

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 21, 2021

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON
THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW**

Brian Lehrer: Now it's time for our weekly Ask the Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 646-435-7280, 646-435-7280 – or you can tweet a question @BrianLehrer. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian. How are you doing today?

Lehrer: Good. Let me ask you first about full capacity schools for this fall, which you said is your goal. Gothamist has an article called "Social Distancing Requirements Will Be Pivotal In NYC Schools Reopening Next Fall," and it's about the CDC guidelines for three feet of distance between kids in the younger grades, still six feet at the middle and high school level. The City has adopted those standards, but you have principals and the teachers union who say most classrooms are too small for that much distancing. So, they need many more rooms than they have in each building, which would also mean many more teachers than they currently have to staff those rooms. Do you have a solution to that math problem?

Mayor: Yeah. First of all, it's May. I don't mean this to be facetious. I mean, it's to be really straightforward. It's May 21st, and we're talking about when school opens, you know, after Labor Day in September. Right now, with the CDC guidance, as cases have plummeted in New York City thanks to vaccinations, right now, we could be at three feet in all our schools, including middle schools and high schools. That's a change that has occurred because of the improved health care situation and the amazing number of vaccinations. You're talking about four months from now. I think we're going to see a much, much improved situation. I think we'll have COVID greatly reduced and have more freedom and flexibility from the CDC. So, we'll be speaking to the specifics in the next week or two. But I'm quite confident that we'll be able to make this work.

Lehrer: I know you want to talk about the anti-Semitic incident in Times Square yesterday. For people who haven't heard about it, would you describe what happened a little bit and then talk about the City's response?

Mayor: Yeah, it's absolutely disgusting and unacceptable. We had a man viciously beaten simply because he appeared to some individuals to be Jewish. We had folks throwing very potent fireworks and creating harm to others and burning some folk, at least one person. This is unacceptable. So, I want to let all New Yorkers know, first of all, we have arrests already and more coming, but anyone who has information about these incidents, please call 8-0-0-5-7-7-TIPS, or you can go on social, message @NYPD TIPS. We found with the horrible actions and violence against Asian-Americans that New Yorkers stepped up, provided information, helped us

arrest people. We need your help to stop these anti-Semitic attacks, immediately. We have reinforced key Jewish community location [inaudible] or of that with NYPD, and we've been doing that throughout the last two weeks at areas of concern, given what we're seeing in the Middle East, both areas that are sensitive in the Jewish community and the Palestinian community. But what happened last night is absolutely unacceptable. There's no place for antisemitism in New York City. We will not tolerate it. My message is very clear. Anyone who commits such an act is going to be arrested and prosecuted, and this is a city that has a very proud tradition of standing up against antisemitism in a world where anti-Semitic attacks have been increasing steadily for years, and a lot of governments are turning a blind eye around the world. We will not turn a blind eye. We're going to intervene very forcefully here.

Lehrer: I think I have my regular microphone back here, I can hear you fine, and I think listeners were able to hear me on the phone, whatever that problem was, and I think I'm back on the regular mic. You can hear me, Mr. Mayor? Control room, are we back on the air?

Okay. All right, listeners, I don't know what happened there, but I apologize for that, whatever it was, and I understand that you also have a reaction to some pretty good news about jobs in New York City that are coming back after the pandemic, but the reports that I've seen say coming back, modestly, there's caution, but they're coming back. How do you see it?

Mayor: Oh, they're definitely coming back. I mean, there's a lot of work to do, and for any New Yorkers unemployed, our job is to get them all back to work. But there's major, major progress. The information just released 375,000 jobs have come back since the beginning of the pandemic of the ones we lost. 375,000 back, the unemployment rate is falling nationally, but it's falling even faster in New York City. That's great news. Unemployment is going down in New York City, even faster than the nation. An example which is fantastic, in the last month alone, 15,000 restaurant jobs have come back, 5,000 entertainment jobs have come back because we went out there, we got the Broadway community and the arts and cultural community vaccinated. Some very good examples of how quickly these jobs to come back, and this summer Brian is going to be extraordinary because we're doing a national tourism campaign to get people to come to New York City. We're already starting to see tourists come back. I think you're going to see what all the outdoor performances, open restaurants, you know, street activities. You're going to see a huge influx of folks coming back to the city and the jobs are going to intensify as a result. So, these are good solid numbers, more to do, but really good direction we're in.

Lehrer: Here's a restaurant owner calling in with a related question, I think. Daniel in Manhattan. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Daniel.

Question: Hi. Thank you for taking my call. Mr. Mayor, first thing I'd like to do is thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you did for our small business last April, by making sure we got a grant and that was a real lifesaver. So, I want to thank you for that.

Mayor: I'm really, really happy to hear it helped and, and that you guys are going strong. God bless you.

Question: Yeah, it really did, and bless you. But here's my next question: did you know every two years we didn't have a full beer, wine and liquor license, we have to re-up with the State Liquor Authority and that's about \$4,500 even for our little, tiny restaurant. But you know,

recently we just got a bill from the City taxing that part of our liquor license. So in other words, we have to pay a \$600 tax this year, even though – my wife owns the business – even though our family business has deteriorated down to about 25 percent, and now on a good weekend, we're up to about 50 percent. So, what I'm asking is that why can't that tax it's about \$600, which is about what we pay for our dishwasher, because we pay people well. So why can't we keep that money instead of giving it over to the city, and if I'm correct, hasn't the city been made whole from the federal government? Could you please answer that, sir?

Mayor: Yeah. Daniel, thank you very, very much for the question. We have gotten a lot of help from the federal government. We also have had tremendous challenges we've had to address and a lot of things that we didn't get support for, you know, for the whole first year of COVID that we're still paying for, but that's not the central concern here in terms of your question. I think your question is a really fair one that we need to try and be thoughtful about everything we can do to help restaurants and bars come back. Look what I loved about Open Restaurants, in addition to the direct grants and loans and things we did that you received, for example, the Open Restaurants, we gave free space to restaurants to be able to survive and that is now going to be permanent. Open Streets, Open Restaurants will be permanent. You're not going to pay for that space. That's going to be a place where you can thank God bring in more customers and keep going. But that being said, we should be looking at any other form of relief that makes sense. And this is a new one on me, I'm really glad you raised it, Daniel. I always say to journalists, I appreciate when they educate me on something, I didn't know about this one on, I'm happy to hear about it. I'm going to look at it to see if there's something else, we can do, especially in the short-term while folks are still suffering and trying to get back on their feet. So, consider me educated and will you give your information please to WNYC, and then I'll have my team follow up with you and let you know what we're going to do with this.

Lehrer: Remote learning, 10:00 am to noon even for the Mayor. Seth in Brooklyn. You're on. WNYC –

Mayor: Nice – nice turn of the phrase there, Brian.

Lehrer: Seth in Brooklyn, you're on with the Mayor. Hi, Seth.

Question: Hey, Brian. Hi, Mr. Mayor. Thanks for taking my call. I appreciate it. I am the owner of a small arts organization. We provide teaching artists and artists and residencies to public schools. We've been doing it for about 20 years. My, every five-year re-contracting with the city has been held up for 18 months in COVID –

Mayor: COVID hell, COVID hell.

Question: [Inaudible] bureaucracy. Now – yes, yes, hell. And now there are grants due this coming week for arts programs in the city, and I'm being made to go through, you know, ridiculous hoops in order for my schools who are interested in bringing our artists to their schools in order to do these grants without my new contract. So, I'm wondering how small businesses who have been held up due to COVID for well over a year, we've been approved for the number, yet, don't have the number, what can be done to sort of jump through these hoops quickly to get our people work?

Mayor: This is really important, Seth. Thank you. We -- first of all, the work of artists and cultural folks in schools has been incredibly important throughout, obviously the pandemic, but even before it's one of the things that inspires young people to learn, and so we got to double down on this and we've increased arts spending in our schools over the years, and it's been really, really worthwhile. We got to -- we got to move our young people, and nothing does that like arts, music, culture. So, thank you for what you're doing. I want to try and simplify your life, because we, in addition to that kind of funding, we have this new very powerful funding with our city Artists Corps, which is, Brian will appreciate, borrowed directly from the New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The incredible work that happened with the Works Progress Administration and the federal programs to directly support artists in theater. We're doing a version of that direct grants to artists to do community performances and workshops, and that's starting right now. So, that's another thing you and your colleagues could key into. I'm going to have a very special person reach out to you, Seth, Gonzalo Casals who is our Cultural Affairs Commissioner. I'd like him to talk to you directly today. So, please give your information WNYC and let's see if we can cut through the bureaucracy and get you to support you need.

Lehrer: Let's go next to her Irina in Bay Ridge, you're on WNYC. Hi, Irina.

Question: Hi.

Lehrer: Hi there. You're on with the Mayor. Go ahead.

Question: Oh, hello, Mr. Mayor, my name is Irina [inaudible]. I'm calling from Step Ahead Daycare. First of all, I want to say thank you for the opportunities for last four years to work [inaudible] with the Department of Education providing pre-K services in our Bay Ridge area. We had a great experience and we're happy that we had this opportunity. But this year we got the bad news that we were not awarded to continue pre-K, 3-K for all programs in our daycare, in our area. So, unfortunately, we try to protest. We did many steps to communicate, reapply, talk with the Department of Education about possibility reconsideration. So, and I remember a while ago you spoke with one of the yeshivas and mentioned that other daycares were not awarded first time, will have a chance to work to go through this process second time --

Lehrer: And Irina, I'm going to leave it there and get you an answer just cause we're running out of time in the segment, but how do you decide that Mr. Mayor, how does the Department of Education decide that a place that had a 3-K or a pre-K program isn't qualified for it anymore?

Mayor: Well, it's -- I'll give it a quick version. First of all, Irina, let's get Irina's contact information, I'm going to have the Deputy chancellor who handles a pre-K and 3-K and really has been one of the great architects of this amazing effort, Josh Wallack, I'm going to have him follow up directly with Irina. And one of the answers, first of all, Brian, is there's going to be more because we're going to Pre-K for All, we're going to -- I'm sorry, 3-K, I'm switching my acronyms here. 3-K for All, Pre-K for All exists in all of New York City, a universal right. Very proud of that. Now, we have put in place that this September every single school district will have 3-K, three-year-olds for free, and within two more years, it will be 100 percent universal. Every child who's three years old gets it for free, which means more and more opportunity for these good community-based organizations to provide a programming. So that is changing as we speak. There will be more opportunity. To answer to your question simply, sometimes there are a lot of groups in a single area and more seats than there are demand, or sometimes a one group

has just performed better in terms of the qualitative and in a choice of where to put the seats might win out, not because the other one's bad, just one might be better. But the good news is we are expecting tens of thousands more kids starting in September. We'll have 15,000 more this September than we had last September, tens of thousands more after that going into 3-K. So, we're going to need more and more of these organizations to provide this for free, and we'll be supporting them to do it

Lehrer: Irina. Thank you for your call. We are almost out of time, Mr. Mayor. I want to ask you, maybe a different kind of question going out, and that is with the mayoral election campaign in full swing. Do you have any advice for voters? I know you're not about to endorse anybody on the show today, and that's not my question, but do you have any advice for voters on evaluating which candidates are just saying stuff and which may actually put some of their campaign ideas and policies into practice? How do you evaluate candidates along those lines generally?

Mayor: Yeah, great question. I'll give you the quick answer. Look, I think every candidate has put out some of their key ideas. I think they all have to do it more clearly, bluntly, and more simply for the people that city, but they all have ideas on table. Easy to find that it. If the – the answer to your question is to compare them against history. Who's been involved in New York City? Who's been involved in our neighborhoods? Who solved problems before? Who has a track record on the issues that people care about? I really think that matters and we're in a crisis environment, it's getting a lot better, thank God, coming out of COVID. But you know, this is the time where the next mayor is going to have to take the baton from me and really deepen this recovery and get us back on a strong footing. I think every voter should look at the experience and the connection between the experience and the platform and see if it rings true. I think that's the right way to do it, because the next mayor is going to have to navigate a very challenging environment and they better damn well understand how New York City works.

Lehrer: Thanks, as always, Mr. Mayor. Talk to you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian. Take care.

###