellor. Rich, we know there will be a COVID achievement gap – we know this. How much, what it means for each child, these are things we're going to keep studying, keep assessing, but we know for sure much of last school year was disrupted, much of this school year there hasn't been as much in-person learning. Clearly, there's something we have to catch up from – we will. We also know, again, kids have been through a lot emotionally, and that's a different kind of reality that we have to address. So, I think what's crucial here is to acknowledge there's a COVID achievement gap that must be closed. We need a plan to maximize the achievement of our students. So, we put together a 2021 achievement plan to bring the strands together, and it's well in advance. We're nine months out from the opening of school in September 2021. But what we'll do over time is be able to give more specifics to that as we go through this school year and assess kids more and more. Go ahead, Chancellor.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yeah, so Rich let's just – we just want to be very, very clear that schools right now have a good idea of where their students are and where some of those gaps are. So, we're not talking about there is a lack of understanding that. What we're talking about is what is the macro universal plan for the Department of Education in the City of New York, as we look to the future and the next school year. That's really what we're talking about, and so in order to do that, schools know where their students are. I can tell you that in my meetings with principals and with others in the schools, actually working with students on a day-to-day basis they've been very clear that there's been some learning loss. There's been some opportunity loss. So, what we want to be able to do is organize ourselves and have a plan so that we can support what schools are doing, in some cases doing exceptionally well, and in other cases provide the support and resources necessary for schools to implement even more robust plans. That's really what we're talking about and why we're talking about it now.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Rich.

**Question:** Okay, so, my question then would be a follow-up, which is I think I've heard the Chancellor say that you know, the remedy for this gap doesn't take a month. It doesn't take a year. It doesn't take two years in some cases. So, how successful is any program to try to make up the gap if you will. I mean, what's the experience on that?

**Mayor:** Look, I'm going to make the sort of strategic statement and then the Chancellor can speak from his experience as an educator. Any time people suffer a setback, you know, can take time to overcome, but we also have lots of evidence of people overcoming a setback and then surpassing what was expected of them. We've got to think that way, Rich, this history of this city is filled with examples of when we were knocked down, but we got back up and then we went farther than people expected the city could go. The same as true for a child. One thing that's amazing about kids is their adaptability, their resiliency. You give them love, you give them support, you give them attention, they blossom, they move quickly. You give them new tools to work with. They'll use those tools. So, I think it is true to say overcoming such a crisis. It's not going to be an instant thing. It will take time for sure, and for some kids longer than others, but I don't want us to think that we're stuck in time, Rich. We're going to close that COVID achievement gap, and then we're going to surpass that's what we have to do. Our schools before COVID were reaching heights they had never reached before. We saw it with our graduation rate. We saw it with test results. We saw so many examples of this public schools doing better and better. We're going to pick up where we left off and build upon it. So, nothing's static. It's how do we take new approaches and new tools and go farther than we could go before. Go ahead. Chancellor.

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yeah, I will only add Rich that academics and trauma are two sides of the same coin. So, when we say – and the example that I gave about trauma, it was truly about the trauma. But I also know because I've walked classrooms in New York City for almost three years now, and I can tell you some of the finest educators, I've seen some of the finest pedagogy I've seen some of the most creative, innovative practices that seen, I've seen in the classrooms of New York city schools in every borough. So, I have tremendous faith that our teachers are going to tackle the COVID achievement gap, and they're going to take it on and they're going to make incredible strides with our children, and they're going to close that achievement gap, and that's not going to take them two years. It's not going to take them four years. They're going to take it on and they're taking it on right now.

But I also remember the children when I was in Houston post Hurricane Harvey that, you know, six months after Hurricane Harvey, when there was a rain shower and children heard rain falling on the roof, they absolutely were traumatized they started shaking because they remembered what that was like during that hurricane. That's the kind of emotional trauma that I'm talking about. Students can't learn their ABCs if they're traumatized and you have to do both at the same time. Some take a little longer, but the academics is already being addressed, now we just want to supercharge that as we go into the next school year.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much Chancellor. I remember when the Chancellor and I had our first discussions of the experience he went through bringing the Houston schools back after Hurricane Harvey, it was very moving to me and something I'm very appreciative of. That was not easy to do. But this Chancellor did it and we all together are going to work to achieve this next approach to helping our kids in New York City and closing that COVID achievement gap.

Look, as we conclude today, again, Hanukkah is upon us. It is the season of light, the focus on the light and the goodness and the hope, and today, all across New York City, we are seeing the light in our classrooms. We're seeing that joy in the eyes of our children, as they learn again with their friends, with their teachers, we're seeing that light, the heart and the compassion our teachers bring the way they support and love our kids. That's happening again all over this city,



850 schools, and there's another kind of light the light at the end of the tunnel because in a matter of days, the vaccine will start arriving in New York City, and it will be the beginning of turning the page from the COVID era to a new and better future for this city. So, let this be a season of light for all of us. Thank you, everyone.

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