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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON CNN'S THE SITUATION ROOM WITH WOLF BLITZER

Wolf Blitzer: Tonight, nearly half of New York City's public-school students are planning to attend online when classes resume on Monday. Some teachers are questioning whether City schools are ready for in-person learning. Let's discuss this, and more, with the Mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio. Mayor, thank you so much for joining us. As you know, the New York City Department of Education says, what – about 58 percent of the more than 1 million students in your school district – the largest in the United States – are planning to return to classrooms for hybrid learning next week. That's far below the 74 percent of students you had anticipated welcoming back in person this fall. So, what does that tell you, Mayor, about confidence in the City's ability to keep the students, the teachers, the staff safe?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Well, it tells me, Wolf, that the families of well over half-a-million kids want their kids in school, that they see that we've gone to the most extensive precautions to keep the school safe. And we really try to create a global gold standard here. We looked at the best practices from around the globe and we went farther. Testing is being provided for free to anyone who wants and needs it. We'll be testing regularly. We have masks on all adults and children – actually, very few countries in the world have required that – we are requiring that. Constant cleaning, a lot of social distancing, a typical New York City public school classroom will have about 10 or 12 students – unheard of to have so few kids in a room. But I'll tell you something, Wolf, there are so many families begging us to get school back, because their kids lost a lot of last year. They need the support of educators. They need the mental health and physical health services available in schools, especially for less advantaged kids. Being back in school is going to allow them to get their education back on track and parents need us to be there for them.

Blitzer: I certainly appreciate what you're saying, but we've heard from teachers out there, as you know, Mayor, who are very concerned about their health and that of their students, they have concerns about actual access to testing, and the inability to properly ventilate classrooms, especially in a lot of those older school buildings. So, what do you say to those teachers who are so worried right now about what next week will bring?

Mayor: So, we did a thorough ventilation check of all our classrooms – 96 percent came back ready to go. The additional classrooms that needed more work are getting more work. We were very thorough, we brought in outside engineers to check every classroom, make sure they were ready. We're making sure testing is there. Just last week, 17,000 school personnel got tested. The number positive out of 17,000 was 55 – 0.32 percent tested positive. Thank God, the vast, vast

majority of the people who are going to be in our schools are going to come in healthy and we're going to be able to keep people safe by all of these precautions. So, I listen to all of the concerns, but the answer is to, again, have a gold standard – use every health and safety precaution, one layered on top of the other to create a very safe environment and to make sure that people are constantly reminded that health and safety comes first. A lot of school systems didn't do that, that's the honest truth, Wolf, and they experienced problems. We're not taking any chances here in New York City. You name the safety precaution, we're doing it.

Blitzer: What about, Mayor, the – more than 40 percent of the City students who have opted for entirely remote learning this fall – how are you meeting the needs of those students who will not be returning to classrooms?

Mayor: So, Wolf, that's how the school year begins. They'll have an opportunity in November if they want to come back into the blended learning and be part of the time in school – they'll have a chance to do that as early as November. But we want to do the very best we can for kids who are all remote. It's hard, our educators are doing a really great job, creating every possible way to make it work. But the truth is, remote teaching just isn't in any way as good for kids as in-person teaching.

Blitzer: Of course.

Mayor: And so, you can make it better, but you can't make it as good as in-person.

Blitzer: Your city, as we all know, was hit incredibly hard by this virus, and, understandably, some residents in New York – they've actually been very hesitant to return. You received the letter from 150 business leaders the other day, warning of what they call deteriorating conditions in your city. Among other things, they write this – and let me read it to you. “People will be slow to return to New York unless their concerns about security and the livability of our communities are addressed quickly and with respect and fairness for our city's diverse populations.” So, what steps, Mayor, are you taking to address those widely publicized concerns – people reluctant to come back to New York City?

Mayor: Well, you know, Wolf, you know New York City – working class New Yorkers, middle-class New Yorkers, they're here, fighting the fight every day to bring this city back. And what are we seeing? We are now one of the safest places in America. We fought back this disease. Typically, around here, we've had less than a one percent infection rate in recent days. People have seen New York City's heart and soul in that. Now, we're fighting some other challenges. We have budget challenges, for sure. We've got to deal with issues in our neighborhoods and keep bringing up the quality of life. But we're coming out of being the epicenter of the crisis in this whole country, and we've gone from there to now – you can see the economy's coming back, you can see more and more people coming in, you can see what's happening with outdoor dining. There's a lot happening. And now, the biggest school system in the country reopening. The more you look at the progress New York City's making, the more confidence people are going to have that New York City's coming back strong.

Blitzer: Well, good luck, Mayor. I know there's a lot of pressure on you and everyone else to make sure that everyone is safe, secure in New York City. Appreciate it very much. Good luck.

Mayor: Thank you, Wolf.

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