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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. We are starting earlier than usual today because I'm going up to the Bronx in a little bit to attend a plaque dedication ceremony for Firefighter Christopher Slutman, a hero of this city who did so much for us. You'll see on your screen, I had the honor of meeting him and awarding him with the Fire Chiefs Association Medal in 2014 for extraordinary acts of courage as a truly dedicated New York City firefighter. He proudly wore two uniforms for 15 years, a veteran of the FDNY, a firefighter who cared deeply for the people of this city, protecting them, loved being a New York City firefighter, believed in the FDNY but also dedicated his life to protecting his country as a Staff Sergeant in the United States Marines and tragically lost his life serving us overseas. So, we will dedicate a plaque to him today in his memory to keep his memory alive, and we'll be there to support his family, and may he rest in peace.

On a happier note, yesterday another sign of the rebirth of New York City, another sign of a recovery for all of us, the comeback happening in this city. And so many New Yorkers are involved in bringing the city back. But what you're seeing, especially these last few weeks, is our cultural community stepping forward with so much passion and energy, our artists, our performers who want to make this city live again, vibrant again. We talk about that great phrase from the theater, the show must go on. Well, the show will go on in New York City and you're seeing it more and more every day. So, Lincoln Center, first live performance, the Restart Stages at Lincoln Center, so exciting. The New York Philharmonic was there. It was a beautiful concert on a beautiful day, a symbol of our comeback. And I want to thank Lincoln Center. They focused the first concert on thanking our health care heroes. So, the audience was made up of health care workers who have been part of the fight against COVID and who saw the city through. And Lincoln Center is focused on a recovery for all of us, on a recovery with equity. And I thank them for that commitment. But it was just beautiful to hear the live music again, one of the greatest philharmonics anywhere in the world. And it was a special, special moment and a sign of many more things to come. There's going to be an extraordinary amount of outdoor performance this year in New York City. So, get ready for an amazing summer.

Now, let me give you an update on vaccinations. The effort continues to grow every day, which is fantastic. We're getting near the five million vaccination mark. Of course, our overall goal is five million fully vaccinated New Yorkers by June. But in terms of individual doses, today a very good number, 4,738,246 doses since the beginning of the vaccination effort. More doses than there are people in the state of Louisiana, the home state of our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi. You've done – you've made Louisiana proud. Now, everyone, we're really

focused on our seniors. Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Varma, our whole team said at the very beginning, the number one most vulnerable group is our seniors, particularly our oldest seniors. So, again, for seniors 75 years old and up, we're doing walk up appointments now. And this has proven to be very popular, very effective, really helpful for the seniors. We're going to expand it even further, even more than we talked about yesterday. Now we're going from the original three sites to 26 sites around the city where a senior can walk up, get an appointment right away, get vaccinated, but we're adding something more because a lot of seniors need someone to come with them, a loved one, a companion, an aid, someone to come with them. Guess what? The companion now can also get vaccinated on the spot. So, if you are 75 years or older and you come with a companion, both of you will be guaranteed to be vaccinated right there at that site, no appointment necessary. Just walk up. This is going to really encourage seniors to come out. We want to really get to every senior we can. And again, we continue to do a lot more outreach to seniors. We're going to keep doing that as long as it takes. We continue to set aside appointments for seniors at all our vaccination sites. This is so important. We're going to stick with it until the job is done.

All right, now another absolutely crucial part of a recovery for all of us is bringing back our public schools now and then we'll be talking soon about what we're going to do this summer. And then we'll be talking more about what we're going to do in September. But our public schools are the anchor of everything that happens in New York City. And I say that proudly as a New York City public school parent, when my kids went to school. We continue to bring our schools back and they continue to be safe because of the extraordinary efforts of our educators, our staff, our parents, our kids, our health care professionals. We set a gold standard from the beginning. We said we would take the best health care practices from around the world, apply all of them in the New York City public schools. It has worked. They're the safest places to be in New York City, literally. And we want to keep getting more and more kids back. And what we heard from parents is they wanted to come back, but they were really concerned about the school schedules, they're really concerned about the instability in those schedules, unpredictability, and they wanted to know that we could keep everyone safe, first and foremost, but also have a more stable and consistent schedule. And so earlier this week, I announced the end of the two-case closure rule.

Today, we're going to be talking about the new rule that will be in place that will help to keep schools open while simultaneously keeping them safe at all times. So, for individual classrooms, we'll still have a very strict closure rule. One confirmed case means going remote. After ten days, the classroom comes back. For the entire school, if there are two cases or three cases in a week that will lead to an increase in testing, but not a closure, if there's four or more cases and they're in different classrooms and can be traced to a known exposure within the school, that's when there'll be a closure and our health care team will speak more about this in a moment. Again, in every instance where there's any kind of closure, after ten days of school is back open. So, this will help us to have more consistency in school attendance and schedules, keep strong health and safety standards. Our situation room, as always, will be monitoring closely. And we worked with the unions who represent the folks who educate our kids and take care of our kids, the educators and staff of our schools – we worked with the unions to work through these issues, to find an approach that would really focus on health and safety for all adults and children alike. Thank God we now have over 65,000 adults that have been vaccinated in our schools. That's a great

step, but we really worked together with the unions to figure out the right approach going forward. And there's a lot more we'll be doing with the unions and with all the stakeholders in the school community to ensure additional supports for our kids, both academically and in terms of their emotional needs, their mental health needs, because we're going to be asking a lot of our educators and our school staff as school comes back. We need to be there for them too, providing the proper supports so that kids and families have what they need, and we can have an extraordinary school year ahead particularly when we start in September.

So, we'll have more to say on that, but in the meantime, I want you to hear from our Chancellor and our Health Commissioner, of what this means, this new approach. And the Chancellor, again, has been doing a wonderful job and when she speaks about this, she speaks as Chancellor, she speaks as a lifelong educator, as a product of New York City public schools, and as a New York City public school parent, simultaneously. Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter.

Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter: Thank you, Mayor de Blasio. And I'm excited, in all of those roles, to be announcing the changes today. Our entire community – from custodians, school safety workers, teachers, and just really want to thank the situation room – has put in a tremendous amount of work and effort to make sure our schools are safe for both students and staff. And we know the multi-tiered gold [inaudible] standard approach to health and safety is working. We have said since the beginning of this pandemic, that we will make science-driven adjustments as our public health experts learn more about this disease and how it impacts our schools. Following the guidance from the CDC and our own public health experts we can now confidently make updates to our closure policies and adapt to deliver a more targeted, precise response to situations in our school communities.

As the Mayor said, schools will only close if there are four or more cases in different classrooms in a school within seven days, that can be traced to exposure inside the school. Additionally, this rule applies to individual schools as opposed to the entire building. If cases are reported, an investigation takes place, but the whole school does not need to close for 24 hours while that is ongoing. And I know all of the parents along with me are shouting a big hooray for that. To be clear, classroom quarantines will continue if a positive case is identified in a classroom. We must still assume that everyone is a close contact in this case. To keep school safe, we are going to continue to lean on our partners at the situation room and Test and Trace. In-school testing has kept us safe all year, and it will continue to keep us safe going forward, allowing us to make smart, informed decisions about closures. In the event that over seven days there are two or three positive cases in different classrooms, weekly random testing will double to 40 percent of the staff and students in the school.

As I said on Monday, this consistency will do wonders for families, students, teachers, and principals. We've seen the studies, consulted with medical experts, and based this change on guidance from the CDC. And we've heard the voices of our school communities calling for increased stability around in-person learning as long as we can do so safely. This is exactly what this change represents. Fewer closures mean consistency and stability for students, staff, families, and more days in classrooms for New York City's children. And I happen to know one, little Jayden's going to be really excited about that. This change will go into effect on Monday. We will continue with universal mask usage, social distancing, weekly testing, and quick

intervention by the situation room to quarantine classes and schools when needed. And we now have an added layer of protection, over 65,000 DOE employees vaccinated, and those numbers are growing every day. We know this policy will mean a lot to families, to students, and to all of our school communities. That is why we're also extending the opt-in period, for families to come back to in-person instruction, until Friday. Again, the deadline to opt-in is tomorrow. And you can do that by visiting our website or calling 3-1-1. And we look forward to welcoming you back to school.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Chancellor. And thank you for giving everyone a really clear update on the changes and how we're going to move forward together. I want you to hear from our Health Commissioner. He is not only our Health Commissioner, not only a parent, but also happens to be married to a New York City public school assistant principal. So, he cares deeply about health and safety in our schools. And he's been working with us closely on this new approach. My pleasure to introduce Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thanks so much, Mr. Mayor. And that's right as the city's doctor, as a parent, and as the husband of an educator there's nothing more important to me than keeping our youngest New Yorkers safe. As long as COVID is still in our city, we must remain disciplined about keeping the virus from spreading. But the good news is that when it comes to schools, we have proven to be able to do just that. When our multiple layers of public health precautions are followed – masking, ventilation, distancing, testing – the virus does not spread easily in schools. As every parent knows, closures also put stress on the entire household. Our goal will always be to keep schools open as much as possible by keeping them safe. We will continue to have the most rigorous measures of any public school system in the nation, our classroom and school closure rules will remain stricter than the CDC's recommendation. So, today's new policy strikes the right balance to keep our kids and educators safe. And getting more and more New Yorkers vaccinated will fuel this and other virtuous cycles promoting health. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Dr. Chokshi. I'm going to actually ask the Chancellor if you have that website ready? If not, I'll – I think we put it up on the screen. Did we put up on the screen, the website for parents to opt-in? Yes, there it is. Okay, Chancellor, we're good. Up on the screen, again, is the website. I want to remind all parents you have until the end of the day tomorrow, the end of the day tomorrow, for the opt-in if you want your kids to come back to in-person learning. And, again, we're going to – we're asking parents across all grade levels to let us know your preferences. We are starting with elementary school, obviously, still waiting for the final sign off from the State, but we're getting ready to go. And we'll be having more to say soon on middle and high school going forward. But the bottom line here is, if you want your kids back in in-person learning and they're fully remote now, this is the last chance to do it. We don't anticipate another opt-in from this point on. So, I want to be really clear with parents, until the end of the day tomorrow, Friday, this should be the last chance to opt-in for this school year up until June. Final statement, I'll make because parents ask me all the time and I like to keep saying it, our goal and our belief is that we will be back full strength in September. Every child who wants to be in school will be able to be in school five days a week. Everything we're seeing now points us in that direction. And we're particularly thrilled with the level of vaccination we're now seeing in the city, which is going to make it possible. We're absolutely confident in our goal, five

million New Yorkers fully vaccinated in June. So, we're moving forward. And if you want to opt-in, here's your chance.

Okay. Now everyone on a somber note, and this is important before I go to indicators in just a second. Today is Yom HaShoah or Holocaust Remembrance Day. And Yom HaShoah is a very somber time and a time for reflection and a time for memory, and memory that teaches us something. If you've been, as I have been, to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, extraordinarily powerful, painful experience, but it speaks to not just a sense of long ago history, but how much we need to learn the lessons still and act on them, how much anti-Semitism is still way too strong in this country and in this world, how much we have to be there for those who have suffered from the Holocaust, and how we have to fight the scourge of anti-Semitism with all our hearts all the time. New York City has the distinction – or several distinctions. One, more Jewish people live in New York City than any city in the world, within the city limits in New York City, even more than Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. And New York City is a home to more Holocaust survivors than any place outside of Israel. We remember these Holocaust survivors constantly, and we have had a dedicated, focused effort to get them vaccinated, to protect them. We've been working very closely with the Claims Conference and the Jewish Community Relations Council, and a number of other organizations. I want to thank all of them for their tremendous partnership in helping us achieve this. More than 2,700 vaccinations so far of Holocaust survivors and more to come.

And the last thing I want to say about this is when I spoke with some of the survivors at the vaccination sites and at other sites where they were getting support, it was so striking to me that this history is so recent, and this keeps making me realize how much we all have to do together, how much we have to fight hate in all its forms. And we're seeing this horrible hatred directed at the Asian-American community. All hatred must be stopped because hatred towards one community is a threat to all communities. But I spoke with a woman, Cilia Jankowicz, 97 years old. You see a picture of her there. She survived Auschwitz. We had an amazing conversation full of faith and energy. She is so happy to be alive, happy that people are helping her. She kept her faith even after she survived the horrors of Auschwitz. I met Sarah Teichman, who survived the Bergen-Belsen camp, the same thing, full of life and energy and hope. I met Fryderyka Shabry, who survived only because her mother smuggled her out of the Warsaw Ghetto in a potato sack as a small child. And when you hear these amazing stories of strength, resiliency, survival, it's inspiring, but it's also a reminder to us that the work of fighting anti-Semitism and the work of fighting hatred continues. And it's not long ago history, it's history that should tell us what we need to do right now.

Okay, let's turn to the indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report, 200 patients exactly – that's right at the threshold and we want to get under that threshold consistently, confirmed positivity 54.03 percent, hospitalization rate 3.53 per 100,000. New reported cases on a seven-day average today's report, 2,904 cases. Percentage of people testing positive city-wide for COVID-19, today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.32 percent. A few words in Spanish on the new rules related to schools being open.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, we will 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 Dr. Chokshi, by Chancellor Porter, by Dr. Mitchell Katz, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Aundrea from WCBS.

Question: Good morning.

Mayor: Hi, Aundrea. How you doing?

Question: Great. I'm great. So, before children were not as impacted by COVID when compared to adults, but now with the emergence of these variants, especially the one that originated in the UK, we're seeing a surge in cases among kids. So, how is a school system factoring in these new developments during this push to bring more students back to school in-person?

Mayor: I'm going to turn to Dr. Jay Varma. I want you to know that topic is something we've talked about a lot, and Dr. Varma has been monitoring the situation all around the world. In fact, he did a scholarly paper on the experiences we've had in New York City that have helped us to understand how to keep schools safe. So, he can give you a sense of how we're looking at those trends and addressing them. Dr. Varma –

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great, thank you very much for the question. And, you know, to reiterate what we've said many times before, you know, we are concerned about the evolution of the virus, the emergence of new variants and how they can impact our city. From everything we have done so far involved in – in our school system, we have shown that despite the surge of the second wave, we were able to keep schools safe during that time. And I think it's because we adopted this gold standard approach at the beginning of the year. Now, what this change allows us to do is to end the era of disruptive 24-hour closures. You know, we've documented the harm that can occur from disrupting the social, emotional, and educational development of children. And we're balancing that with the data that we've learned from over 700,000 tests, hundreds of case investigations, and really the close partnership with our colleagues in the union and with families. So, I do feel confident that we can continue to apply very rigorous safety standards that will keep our schools safe, even though the virus is, you know, fighting back by evolving and changing. And, of course, to always emphasize the fact that we are grounded in data and science, if new things emerge, new information emerges, we're always going to adjust our protocols to match and maximize health and safety.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Aundrea.

Question: Second question is just for clarification, because under one of the parameters, it was saying that contact tracing has to be linked to the school before a certain action is taken. Can you explain that? Because contact tracing isn't an exact science, right? So, can you explain that and kind of what the tiers are and what it will take for schools to close and how you're making sure if there are positive cases in the school, you're going to keep students and the staff safe?

Mayor: Yeah. And let me just say on these technical questions – it's a very valid question. I'm going to turn to Dr. Varma because he's been deeply, deeply involved in all of our conversations and calls on this topic. If Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Katz have anything they want to add, just speak up each time if you want to jump in. Dr. Varma, take that first.

Senior Advisor Varma: So, you're exactly right. A lot of what we do in public health is – what we are doing is we are taking science and we're applying it in the real world. And then the challenge, of course, is that it is imperfect. And that's actually one of the important reasons why we are changing the rules because it is extremely difficult to know, with a hundred percent certainty, where every single case got their infection. What we've learned from our investigations, of course, is that oftentimes, you know, people have had potentially many exposures during the periods in which they might've gotten infected. Now that said we also know that because our school community is a sort of more regulated setting, you know, people are going to those places on a very regular basis [inaudible] large number of our cases of course, there are in children also, and their activities are closely monitored unlike, say, an adult who may not know all the places that they've been, we are able to take that information and to draw reasonable conclusions. And so, that's why we have this criteria that we put in there that we have to have traced their exposure to the school. And it has to have occurred in multiple different places around the school – so, that is four or more classrooms – for us to make the very difficult decision to actually move the entire school to remote learning. So, we recognize that there are imperfections in this and that some of this is an art. But we also feel like we've gained enough experience and knowledge that we can do this in a way that is safe and ensure stability.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, sir. I just wanted to emphasize one of the things that Dr. Varma said about this, which is what this represents overall is really a stepped approach with respect to health and safety. The baseline is those multiple layers of protection that we've talked about, that applies to every child, every school. And then we can bring to bear additional interventions, starting with greater testing but then moving on to quarantining classrooms when that's necessary and then ultimately quarantining schools as well. And we move along that spectrum depending on the level of transmission that we see. That's our overall approach to making sure that the intensity of our intervention is matched up to what we're actually seeing with respect to the virus.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

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

Question: Good morning, guys.

Mayor: Hey, Michael, how you been?

Question: I'm good. I wanted to ask you a follow up to a couple of questions Juliet Papa asked yesterday. You know, over the past few months, you put, and arguably longer than that, a lot of emphasis on mental health and trauma-informed care. Yet, you know, yesterday when Juliet

asked you about New Yorkers living in fear over violence in the city, you said that you didn't think that was what's going on. We interviewed some people yesterday who said, you know, that is going on, that they do live in fear, and so, I mean, my question is, you know – we talked to the family of this five-year-old girl who got shot in the head, she got grazed by a bullet in East New York. I mean, how can you say that people aren't living in fear when, you know, a five-year-old child is shot? You know, I mean, on top of it all, we have the pandemic going on and I just talked to a neighbor yesterday whose daughter is afraid to go back to school because of the virus. So, I'm just wondering if you could kind of elaborate on that a little bit.

Mayor: Sure, I appreciate the question, Michael. First of all, it was horrible what happened to that little five-year-old and thank God she was going to be okay. But look, there are places where there's too much violence and we are going to deal with it. We have to, and there's clearly a lot of anxiety about COVID. We've been talking about that now for over a year and talking about the mental health support we need to provide to families and provide the children coming back to school. I think we've talked a lot about this and moved a lot of effort and resources to address the mental health challenges.

What I was saying, Michael, and I appreciate the opportunity to clarify is New Yorkers, yeah, we have a lot of challenges we have to overcome, but we overcome them. We went through a horrible, perfect storm last year, everything that could've gone wrong, went wrong at once, whether it was the pandemic, the violence, people losing their jobs, schools being closed, and New Yorkers fought through it. So, is there anxiety? Of course. Is there fear? Yes. I'm not saying there's not any – I'm saying New Yorkers don't get intimidated, we fight back, and the comeback you're seeing this year is obvious and powerful, but we're going to address all of these issues. The mental health needs of families and kids, the shootings were getting out there, and more and more gun arrests by the NYPD and more cooperation with community and police together and more Cure Violence and Crisis Management System, and we will turn it around. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: Thanks, Mr. Mayor. Switching gears here, I wanted to ask you about a story that came out in The City today, about Maya Wiley's involvement with vetting Campaign for One New York fundraisers, and in this story, she says that her advice, as far as keeping the administration within the ethical boundaries for CONY fundraising was not always followed, and you know, the story also touches on contradictory statements, you and she made that were cited in a DOI report a few years back. Can you address that? I mean, she's saying advice is not always followed, is that true?

Mayor: You know, Michael, we've talked about this so many times, I'm going to keep it real simple. She and other lawyers worked hard to make sure that everything was handled properly. Everyone on the team myself included, worked hard to implement all guidance properly. All of this was looked at. I think it's quite clear that, you know, it's been addressed and we're just moving forward.

Moderator: The next is Reema from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi everyone. How's it going today?

Mayor: Good Reema. How are you doing?

Question: Good. Good. I'm glad to hear details on the two-case rule. So happy about that.

Mayor: We told you they'd be soon coming.

Question: Yeah, well, you know. Okay, so someone already asked this, but I wanted to just follow up I believe Aundrea from CBS asked this, but when we're talking about tracing exposure to classrooms, Dr. Varma said that, of course, like, you have to consider real world circumstances and that someone may have been exposed elsewhere. So, I'm curious if you have a situation where a child may have been exposed in the class and in the school. But it's also possible they could have been exposed at home or somewhere else – in that case, what would happen? Would that person count as like having potentially gotten it at the school, and that would count as someone towards the building closure?

Mayor: Go ahead, Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Varma: Great, thank you very much. You're absolutely right, and unfortunately, I'm not going to be able to give you a precise formula for this, because as we've mentioned before, it really depends on how we weight different pieces of evidence. You know, let's use the example that you gave. If the child did have an exposure in their home, that is a close family member was a known, confirmed case, then we would assume that that case is linked to that household, and that's because we know that household transmission is the single strongest risk factor for getting this infection. Now, if the situation was different. In fact, we knew that for example, in the classroom that there had been or I'm sorry, or an afterschool activity or, or something other related to the school, there had been an exposure there, but there were no documented exposures in any other situation, because we know some children, you know, really only spend time in their homes and in the school, we would be more inclined to implicate the school as that source. But the reality is there is no specific precise formula. It's the reason we have extremely well-trained staff from the Health Department, from the Test and Trace Corps, and from the school system, all working together in a situation room, so they can adjudicate these cases on a case-by-case basis.

Mayor: Yeah, and Reema, look this has been an ongoing effort, and when we talked about yesterday, the fact that as Dr. Katz has talked about the medical community has learned so much in the last year, dealing with COVID, no one would have ever wanted this challenge, but what they've taken on the challenge learned a lot, made a lot of adjustments they're able to deal with COVID a lot better. Test and Trace Corps has been extraordinary, and you know, they got started in June. They've learned so much in most of the year, they've been here. They've been able to figure out how to address things better and better through experience. But one thing we know is the very, very low level of infection in the schools was striking. And whatever else was happening in the larger community, the level of infection of in schools stayed very, very low, and we brought back middle school, we brought back high school, it just stayed low, and we believe it's all those measures that we put in place. But now a huge X-Factor: 65,000 adults vaccinated, I think that number could be substantially more than just as people we haven't gotten

the report on and more gain vaccinated all the time. So, all of this was factored into thinking about how we could make changes that would keep schools open more often, but also be safe. Go ahead, Reema.

Question: So, my second question is about the number threshold. I've talked to some public health experts and epidemiologists who looked at the rule before it was changed today and thought it was conservative, but also that a numerical threshold doesn't really make sense. That it's more about doing individual investigations in classrooms, which it sounds like that's part of some of the city is going to be doing and perhaps has been doing. But can you explain the rationale behind having this, you know, this number four as a threshold versus just something else?

Mayor: Yeah. Reema I'll start and turn to Dr. Varma. Anything that Dr. Katz or Dr. Chokshi want to add, obviously again, just raise your hand. Our standard was arguably the most conservative in the nation and served well, but also had some unintended consequences, and that again was a standard set at the very beginning when we had to find our way, remember we opened our public schools in this city when a few major cities dared to try, but we knew we could do it safely. We've proven that. We've also seen that we've had a number of developments now helping us like vaccination, but by any measure, our standards were extraordinarily conservative, and even this new standard is much more conservative than some of the national guidance. So, we do feel though it strikes a good balance. Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, thank you very much for the question, and the simple reality is that in an ideal world, every situation could be managed on a case-by-case basis. You'd be able to accumulate all of the information and be able to make a decision rapidly with all of that. But the reality is that we're dealing with the largest diverse and most complex school system in the country. We have you know, lots of, of investigations that occur and need to happen rapidly so that we can get information to staff and to families as quickly as possible. Because anytime there are cases, there are people appropriately concerned and worried about their potential risk. So, we do have to balance the epidemiologic science which says exactly as you have noted that every situation should be managed on its own with a very real world need to actually be able to get decisions made quickly that we can transmit information to different audiences rapidly, and we can make the interventions, we need to reduce the risk of an outbreak occurring. So, yes, in an ideal world, we would be able to manage everything on a case-by-case basis, but we also have to balance how we can do this efficiently and appropriately as best we can, and we feel quite strongly that we're really able to strike that balance.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Katherine Fung from WNYC.

Question: Hi, I have a question about how the classroom quarantine will work in upper grades where students switch classes, if there is one case. Does that mean that the sixth, perhaps like the multiple classes that a student is in would be shut down would have to quarantine?

Mayor: Katherine, I'll turn to Dr. Varma, but just want to make sure I understand when you, you're saying, for example, high schools where kids need to take more specialized classes and move around a little more. Is that what you're saying?

Question: Right, like if they move around to four different classrooms a day, does that mean that all four teachers in all four classrooms would then have to quarantine?

Mayor: Go ahead, Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, this is actually what we have as our current rule right now. Is that if a person was in a shared classroom space for somebody, then they are considered a close contact, and this is a conservative definition, but it is one that we chose because of the primacy of health and safety, and so it is true that in situations where somebody was in multiple different classrooms, all of those classrooms would be considered exposed. It's one of the reasons that pods are so important, particularly in the younger years, but obviously it becomes much more difficult to maintain as kids advance in their education and need to get specialized classroom instruction.

Mayor: Yeah, and I appreciate the answer. And Katherine, again, reminding you that we have an x-factor here we didn't have when we started, which is, you know, the vast number of adults who have been vaccinated and how that's going to help us. And Dr. Varma very quickly, just remind everyone, from the study you did how much of the transmission in schools was adults versus kids?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yes, correct. So, we did a detailed investigation involving very complex analysis from October through December of all the cases in our schools, and we found that 78 percent of the events in which there was likely transmission in the school, the original case of the index case wasn't adult. So, either a staff person transmitting to another staff person or a staff transmitting to a child, and this very much aligns with what we've seen in studies done throughout the United States, as well as the UK, Germany, Australia, and many other settings, which is that while it is true, that children can, can bring in infections into school and even cause outbreaks the majority of the time that there are transmission events they are introduced by adults, and so that's one of the reasons it's so important for us to have vaccinations for adults.

Mayor: So, yeah, Katherine, that was a big part of our thinking, that knowing that based on a lot of research locally, all obviously before there were vaccinations, now 65,000 vaccinations. That's a game changer. Go ahead, Katherine.

Question: Thank you. So, the CDC calls for basing COVID policy for schools on the number of cases per a hundred thousand residents. So, for example, based on that guidance indoor sports should currently be canceled on Staten Island. So, why doesn't the City just move to a case-rate style policy?

Mayor: Well, just to say real quick and I'll turn to Dr. Varma on this – we really believe in the outdoor sports in terms of city [inaudible] be any confusion between what the State has said

about college sports. We are doing outdoor sports with public schools, and we think that's smart and safe for the foreseeable future. But to that standard question, Dr. Varma, speak to that.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah. I'm not sure I fully understand the question but let me try to explain. So, CDC uses – has a matrix to decide you know, what safety measures schools should have based on two factors. One is the number of cases per 100,000, and the second is based on the test positivity. Now, because New York City does more testing per capita than any other very large jurisdiction. We always have a discrepancy where we fall the moderate risk criteria based on test positivity, but we fall into the high-risk category because we document and confirm so many cases. So, you know, we continue to adopt very rigid safety measures that really meet and exceed the CDC guidance and those aligned with what CDC recommends in that high-risk case threshold, and in terms of, of public school sports, as the Mayor has noted, we feel very strongly that outdoor sports are something that benefits students and can be done safely but we are concerned about indoor sports activities.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Mark Hallum from AM New York.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, thank you for taking my question. Can you hear me now?

Mayor: Hey, Mark. Okay, how are you doing?

Question: I'm good. How are you?

Mayor: Good, man.

Question: So, I wanted to hear your thoughts on the Empire Station Complex and consideration to Senator [inaudible] and other advocates calling for the city to have a stake in the matter, I want to know specifically, is your administration communicating with the State regarding this plan sort of advocating for the same thing?

Mayor: Yeah, Mark, we've been talking to the State for a long time about Penn Station, and we very much believe in local input and community input and that it has to be a project that benefits the larger community, not just wealthy developers. So, I think the legislature did exactly the right thing, it limited the funding to transit infrastructure, put additional checks and balances on, additional approvals that are needed that are not just left to the Executive Branch at the State. And we're going to keep working with the legislature to ensure community input because it's an important part of our city, but whatever happens there has to be for the community, not just for some very powerful interests. Go ahead, Mark.

Question: Oh, no, that's it. Thank you.

Mayor: Okay, thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Dan Slotnik from the New York Times.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you today?

Mayor: Good, Dan, how are you been?

Question: I'm good. I'm good. So, you know, I'm working on a story about – mainly about homeless shelter workers and their pay scale in the city and how they can sort of struggle to get ahead in a city where the cost of living is as high as it is in New York. So, I was just wondering you know, why many of them are paid so little and how those salaries are determined?

Mayor: Dan it's a really good question and the folks who work on our homeless shelters do incredibly important work, and obviously this is one of the most complex issues facing New York City, we depend on those folks to help us address really deep human needs. I don't honestly know enough about the different types of workers and the different pay scales, but I'll be happy to look into it. And, you know, we want people to do this work and be able to commit to it. So, I will take up this good question and we will come back with some answers.

Question: Well, thank you, and I guess the follow-up would just be, you know, is there a way to get higher salaries for some of these lower-level folks and what would it take to do so?

Mayor: Again, I think when we talk about homeless shelters, we have a mix of different employees, some who are city employees, a lot of times, of course, it's nonprofits running shelters on behalf of the city. They have their own pay scales and different realities for each nonprofit. We have worked over the years to provide more funding to the nonprofit community so they could increase pay for workers, that's something we'd done systematically in previous budgets, and we want to keep looking at this issue. We got to balance a lot of needs as always, but I do want to make sure we're as fair as we can possibly be the working people with the resources we have. So, again, this is something that's – it's not a single group of workers, there's a lot of different types of workers, we will look at this and discuss this as part of our upcoming budget process.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call.

Mayor: Good morning, Andrew. How are you doing good?

Question: Good –

Mayor: Do you have a better phone?

Question: Yes, yes, it is. You know, thanks to technology, crystal clear. My question about the, the two-case rule and maybe the Chancellor has this information, what we would hear from parents when they were upset with this rule is that it would happen over and over at certain schools. I'm wondering, did the DOE keep track of where this was happening most often? And is there sort of any special initiative to address what happened to the parents in those areas?

Mayor: Well, let me just start and, I'll turn to the Chancellor, yes, of course, I mean this is what the situation room is all about. Of course, everything's been tracked. We believe this new approach is going to keep everyone safe, but also keep schools open a lot more steadily through April, May, June. So, I think the fact that we've been tracking helps us to understand how everything played out, but we really do believe this will overwhelmingly – overwhelmingly – I want to be really clear about that, Andrew, that we think the vast majority of closures won't happen anymore under this approach, but we still can keep people safe. In terms of the impact on those school communities and how principals and educators have compensated when there are closures, the Chancellor can speak to that.

Chancellor Porter: Yeah, so I'll say first of all, the closures are public and posted on our website, and I think that, you know, one of the things that's been important all along is that we work in partnership with our health and safety partners to make these decisions, but our schools have been prepared to shift to remote learning as they did at the start of this pandemic and have continued to provide remote instruction to students when there have been closures. But today's announcement is really exciting for all of the reasons that you've said, and it will bring stability to our system in those places where families felt like there were more closures more often than not this, this eliminates that in some ways, in a lot of ways, but also is really grounded in identifying where we are as a city and a state and having the ability to make this shift based on health and science.

Mayor: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Chokshi: Mr. Mayor, I'd like to add.

Mayor: Yes, Dr. Chokshi, please.

Commissioner Chokshi: Briefly a couple of points to add to what the Chancellor has said. First, the era of disruptive 24-hour closures is over. That's one of the things that that the new policy gets us to. The second is we're bringing to bear what we know has worked over the last several months, which is increased testing. That gives us such a powerful tool both to have visibility into what's happening in our schools, but then also, finally, to take action when necessary and our ability to quarantine classrooms and close contacts really allows us to interrupt the spread before it gets too far.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Then my second question also has to do with education, and I apologize if I missed any aspect of this earlier, but when you reopened schools a couple of weeks ago, you said the goal was for five-day-a-week in as many places as possible. From what we hear, there are still many, many, many schools where it's the blended model. The parents have been told there isn't room to do five days a week. Has the new CDC guidance about three feet of separation been factored into these schools? And are you still pushing to expand to five-day-a-week, in person, during this school year?

Mayor: Yeah, good question, Andrew. Yes, I'll start, and if the the Chancellor wants to add. Yes, five days a week is the goal everywhere it could possibly happen, point one. Point two, we continue to add five-day-a-week capacity all the time because there's constant efforts by principals and teachers to either open up new space or use space differently, or sometimes students move to remote and that changes things. So, there's lots of different moving parts, but we're always looking to add five-day-a-week capacity, even down to child by child, every additional child you can get to five days a week is better. Majority of our schools are at either five-day-a-week all kids or five-day-a-week majority of kids. There are definitely schools that are not, we continue to try and work with them. Some of them have insurmountable space situations, but we continue to work with them. Last point on the CDC guidance, we are preparing to implement it, but we are waiting on the State of New York to give us formal guidance. We'll have more to say in the coming days on what we're hearing from the State and how we're going to proceed. The opt-in is to give us the information when everything is clear and ready to go, we can act on it for the thousands and thousands of parents who are ready to opt-in with their kids. But the bottom line is if we do have more space, flexibility, that also is going to help us get more kids to five-day-a-week. Chancellor?

Chancellor Porter: I will just agree with the Mayor and say yes, five days a week, and I think he did a really great job of outlining that there are some places where we're targeting specific groups of students. There are some places where we can do it all five days for all students and schools are working on what works in their community, but we are pushing forward to get as many students in person five days a week as possible.

Mayor: Excellent. Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to Ben Evansky from Fox News.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor for taking my question. On the \$2.1 billion fund in the state budget that in part provides assistance to illegal aliens, is this a wise use of taxpayer money?

Mayor: Well, Ben, I'm going to say everyone has a right to their own terminology. I think the people who are benefiting are New Yorkers. I know the people benefiting are New Yorkers. Half a million of our fellow New Yorkers here in this city happen to be undocumented. They are part of our city. They're part of the life of our city. This is why long ago we provide public education, we provide health care, there's been a food crisis, we provide food, we don't discriminate. So, my answer is, yes, this is important to do because these are families. These are human beings who are part of our communities, part of our life, part of our economy, they've been suffering without a lot of the help other people have gotten. This is part of how we recovered together. So, I do think it was the right thing to do. Go ahead, Ben.

Question: And just to follow-up on that, obviously at a time where we're seeing a crisis on the border, might this be the wrong signal to send to those trying to come into the US right now illegally?

Mayor: Well, I understand the question, Ben. And look, I think the answer, it's a very fair question, and I think this is the kind of conversation we should all have as Americans, and I think the answer is increasingly clear. It's comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship for the 12 million people who are here and let's change this whole paradigm and make sense of it rather than this illusion we've been living with for decades and decades. But in terms of the folks who are coming to the border or coming to the border, I think it's well-documented because of horrible crises that really are not like things we've seen in the past, particularly in the Central American nations, that we do need to contribute to solving at the root. The US has had a long, deep, deep involvement in Central America. We have very much been a part of what has created both the good and bad there, but we have to work to solve that problem because it – unless we do that, there will be constantly people trying to come here because they have no other choice, they're facing violence and terror in many cases, and it's a classic situation. Any parent faced with the same challenge would do the same thing and try and get their families to safety. So, why don't we go and deal with the root because I think it's the right time to do that.

Okay, everyone, as we conclude, I just want to offer a thanks because the conversation we're having today about our schools gets back to a core reality. Our schools opened starting in September. We had challenges. We had ups and downs, but we opened our schools and we kept moving forward our schools. And that's because of our educators, that's because of our school staff, that's because of the leadership of our Department of Education, that's because of our health care professionals, Test and Trace Corps, situation room, a lot of people gave their all and very, very long hours. I want all New Yorkers to understand this. Your public servants have been working nonstop since March last year, many of them with no break, many of them working longer hours than they ever worked in their lives to protect you and serve you and serve your kids. It's been a heroic effort. I want to thank all of them. And now with this new rule today, we're convinced we will have the same extraordinary safety that our schools have had while having more time in school for our kids. I know every day, every hour in school helps a child move forward, particularly after the trauma they've been through. Being around loving, caring professionals who are there for them makes all the difference. And so, everyone, it's an important point to recognize that we're going to make sure our kids get what they need. We're going to see them through this crisis and today's announcement is going to help us do it. Thanks, everybody.

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