

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Makes an Education-Related Announcement

May 12, 2022

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Such a powerful moment for us. And you're right, this historical moment in what we are going to accomplish in education for our children and how we are really accomplishing an important initiative really for our city, if not for our country. And you heard me often on the campaign trail talk about my struggles with reading comprehension and learning, and my mother didn't know how to go about getting the proper screening. And just walking into the classroom like these babies and seeing that sign on the back of the chair of the dumb student and really not wanting to come into school every day, because I just couldn't keep up. Didn't know what was stopping me from comprehending and learning the information that was in front of me.

Mayor Adams: And so to come here and see these students and say that we are going to give them their full potential, because teaching is a calling and I'm sure Principal Leopold and the other educators that are here on the stage, they pour so much into our students and really shape them into the leaders of tomorrow, if not the leaders of today. I still remember my third grade teacher, Miss [inaudible]. She calls me all the time, send me little tips on how to stand. Miss [inaudible], I hope you watching me. Am I standing right? Because once a teacher, always a teacher.

Mayor Adams: It is so significant to them. And so I'm excited about today and I want to thank everyone who is part of this important initiative. Dyslexia holds back too many children in school. But most importantly, in life, in life. We think that it is just that they get challenges in the school system, but no, it goes through life and it haunts you forever until you could get the proper treatment that you deserve and every public school student deserves to have the ability to read at a high level.

Mayor Adams: And two of my partners in government that's here now Assembly Member Peter Carroll and Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon, they have been talking about this for a long time. The first day I met Jo Anne, she was just talking about we have to get into learning loss. And we must look at these issues around children that are

dealing and struggling with reading comprehension. And I really want to thank them for what they have done. And dyslexia is not a disadvantage. It's just a different way of learning and all the children need, they need the tools to know how to understand how they comprehend information. And that is what we are giving them in this initiative. And we are proud today and we hear this often, someone needs to be keeping a score on this, but we are going to have the largest, most comprehensive approach to supporting students with dyslexia in the country, in the country.

Mayor Adams: If you would just get a dollar every time we say we are going to have the most largest and the first time, we just continue to put these points on the board. Chancellor Banks and his team, they just clearly understand that you can't continue to do the things that we have done and get the same results. We are going to do things differently. And so for the first time, we're going to screen all New York City schools' students for dyslexia and give them the support they need to succeed. All students will be screened for dyslexia. We're going to do this in a multipronged way. First, students will continue to be screened for literacy. Those who repeatedly struggle will be offered a specific screening for dyslexia. We're going to identify it early, give them support early, and ensure that they could have the right support as they move throughout their education.

Mayor Adams: This is an equity issue. Screenings are expensive. The costs, they cost hundreds of dollars. Many families can't afford it, particularly in a black and brown multi-language communities. Those communities that are struggling economically. This is going to remove that barrier, ensure that every child in every zip code receives the screen. And with it, the help they need. The support for the family and children.

Mayor Adams: Second, our teachers who are our most valued planters of the seeds in our children of education, we are going to ensure that the teachers will be trained to identify students with dyslexia and will have plans in place specifically to support those learners, giving our teachers what they need in the classroom. Third, we're going to pilot programs in our schools, especially geared towards dyslexic students. Starting in fall 2022, there's going to be one at P.S. 161 in the Bronx, but another is going to be right here in P.S. 125 to give them the support they deserve.

Mayor Adams: And by September 23, we will have one program in each borough tailored for dyslexic students. One of the reasons I know that we must do this, this is not an option, is because of those personal struggles and the number of my friends in

school who dropped out of school, left school early, never to return merely because they were dealing with reading issues. We want to empower dyslexic students and help them reach their highest potential. These children are the thinkers of not only the future, but the thinkers of today, but we know, and I said this over and over on a campaign trail. And I will continue to say, if you don't educate, you will incarcerate.

Mayor Adams: We are feeding the incarceration of our nation and city because of our failure to educate. A 2014 study conducted by the Department of Education found out that about a third of the people incarcerated in the country had difficulty reading simple text, about a third. Think about that for a moment. What if we just would have screened them for dyslexia? Imagine what a different pathway they would have been on. The steps we're taking today are part of our long term commitment to literacy for all New York City public schools. Chancellor Banks talks about literacy and how we need to get it right in a real way. And I'm just really proud of that. We're going to start using a proven phonics based literacy curriculum that's proven to help children read.

Mayor Adams: And we have caught the attention from my campaign and open discussion on dyslexia. We have caught the attention of the globe. We are proud to be hosting the World Dyslexia Assembly next year. All over the globe people are coming here to see what the dyslexic mayor is doing to prevent dyslexia and bring the knowledge and information to New York City. All of our children deserve the best education we have to offer. And together teachers, parents, students, the city, we're going to get it done for them. I'm really proud of this moment. A promise made, a promise kept. This is our opportunity to really move the needle on something that has been impactful for our children for a long time. And so my colleagues, Senator Holyman, Assembly Member Carroll, Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon, Council Member Stevens, Council Member Abreu, and the principals and teachers here. Just really thank you.

Mayor Adams: Sitting inside your classroom is a young man that may have dumb student on the back of his chair. Today, we're going to rip that sign off and tell him not only is he a learner, but he has the potential one day to be the mayor because of our actions today. I'm proud of this moment.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: Thank you. I want to bring on my great school chancellor, a real visionary for educating our children, Chancellor David Banks.

Chancellor David Banks, Department of Education: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. And thank you to the principal of this school, Leopold, for your leadership. This auditorium reminds me of P.S. 161 where I graduated in Brooklyn. It's an old auditorium, but it has a lot of character. Doesn't it? And it feels good to be here with all of you this morning. We have made together with the mayor, a number of announcements since the beginning of the school year. There is no announcement that has excited me as much as what we are here to do today and to announce today, really.

Chancellor Banks: The mayor years before he became the mayor was talking about this issue. And I have to be really frank. I didn't know a lot about dyslexia. And I learned more when I met Debbie Meyer, who's here today. And Debbie said to me, "This is a really important issue. There are a lot more kids that are suffering from this than you even realize. And we know that the mayor believes in it. We want to really elevate this issue." And I introduced her to the mayor and things just continued to move on. And since that time, Assemblyman Bobby Carroll, who is a real expert in this area, I've learned so much from him about the issue as well. And when the mayor talks about 65% of Black and brown children who never achieve proficiency, it's in reading. It's not because our teachers don't care.

Chancellor Banks: Our approach has been a flawed approach. And there's so many of our students who have not gotten the supports that they need, and that changes today. And that's why I'm so deeply excited because we have a chance to really impact the lives of so many of our young people. And it's because of all of you and all of us coming together for real change. And so today, as some of you may know, it's dyslexia awareness day, and we are committing to the very basic and fundamental goal of teaching all of our kids to read by announcing this first of its kind comprehensive approach to supporting students with dyslexia. For the first time, we're going to identify students in our schools who are at risk. And starting this September, all of our students will take part in short proven literacy screenings, three times a year. Students who repeatedly score well below their peers will be selected to participate in pilot programs for specific screening for risk of dyslexia. It is not enough to simply identify the students who are at risk. We must be able to fully support the students in their schools. Beginning this fall, we are piloting, as the mayor already pointed out, these two programs. Together, the Literacy Academy Collective at P.S. 161. And they are here today. Come on, we should hear it for this group here, they have been on the front line

on this issue as well for a long time. And I know it has to feel good to be at this moment. Doesn't it?

[Applause]

Chancellor Banks: And also here with The Family Literacy at P.S. 125 will both serve as specialized programs offering direct instruction. These two programs will provide deep – and this is what's really important. It's not just the screening. Will provide deep professional development and comprehensive learning interventions for the students with dyslexia. Most importantly, they will provide all of our students with important lessons on how to improve literacy instruction in all of our schools. They will be labs of innovation for us. We're going to immediately work to build out additional programs with the goal of having one school, offering specialized instruction in each district by the fall of 2023.

Chancellor Banks: Furthermore, 80 elementary schools and 80 middle schools will receive targeted support and training, developing school-based teams to coordinate literacy support for small group interventions four days a week. Teachers at every school will also be trained to address the needs of students who may not need deeper interventions so that they too can achieve success. Literacy cannot be a skill that is relegated to a single class, and we must support educators in every subject area to become allies in the work of making sure that every child can read. And finally, this is a long term commitment. Over the next year, all schools will be asked to switch, as the mayor already pointed out, to a phonics-based literacy curriculum.

Chancellor Banks: With planned professional development for all of our educators. Additionally, we are establishing a Dyslexia Task Force, alongside our Literacy Advisory Council made up of members of our communities, experts in literacy, and public school staff, students, and parents. They will help develop our long-term vision and approach for supporting students at risk or who live with dyslexia, inclusive of our multilingual students. This investment is the first time New York City public schools is comprehensively addressing the needs of this student population. And with the implementation of our pilot programs and academies and teacher trainings for the first time, New York City public school students will be able to receive specialized instruction without leaving their neighborhood. This is just the beginning.

Chancellor Banks: We are committed to supporting all of our students. And I just want to make sure that you know that we are getting back to the basics to ensure that every single child can read. Marsha Kramer, we talked about this early on. When the mayor made me chancellor, and you told me how important this issue really was. And I just want you to know, because of this mayor and because of all the people that are on this stage, we are going to make a huge difference in the lives of thousands of students. And I could not be happier. Thank you so much, everybody.

[Applause]

[...]

Mayor Adams: Did we get everyone? That everyone? Well, listen, I know we were long, but we wanted all people who are involved in this to just have an opportunity to humanize this issue. You look at the Council person, the Assembly personnel, and you tend to believe that their story is just a storybook story. And not that they have gone through their same struggles as well, and we're learning from each other, but it would not be fitting to conclude this without bringing on Debbie. Debbie has been an educator for all of us in understanding this issue. And I cannot thank her enough. We've questioned her, we ask how, and she has just been a real champion for these families over and over again. She's educated all of us on this issue. And so Debbie, please come up and say a few words.

[...]

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I was wondering, beyond the specialized programs that you and the chancellor mentioned today, are there any plans for school kids who might be diagnosed with dyslexia that can't make it into one of those programs because they're filled up? Is there a plan for support for those students who will remain in other regular public schools to do?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. The programs that we're announcing today, the very specific places that we're going to have a full-on build-out are one thing, but there's going to be professional development across the board, across the city. And so it's a huge effort. This is the largest school system in the world. We can't do it all overnight, but we have a full-on commitment even beyond the students who are part of this particular program to ensure that the teachers get the training that they need as well. So everyone is going to

be screened, but the interventions really have to come from the teachers and that comes from the level of professional development and training that they get. And we have a commitment to ensure that all of the teachers, including the teachers who are not just teachers of reading, understand how to teach for students who have dyslexia.

Question: High schools, is there a plan to screen in high schools as well?

Chancellor Banks: Yes. And it's so interesting, as you've even heard a number of the speakers today, who said that they were diagnosed in high school and college and even being older. It's amazing. We think of this as an issue for the little ones who were here, as an example, who, I have to tell you, I was just beyond impressed that they were able to sit there that long. Right? Just great, great kids. But yeah, we're going to try to capture as many of our kids as we possibly can. We have a lot of work to do in this area, but we're committed to doing it.

Mayor Adams: And what we're doing also, I am speaking with Jumaane Williams, the public advocate, we're looking to do screening in our jail system. We think the correctional facilities, we want to partner with some of our state reps here to look at our state facilities, because if we don't start correcting the behavior that puts people in jail, then they're going to come out and do the same things that go back to jail. So we want to see how we can expand this to Rikers, see how we can expand this in all of our state facilities so that we can start giving people the support that they need. And that's the next step, that we want to partner with our city council members and our state lawmakers, so that we can look at those two locations as well.

Question: I actually have two questions. The first one is for Chancellor Banks. The second one is for the mayor. Chancellor, I know you and I have talked a lot about this, but we both know that there are more learning disabilities than just dyslexia.

Chancellor Banks: That's right.

Question: I wonder if you have any plans to deal with a vast array of other learning disabilities that people in New York City schools have.

Chancellor Banks: Absolutely and we will be. In fact, I wanted the Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning Carolyn Quintana to come up because she's really leading

the effort for us at the Department of Education on this. And it's even greater than what we're doing on dyslexia. You want to speak to that?

Deputy Chancellor Carolyn Quintana, Teaching and Learning, Education

Department: Sure. Thank you for the question. And I think we talked a little bit before the event. What's really important about all of this work is that we're addressing literacy as a whole. We want to begin and we're identifying an issue that is very prevalent and that we know we need to tackle, but we're starting with an awareness campaign. We have partnered with Made by Dyslexia who is offering free training for all teachers, which we will have in place before April of 2023, for all teachers. Then we're going to begin developing a team that will have intervention specialists, as well as those literacy coaches and specialists for grades K through 12. So in the past, we've only had it in select grades. Now we will actually have literacy coaches in grades K through 12. That will help with all of those literacy issues that we have in our classrooms, whether you're in elementary school or in high school. Those intervention folks that will be trained, we're going to use a "train the trainer" model so that it is something that is also sustainable. We'll be able to support folks in the schools directly.

Deputy Chancellor Quintana: So for those kids that you mentioned, won't be part of those specialized programs, they'll have an opportunity to receive those kinds of supports through those intervention specialists. In addition to that, we're still working on building out some of those other programs that have demonstrated success that are those inclusive and integrated programs. So for our students who are on the spectrum, we're going to continue to build out our programs that have been successful so far, so Nest and Horizon.

Deputy Chancellor Quintana: Teachers will continue to receive training, not just for literacy purposes, but for other types of strategies that they can use to intervene, to support kids, and as was mentioned earlier, our kids have superpowers. We just have to unlock them. And so the more we can teach teachers how to do that, regardless of what class they're in, what program they're in, what grade they're in, we'll actually catch those issues earlier on and let them unleash those superpowers earlier on so that they don't have to wait until college or even afterwards to find success.

Deputy Chancellor Quintana: And so we'll absolutely continue to do that work. And I think it's something that's really important, regardless of what we put in place, it does

not mean that we are not paying attention to the other areas and that's really important to emphasize here. Thank you.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I know that you have talked about the fact that you had frustrations dealing with dyslexia. I wonder if you've ever thought about the fact of how your life would've been different, if you were able to access the programs that you are announcing today.

Mayor Adams: I think that if I would've had those support earlier, right now, we would be not saying just "Mr. Mayor," you'd probably be saying "Mr. President." But seriously, the reason you heard the passion in these teachers and in these mothers, I don't know if people know the emotional trauma of a child and the mother's watching. My mother used to watch, my mother had a third grade education and when I couldn't read, she didn't know what she was doing staying up late at night with me. But having her by my side made me feel different. And mommy would just sit there and just go through the motion and you know, it was just, it was just such a moment.

Mayor Adams: So what you see with these mothers, nothing is more devastating than the mother feeling helpless. Now these mothers have the fortitude to push forward. But if you are a mother where English is the second language, or if you struggled in school, where you don't have the resources, where you're living in a domestic violence situation, where you're living in a homeless shelter and you just watching your babies not being able to move forward, I'm telling you, that's just a traumatic experience.

Mayor Adams: And so this is not just an academic achievement. This is an emotional, psychological achievement that we are accomplishing. And so if I didn't have to wait, as Councilwoman Stevens stated, if I didn't have to wait until I stumbled onto this in college, God only knows where I would have been. But I also think about those of my friends who were not diagnosed and how many of them, every year that I moved up, I started to lose more and more of them to going down the wrong pathway. And so I don't think it's about, Eric, you were able to get where you are. I think it's more about those who were unable to get where they should have been.

Question: Thank you for taking my question. Is there any consensus on phonics based curriculum that would be encouraging [inaudible].

[...]

Deputy Chancellor Quintana: I just want to make sure because I was in the corner, so I just want to make sure I heard it. Are you asking if there's a specific phonics based curriculum that we'll be using?

Question: Yes.

Deputy Chancellor Quintana: So yes, across grades K through two, we're going to be offering a handful of options, many of which are already part of our core curriculum. And so we'll be asking principals to make selections and we'll be reopening those selections if they haven't already made them for phonics instruction. So those include programs like PAF. They include Ready for Reading. They include Foundations. Now these are very explicit phonics programs. And so they do need to be coupled with a comprehensive literacy program as well, a comprehensive reading program. And we're addressing writing too. And so we want to make sure. That's the base level. That's that tier one piece that everyone should begin with.

Deputy Chancellor Quintana: And then as we need greater intervention, you'll find particularly in the schools that are going to... like, the LAC is opening up... You'll have more minutes more often throughout the day and much more comprehensive, for example, use of PAF that is grounded in Orton Gillingham methodology. So yes, there, we will have selections for them and it comes with training. And we will have a train the trainer model so that we always have support to provide both in school and then outside of school as well.

Question: This is, I guess, a more broad question. Seeing the news, people are reacting almost in disbelief that this wasn't already in place, the nation's largest public school system, having this universal screening. So do you want to speak as to why this hasn't existed before—

[Crosstalk]

Mayor Adams: Let me tell you why. As I continue to say over and over again, when I use that analogy of, we spend a lifetime pulling people out of the river, instead of going upstream, preventing people from falling in. Look at who's falling in. The assemblyman said something that was crucial. He said that was where the pathways divide. Of families like Peter's and others, they can go and pay for this training. These mothers and fathers of means, you're able to pay for them. So their voice is not really heard. But

when you look at the number of people, like I said, look at the prison population, over overwhelmingly black and brown and poor. So these were the voiceless. There was not a sense of urgency because when you looked at who was impacted and not receiving the support, they were black and brown.

Mayor Adams: And so when you don't have that level of urgency and seeing the inequities that are happening to these groups that are basically, well, we write them off. That's why here you come along with a dyslexic mayor, a chancellor, that grew up in a public school system that lived among those who were the voiceless, and now are saying, "We are going to give voice to them." So this was ignored because the children that were impacted did not look like the people who were making these important decisions. And that's the reality. If people want to acknowledge it or not. We've got to acknowledge it. And so if I'm allowed to do a commercial, that's why we need male accountability. You have a chancellor and a mayor that's focusing in on those students that historically have been denied for many reasons. And one of those reasons, because they were among the voiceless.

Question: These safety zones where there's no guns, would these be specific neighborhoods?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. I'm amazed that other people are not focusing on this, where you folk, you just talked about it. This is a significant issue for our city. It is the right to carry. After what we saw the Supreme Court did on abortions, we should be very afraid. In a densely populated community like New York, this ruling could have a major impact on us. And so we are now looking with our legal experts to see what we can do. How we would curtail the behavior, our transit system around our schools. And so we are really trying to figure out what powers we have based on the Supreme Court ruling, but we should all be concerned.

Question: Would part of it be carving out parts of the city? I know that is part of the rumor is to carve out an area where they're not allowed. And are you looking where it could be or—

Mayor Adams: Well, it opens the door, even if you carve out an area, that there are those who are going to sue based on the areas you carved out. And so this is going to be a legal battle for some time, but the lawyers are looking at it. We are not sleeping on

this ruling, on this decision that's coming down, but we are concerned. We're very concerned.

Question: Mr. Mayor, [inaudible]. The CCRB came out with a report yesterday substantiating 27% of the complaints about cops coming out of the BLM protest two years ago. You talk so much about holding bad cops accountable. You really want to do that. Do you think that the current system is working or does it need to be revamped to hold cops accountable?

Mayor Adams: The CCRB System? Listen, I'm taking a deep dive into police discipline. And there's a couple of pieces that I'm looking at now. I'm spending a lot of time reading through it, seeing the process, mapping the process. And number one, it's taking too long. Number two, there needs to be a clear standard based on the cases. And the police commissioner and I are saying, "How do we revamp so that we can ensure justice prevails?" And I think the current system that's in place, there are many areas that we are going to have to revamp and reform. And we are still looking at the exact timeline and how do we properly carry this out. Cause we want justice and we want it to be efficient, but it should not take as long as it's taking to get to a final result.

Question: Will the police commissioner have the final say on who gets—

Mayor Adams: Yes, yes, commissioner or the mayor. I think we're responsible for our department and we should have final say so on the department. Okay. Let's get these last questions.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I know that you spoke emotionally yesterday about the violence in the city, but there were also two more shootings. There was one at a school at Maspeth and one at a school in Brooklyn. I wonder how you feel about this constant drumbeat of guns and shooting that's been going on, despite all your efforts.

Mayor Adams: We are undaunted about our fight. We know what we are up against. And I said yesterday that we thought by the end of January, going into February, that these shootings would be behind us because the goal was, the plan was, get guns off the streets and get shooters off the streets equals safety. The problem is we did our job of getting the guns off the streets. Keeping the shooters off the streets is still failing. And so unclog our courts. Start to sentence these shooters. Modify those parts of the laws that allow shooters to come back onto our streets. Those are the pieces that we need

that are missing. So we're still going to do our part. As I said, we have a 28%, we have an increase in gun arrests of, in the last 28 years, the highest number of gun arrests. So we're doing our part. I said it over and over again. We need help. We're going to continue to do our part, but we do need help. We have to turn off the faucet.

Question: Mr. Mayor, on home rule of the city's speed cameras, Senator Gianaris said yesterday that's not happening this year. The chair of the Assembly Transit Committee said that was in part because of a lack of engagement from your administration. So I just wanted to give you the opportunity to say what happened here. Why didn't you engage more? And what's the plan now that's not going to happen?

Mayor Adams: We will give you the breakdown on the engagement we did in the Assembly and in the Senate. And you had one of their own, Senator Gianaris, was up there advocating for this. And so we will give you a complete list, because we have to file lobbying reports. We will give you that list. And then you could do an assessment to see if it was a lack on our part. So this is not based on what I said. The records would show the engagement we had there.

Mayor Adams: And I think that this is the right thing to do. So if we are saying that it's not done because we didn't see, someone's telling us to do it. It's the right thing to do. The real question should be, not that we're telling them they should do it or not. Do they feel this is the right thing to do? Do they feel it's right for us to use our speed cameras to stop the vehicle crashes and fatalities? So if they're saying "No, it's not right, because we haven't heard from City Hall enough," something is wrong with that. Hearing from us enough? They should have heard from the parents, from the family members. That is the question. Is this a way of penalizing, or is this a way of making sure we get dangerous people off the road? That's the question that should be answered. Okay. Thank you.

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