

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 19, 2021, 10:00 AM

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. It is a really beautiful day in New York City today. And we have some really good news today, and I want to start with something I experienced last night that was just wonderful. I went and greeted the audience at the show, A Perfect Crime. And this is important, this is momentous, because here was an example of the shape of things to come – the theater coming back in New York City. A show that has been running since 1987, longest play ever in New York City history, a show that kept going after 9/11, after the Great Recession, but got held back for the first time by COVID. And the actors had not been on the stage since March 15th, 2020, and now, for the first time, they were coming back, and there was such energy in the audience. Careful, smart plan in place – [inaudible] and everyone associated with the show worked with Actors' Equity to come up with a safe and smart plan for the actors, for the audience. I want to thank Actors' Equity for their commitment to bringing this show back, but doing it the right way. And that's so important, because the energy that folks were feeling about the theater coming back, it was palpable, but there was also a sense that this was the trailblazer show, that this show would help pave the way for so many other shows to come back off-Broadway and on-Broadway this fall. So, this really was one of those moments where you could feel New York City really deepening our comeback. And when the arts come back, New York City comes back. When the theater comes back, New York City comes back, and I got to see it with my own eyes last night. And I hope many of you will get out there and support indoor and outdoor cultural performances throughout the spring and summer to help bring our cultural community back.

Now, let me talk about where we stand on vaccination, because nothing will help us come back more than vaccinating more and more New Yorkers. And here's a good-news moment as well, last Friday, just a few days ago, we set the all-time record for New York City for a single day since we started these vaccinations months ago. We hit our highest number of vaccinations for a single day on Friday, 106,527 vaccinations in one day – in one day. Really strong effort. And that brings our total now to 5,746,378 vaccinations given to-date. Now, we have more to do. So, we see this system is working – lots and lots of vaccination sites, over 600 around the city. The grassroots sites are working, people want vaccination in their own neighborhood, places they know. Now, we are going to go farther and farther to reach more and more people and make this a key to our recovery. One of the things we did over the weekend, and we're really excited about it, was provide walkup appointments for anyone 50 years old or older – very different approach to what we did previously, but one we're increasingly excited about. We had more than 30 sites around the city, and we are very hopeful that this is also the shape of things to come, that walk-up vaccination will be more and more possible, because what could be easier than that? This is something we're working on, we're experimenting with, but we certainly hope to expand, going forward. And again, great that it's happening at so many sites right now for so many New Yorkers.

Now, again, if previously you didn't get vaccinated, because it was hard to get an appointment – thank God, now it's easy to get an appointment. So, now, is the time. If you were hesitating because you thought it was inconvenient, too much of a hassle, now is the time to go out and get vaccinated. And you can do it – it's straightforward, it's easy, go to nyc.gov/vaccinefinder. Or, if you prefer to talk to someone on the phone, you can go to 877-VAX-4NYC. But whatever you do, make an appointment today.

Now, as I said, we are continuing to open up more and more sites. More sites is unquestionably – one of the things we've found, the more sites, the better; the more sites, the more comfortable people get. So, we have an exciting new site to announce today. And I've been trying to work with different ways to phrase this – different ideas thrown around – I would say it's a whale of an announcement. Or, perhaps we are whale-coming this new site. It is the American Museum of Natural History – really exciting new site. Literally, you can get vaccinated directly below the blue whale. And this will be for everyone, but particular focus to begin with on public housing residents, on cultural workers, members of DC 37, AFSCME who work in cultural institutions, museum staffs. We want to reach all these folks who we depend on to bring back our cultural community. And this is an exciting new effort. And I guarantee you, a lot of people are going to say that's where I want to get vaccinated. So, here to tell you more about it – and I'm so thankful for her leadership and for the museum, becoming our partner in this effort, the President of the American Museum of Natural History Ellen Futter.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Ellen. And, Ellen, first of all, I want to see the really, really, really big syringe you guys use to vaccinate the whale. Okay. I think you've got to show that at some point. But, seriously, thank you, you always – every time the City of New York needs you, personally, or needs the museum, you are there. And you really had provided a beautiful example, a template of what it means for a cultural institution to be part of the community. And I think you're right, this'll be one of those moments that people will look at and say, look how everyone pulled together in common cause. And that's why, even though we've been through so much, this will be seen as a heroic time in New York City's history. So, Ellen, thank you to you and all your team for this really wonderful contribution to our effort.

All right. Now, everything is about our recovery, and every time we talked about recovery, we talk about a recovery for all of us, because it has to be a recovery that works for everybody. It has to be a recovery that lasts that has to be a recovery that changes what was broken from the past. And when we think about the recovery, I always say, it's not just about jobs coming back. It's not just about wonderful cultural institutions coming back. It's about recognizing how we deal with our future, and that means addressing the number-one challenge we all face, and that is climate change, getting ahead of it in every way we can, changing the trajectory, using every tool we can.

Now, this is an important week. Earth Day's coming up on Thursday, so this is earth week. And every day, this week, we're going to talk about new things that the City of New York is doing to fight climate change, to address this crisis, to contribute in our way to moving this city, this

nation forward. And, thank God, we have leadership now at the federal level that is focused on climate change. President Biden did so much just putting us back in the Paris Agreement alone as a nation. But, guess what? Every single one of us are going to have to contribute in every way we can, and every city. And cities really stood up – when President Trump went out of the Paris Agreement, cities went in, starting with New York City. And so, we know how to take our own actions to address climate change. Let's talk about that today.

First of all, I made clear in the State of the City that we are going to work to constantly expand the use of renewables and to break our dependency on fossil fuels once and for all. That takes many, many forms, and we'll be talking about that this week and in the future, getting more and more renewable energy that the City of New York will use, but also consciously new laws, new approaches to cut the dependency on fossil fuels. Today, I'm taking a stand formerly against two fossil fuel plants. The two peaker plants, they're called, that had been proposed in Astoria and Gowanus. These are plants that would be run on fracked gas. They are plants that would take us backwards, not forwards. They are plants that would unfortunately place us in that past of fossil fuel dependency and hold us back. They should not be allowed to go forward. And we've got to understand, this is about fighting climate change. This is also about climate justice. When fossil fuels are burned, a horrible impact on communities, especially lower-income communities, have suffered, kids have suffered with asthma. There are so many reasons to break this dependency. So, we've got to move off fossil fuels consistently, purposefully, intentionally in every way we can. Now, the State of New York has made major investments in renewables. The City of New York has made major investments in renewables. There's much more investment being made in power reliability, so we don't need these peaker plants, certainly not with fossil fuels as their fuel. The important point is to listen to the climate justice movement, listened to the movement, especially led by our young people, for the need to take climate change seriously, and put communities first. So, those plants should go nowhere. Let's start really devoting ourselves to renewables.

Okay. Now, another part of good news today, and this is big, good news today, and this is definitely about a recovery for all of us, because it's about our kids, it's about our families, it's about our public schools. And I want to say, for years and years, we all saw an injustice in this city that some schools got more money each year consistently than other schools and perpetuated divisions that were unacceptable. And I have to give credit to the City Council, the City Council had intensely focused on this issue over the years, made it a budget priority. Even when we didn't have as much money as we wanted, the City Council really emphasized making progress on fair student funding. And you're going to hear from Speaker Corey Johnson and Education Chair Mark Treyger in just a few minutes. But the bottom line is, we all wanted to go as far as we could, so we kept investing more in the schools that hadn't gotten their fair share. And we kept trying to bring that floor up and create more equality in school funding, but it wasn't what we all wanted to achieve. We wanted to get to absolute consistency. We wanted every school to get its fair share. Now, because of extraordinary actions have been taken at the federal level and the State level, we finally have the opportunity to right this wrong. And, from this point forward, every New York City public school will get 100 percent fair student funding – that will now be the standard for every single school starting in the school year that begins in September.

Again, let's give credit where credit is due. Thank you to President Biden, to Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, to Speaker Nancy Pelosi for all they did with the stimulus and the focus they put on education. But I have to give extraordinary profound thanks to Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Carl Heastie for doing something that many thought was impossible, for remembering that the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case was decided in favor of the students and families in New York City, and yet those students, those families never got their fair share of the funding. State government, governors had ignored it. Now, the Legislature stood up and said, no, we're going to finally do what needed to be done. We have the money. We're going to make it a priority. And they actually locked in the commitment that the Campaign for Fiscal Equity sought to achieve almost two decades ago. It's finally here, and that's allowing us to do amazing things.

So, to make fair student funding 100 percent for every school, this will be a \$600 million annual investment – \$600 million. It will allow so many schools to do so much more, particularly for kids with special needs, for bilingual students, for those who would benefit the most. And let me tell you something, when we finally give the schools the funding they deserve, the progress we've seen in our public schools will now be supercharged. In the last few years, we've seen the highest graduation rates we've ever had in the history of New York City. In the last few years, we've seen the lowest dropout rates we've seen consistently improved student performance and the “achievement gap” has been closing. We're seeing more quality among students of all backgrounds and that's crucial. And we see rising college enrollment for kids coming out of New York City public schools. That was before we had 100 percent fair student funding. Now, we have it. It is going to make a huge difference. This will be one of the best examples of what a recovery for all of us will mean for New York City. I'm excited, but someone who's even more excited here with me today, our Chancellor. And she has been waiting for this moment her whole lifetime as an educator, and it is finally here. My pleasure introduce Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter.

Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter: This is the best news ever. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you so much to the State Legislature and the City Council for making this moment possible. This is my favorite announcement to make. It's an announcement that signals a historic moment in investing in New York City public schools. For years, our students were shortchanged not millions, but billions of dollars. And thanks to this administration's advocacy and support, and the support of so many others, including our State Legislatures, including our City Council members, including families and students and educators who've gone to Albany to fight for so many years, the State has started to phase in these funds and we are giving them directly to our schools. With these new resources, next year – all schools – all schools – every single New York City public school will receive their fair student funding entitlement. This is all community district – this means all community school districts will receive 100 percent of fair student funding. And as the Chancellor who never forgets what it means to be a principal, I know what this means for schools. I know the tremendous work that our school leaders will do to make sure every single dollar hits every single classroom. Providing every school with 100 percent of their fair student funding allocation is something that's never been done before and we'll give even more support to our school communities. Principals can use this money to hire staff materials, supplies, and more at a time when our students need an incredible amount of academic and social-emotional care. I can't think of a better way use this money or a time when it was

most needed. And I think the elected officials again in the State Legislature who included this in their budget, have prioritize this for years, and the dedicated advocates, community leaders, and the City Council for their continued advocacy.

This will kickstart our recovery like no other. Our primary equity initiative is going to be about prioritizing putting money where it's needed most, and that's in our school system. And so, I want to thank everyone for this. I'm so excited that I get to be a part of this moment. And with that, I'll turn it back over to you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: [Inaudible] this is the old-school way.

[Laughter]

You're so much more up to date. Everybody – running joke with the Chancellor and I. Okay. It's a great, great moment. And again, giving credit where credit is due, the City Council has been fighting for this for years. And since Speaker Corey Johnson became the leader of the City Council, every year he pushed this personally and said this has to be a budget priority. We made a lot of progress. Now, we can make the greatest progress. And I want to thank the Speaker for every step along the way, believing we could get to this day. So, join the celebration, Speaker Corey Johnson.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Speaker. And listen, your mom's right, first of all. And, second of all, this is a tale of persistence. You and your colleagues in the Council persisted in believing this was something that had to be achieved, could be achieved. Carl Heastie, Andrea Stewart-Cousins persisted. Really an example of the fact that elections do matter and that folks who believe in this vision all came into the right roles at the right time and could make it happen. So, this is a real exciting moment. And one more person I want you to hear from, and he will clearly be excited as well, as he is passionate about education, because he did the work himself as a public school teacher, now Chair of our Education Committee – Council Member Mark Treyger.

[...]

Mayor: I think Council Member Mark Treyger has pointed out, there's a direct causal link to riding the Cyclone. Definitely - it rattled my brain and made me think new things were possible that were never possible before. So, thank you so much, Council Member.

[...]

Who knows what we'll announce after that? It could get really wild around here, you know? Thank you both so much. And everyone that is really profoundly good news, and good news fought for, for years and years and years. But as they say in late night advertising, but wait, there's more. And our indicators today also offer some really good news and I will note that because of a technical issue, the information we're going to give it is from the 16th. So, there's a little bit lagged and we're working with the State to resolve this issue, but it's accurate

information from that day and it tells us a lot now. Now, again, long way to go, not out of the woods yet, we got to keep being smart and we got to keep getting everyone vaccinated, but here's today's numbers.

Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report 163 patients, again below the threshold, and you can see by the graph up there on the screen, we have been below the threshold numerous days. That's a really good sign. Confirmed positivity, 56.98 percent. Hospitalization rate also has continued to go down, 2.71 per 100,000. So, that's looking good. New cases – new reported cases on a seven-day average, today's report, 2,384 cases. So, we've seen improvement there. But here's a really important one, number three, percentage of people tested city-wide positive for COVID 19, this is the number we've watched the most, and on a seven-day rolling average, this number now coming down again, today's report 4.19 percent – excuse me, 9-1 percent – 4.91 percent. This, I don't know if that is up on the screen, but it should be. But today's report takes us below that threshold of five percent. You can see it there now. Below the five percent threshold for the first time in a long time, and that is a profoundly good sign. So, I know everyone's been working really hard. Let's keep working. Let's just run and COVID out of this town once and for all, but I hope everyone there can see the fruits of your labors because things are really starting to change.

Okay. A few words in Spanish, I'm going to go back to equity and fair student funding

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: Hi, all, we'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Ben Furnas, the new Director of the NYC Office of Climate and Sustainability, Health Commissioner Dr. Chokshi, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and Health + Hospitals CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz, and of course Schools Chancellor Meisha Porter. With that, we'll go to Andrew from WNBC.

Mayor: Andrew? I don't hear anything. Andrew?

Question: Oh, good morning. Avery said my name, the name – the name had gone away when Avery [inaudible]. So, now I know it's me –

Mayor: Andrew, alright. We're ready for you.

Question: Okay, the question is about the walk-in vaccine sites. The question is you have opened up sites in all five boroughs where people 50 and older can walk in, what is stopping from going walk in at every single site as of now.

Mayor: We're looking at that right now, Andrew, and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Katz. We wanted to test this out. The goal here, of course, is to make vaccination as convenient as possible. We want to welcome people to it, and I think honestly, convenience has been one of the

issues and the more convenient it gets, the easier it will be for people to make that choice. But we also want to be careful about not having big lines, not having other situations that would create challenges. Obviously, we don't want people waiting a long time. So, we've been testing it, expanding the tests, so far so good, and we're looking to see if we can go farther. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Mr. Mayor, and just to add, yes, we had a great weekend expanding our walk-in efforts, over 3,000 people vaccinated at city sites, taking advantage of that walk-in option, and you're going to be seeing more and more of this in the days ahead, with respect to improving access to vaccination, making it easier and easier for people to get vaccinated.

Mayor: Amen. Dr. Katz, would you like to add?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: We already Health + Hospitals allow when patients have visits on the same day, we enable them to go down and get vaccinated at our centers. So, we very much believe that making it easy is a great way to get all New Yorkers vaccinated. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Second question has to do with schools, and since Chancellor is there, maybe she can clarify this. On Friday, there were principals sending letters to parents saying this three-foot rule may not happen, expanding five days on the 26th may not happen, as a result there's a lot of confusion out there about whether on April 26th, you are essentially going to five days a week citywide, so maybe the chancellor can –

Mayor: Let me, let me start and I'll turn to the Chancellor, look –

Question: [Inaudible] next week.

Mayor: Yeah, Andrew, first of all, I haven't seen these letters you refer to, but I want to emphasize, we want clear and consistent communications with our parents. What we're saying, very clearly, is for the kids in middle and high school are coming in, that's still the six-foot rule. That's according to the CDC, but we can accommodate those new kids coming in from the opt-in, and we want as many as possible to be five days a week. For kids in elementary school, what's going to happen in some schools, they can do six feet and still achieve five days a week and accommodate every kid. That's great. Where three feet's necessary, that's absolutely appropriate to do. We want school communities to talk to their parents to work out plans, make sure they're smart, obviously work with the folks who are employed in the schools, but we're quite clear. That's what we're going to do wherever it's needed. It's not needed in every elementary school, but where it's needed, we're going to do it. Chancellor?

Chancellor Porter: Yep. So, I just want to clarify there were five schools where that came up and it was incorrect. We're working towards welcoming back the 51,000 families that have opted back in to in-person learning on the 26th. We're also going to be working with our unit union partners. As the Mayor stated, there are many schools that can welcome the students back with –

at the six-foot requirement. There are a few schools that will need to move it to three feet, and so we're working with our union partners to do walk-throughs and engage our families around what that will mean for each individual school. We are sending more guidance on an information to schools throughout this week and we're sending out information and guidance last week, but that was miscommunication. We are working towards welcoming our families back into school.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next, we'll go to Jessica from WNYC.

Question: Hi, thanks for taking my call. Also on schools, I just wanted to know if you have an update on the demographics of those who have opted-in, plus the new 51,000 kids, and how many will be five days exactly?

Mayor: So, Jessica I'll turn to the Chancellor and if we have demographics right now, we'll share them or else we'll get them to you as soon as we have them. But the goal here, which has been a constant goal, is keep evolving the five days a week for as many kids as possible. So, that work never stopped happening. Obviously in the elementary schools, having new opportunities around the three feet rule will help in some places. But the message has been from the beginning and continues, when I say from the beginning, once we decided to move to five feet – excuse me, to move to five days. I can do. Once we started moving to five days, we've been telling schools, keep working to get more and more and more kids to five days, and we're hopeful that we're going to be able to do a lot more of that for the 26th. Go ahead, Chancellor.

Chancellor Porter: Yes, that is correct. We are continuing to work for more and more students to be in school, five days a week, that work doesn't stop, schools and figuring that out every single day. We don't have demographic fixed right now because we're still working through the data, but happy to share once we have it all sorted out.

Mayor: Thank you, go ahead Jessica.

Question: Okay. Thanks, and are you seeing any more signs at this point of decreasing demand for vaccines?

Mayor: Jessica, I would say, you know, look at Friday. We had our highest day ever since the vaccination effort began, 106,000. That's a really good sign, but I do think we're going to have to do more, we've talked about this over the last week or two, more to attract people going forward. The folks most ready to be vaccinated have been vaccinated. Now, we're getting into more and more folks who need a little more encouragement, need it to be a little easier, or need some more answers to feel comfortable, and that's why we're experimenting with things like the walk-ins and a much greater grassroots outreach effort, particularly in communities that need it most. So, I think this is a chance now to reach a whole another group of people, and that's what we're going to be very focused on.

Moderator: Next, we'll go to Michael from the Daily News.

Question: Morning guys.

Mayor: Hey Michael, how are you doing?

Question: I'm doing okay. How are you?

Mayor: Good. Good. You sound tired, Michael. You sound tired. What's that about?

Question: Oh God, it was a long weekend, Mr. Mayor –

Mayor: I won't, I won't ask further questions. I'm leaving it there.

Question: [Inaudible], soccer, dance, so you know, I'm chauffeuring kids around a lot this weekend. I wanted to ask you about the Johnson & Johnson situation and, you know, what that means for the city's vaccine rollout now and what you foresee it meaning for the continued vaccine rollout – vaccination rollout, you know, two, three, four weeks out. What's kind of the read on that at the moment.

Mayor: Look, what we need is fast resolution on this, Michael, and I'm very hopeful by the end of the week we'll get that from the federal government. The thing we need is answers, and I'm not going to be surprised at all if they put some specific guidance or restrictions on who gets Johnson & Johnson and who doesn't, that's fine, we can work with that, but we just need answers. And I think once we get answers that will help everything to keep moving forward. We definitely would rather have it in the lineup in a big way, because it allows us to do a lot of things better, obviously starting with the homebound program. So, I'm hopeful that we'll have a resolution we can work with by the end of the week. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: Thanks. The other question I had has to do with the story that I believe came out last week, you know, the possibility that Pfizer said something about doing booster shots and, you know, this is for the medical professionals here today. I'm wondering, you know if that comes to pass, how would that play out exactly. If I got Pfizer shots, would I have to get a Pfizer booster shot? Would I be able to get a Moderna booster shot? Can you, I guess, talk a bit about how the booster shot situation would play out if that kind of comes to pass?

Mayor: Yeah, I'll turn to Dr. Varma, but just as the nonmedical person say, just to demystify me, booster shots are something that have been part of the medical community for a long time, and obviously something like flu shots, we're supposed to get them every year. So, I don't think this is going to be particularly challenging as a concept. I think there's a difference between breaking the back of COVID right now in a crisis, and then what we do going forward to manage. But in terms of your specific question about can you use different brands as it were, let's ask Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great, thank you very much for the question. I want to start with a couple of really critical background points. The first is that we know that the current vaccines work, they are incredibly effective at preventing infections and even more important preventing severe illness and death. That's number one. The second is we're learning is that based on the

trials that were started last year and what Pfizer and Moderna have reported publicly is that the vaccine duration of protection lasts right now for at least six months, and that maybe longer, we don't have a time machine so we can't accelerate, you know, knowing how long they're going to be at work, but we know that they're going to last for quite some time. So, those are two really important pieces of information because it means people should get back to me right now. They shouldn't wait. And they shouldn't be worried about the degree of protection that they're going to get.

Now, it is absolutely true that the way the body's immune system works, whether you're talking about a polio vaccine or a flu vaccine or tetanus shots, is that the more times your body is exposed to a protective vaccine, the better it gets at responding to that. And we also know that this virus has a tendency to evolve and mutate. So, it is certainly reasonable to anticipate that at some point in the future, we will need some type of booster vaccine. I, myself, recently in the past couple of years has had to get a booster polio vaccine when I was working in Africa. Typhoid, meningitis vaccines, it's very common to do. We don't know the details that you're asking about, which is, will we need them? When will we need them? What brands of vaccine that we're going to need? But I would say that, you know, we know that at least for the mRNA vaccine, the Pfizer and Moderna, it's very likely that you won't have to stay allied to one specific brand, but of course, there are studies being done right now to look at sort of mixing and matching across different versions.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Stacey from FOX-5.

Question: Hi. Yes. Good morning. Can you guys hear me?

Mayor: Yeah, Stacey, how are you doing today?

Question: Good, thanks. I'm actually going to start with a question regarding climate week. I know you're going to be announcing more initiatives. I'm wondering, there's been a lot of reporting out there that, you know, climate efforts all over the country were really set back with the pandemic, huge increase in use of single use plastics, PPE, which is a lot of plastics. We know the Residential Composting Program in the city was put on hold. More people are driving. So, I'm wondering how much of a setback, you know, have we seen, you think, in the city because of the pandemic, you know, the efforts towards going green?

Mayor: Well, Stacey I'll start, and I'll turn to Ben Furnas who's our new Director of the Mayor's Office of Sustainability and Climate. But I'll say this, I'm a little bit of an optimist by nature, but I would argue, and Ben can speak to this, I think globally, we all hate that there was a pandemic, but with it came a real realignment in the sense of a lot of activity slowed down or stopped that did involve fossil fuels. So, I think that may be the biggest storyline of the interrelationship of climate that there was a bit of a pause. And the other storyline that I think would be important is that people in the disruption caused by the pandemic had to rethink so many elements of life, and that actually is what we need to do to address climate too. So, in some ways we can learn from that, but I think you make a good point. Like we need folks to get, you know, as things evolve,

get out of their cars, get back into mass transit. I'm hopeful about that. We're seeing mass transit ridership go up. Obviously, we're not going to need as much in the way PPEs going forward. I do think that we'll adjust. I don't think any of the things we've seen here are necessarily lasting. Ben, you want to comment.

Director Ben Furnas, Mayor's Office of Climate and Sustainability: I think the only thing I would add Mr. Mayor is that, you know, the next eight months are really going to be a sprint. You know, we can't afford to take any year off from fighting climate change in 2021 is no exception. I'm really looking forward to working with all the parties across city government to get big things done this year. So, thanks so much.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Stacy.

Question: Back to the vaccines and, you know, the fact that there are all these appointments available. Now you can get same day appointments at a lot of places. I know, you know, someone already asked about whether you see this as decrease in demand. I mean, do you think that the pause in Johnson & Johnson has, you know, caused some people to think twice about making their appointments and that that's part of the reason we're seeing all these open appointments now and maybe not the rush to get the shots?

Mayor: Yeah. Stacy look, the development with Johnson & Johnson sure didn't help, that's for sure. But it's – I think it's too soon to tell. I think we had months where people were, you know, just struggling to get an appointment and eventually the day was going to come where it became less of a struggle, and that's a good thing, right? We like the fact that people can get appointments readily, and I would argue the fact that we had our highest ever day for vaccinations is directly related to the fact that it became easier and more convenient. So, that's – I think the good news here outweighs the bad. The good news is that folks can finally get appointments when it works for them. When they feel ready, you know, in a more convenient location, we want that, and as we experiment with the walk-ups, that continues to be a good approach. We'll keep expanding that. But I also think that the answers on Johnson & Johnson will help a lot. I think if, as we predict by the end of the week, we'll get some clear answers. People will acclimate those answers move forward. So, I think this is a question we'll have a much better take on, you know, by the end of April. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Steve from WCBS Radio.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Steve, how you been?

Question: I'm alright. I wanted to take kind of another angle at the question Stacy just asked knowing that we have reached this kind of inflection point where supply is now meeting demand. We didn't really know when this would happen. It's coming at a point where only about 45 percent of New Yorkers are vaccinated. Does that at all concern you, that this is where we've kind of hit that point where, you know, it is getting a little bit easier to get an appointment, but

that may show either some hesitancy or just people that aren't interested when we only have less than half of the city vaccinated at this point.

Mayor: Steve, I would tell you, I've been obviously studying this issue daily now for months. I think there is a lot more to play out here. People are just, in the last few days, getting used to the idea that appointments would be easily available. A lot of the appointment sites are brand new. People are just getting word of them. Again, the walkup dynamic could change things profoundly, and we're going to get some answers on Johnson & Johnson. I think there's a lot more to play out. I also think, you know, unquestionably, more sites, more local sites help, more outreach helps, and more word of mouth helps from people who've had a positive experience. So, I'm out there all the time, talking to New Yorkers, I hear much more enthusiasm for getting vaccinated than I did months ago, many fewer people questioning. Now, I think it's less about questioning, more about just making the appointment, connect to the person, and we have a lot of tools to do that. Go ahead, Steve.

Question: Thank you very much, and just a point of clarification. I don't know if you want to count this as a formal question or not, do we know when the Natural History Museum site is going to be opening up?

Mayor: I will get you that answer in just a second, but you go on with your second question.

Question: I appreciate that. On a different topic, because we were anticipating some amount of protests coming up with the Chauvin trial wrapping up in Minneapolis. There's been a lot of discussion about how the NYPD's tactics are going to change as a result. We've already seen a few protests, and I think one of the overriding complaints so far is the use of helicopters by the NYPD. It seems to be somewhat antagonizing especially some of the residents that have to deal with the noise circling overhead for hours. Obviously, it's very expensive for the NYPD to operate. Is that a strategy that you're looking at changing at all in terms of how the NYPD uses helicopters to police protests?

Mayor: Yeah, let me first just get out of the way, the answer to your previous question. Friday is when the American Museum of Natural History opens up and we're excited about that.

The answer is yes to your second point there, Steve. There is a place in certain situations, of course for police to use helicopters sometimes are absolutely a crucial tool. I think with protests they should be used sparingly. I think we have another reality that, you know, your stations and other stations might have helicopters themselves, and sometimes people might be confused, which one is a police helicopter versus which is a media helicopter. But I do think from the policing point of view, it should be used as sparingly as possible, and we're working with NYPD, we've been having conversations about this to make sure that's the case going forward. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Juan Manuel from NY1.

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

Mayor: I'm doing well, Manuel. How are you?

Question: Very good, thank you. So, Andrew Yang, who ran for president in 2020 like you did, is consistently topping the polls for the Democratic Mayoral Primary and the NY1 poll released this morning has Yang at 22 percent, Eric Adams at 13 percent, Scott Stringer at 11 percent, and Maya Wiley at 7 percent. Other candidates are polling lower. What do you make of it? And is it that New Yorkers, favoring Yang are looking for drastic change after your eight years in City Hall?

Mayor: I think it is April 18th and we're over two months out. I checked facts the other day – at this point in 2013, I was in fourth place. So, I just think this has been a very late developing election. I don't think a lot of information has flowed yet. People have been rightfully, understandably, very focused on COVID they're now just starting to put their attention into the mayoral race. So, I don't think anyone should assume what we've seen today is what the outcome will be. It may be, but which just way too early to tell, I do think what's going to happen from this point on – we're about to cross that two-month mark – is more and more scrutiny. I believe all of you in the media will give scrutiny to all the candidates. I believe the public will start focusing more, and typically that changes the reality of an election a lot. So, you know, ask me the question again, as more of that has happened and then we can, we can assess better. Go ahead Juan Manuel.

Question: Let me try one more time, because you do know Andrew Yang, you ran for president at the same time that he did, you were on debate stages with him as well. Do you think that Andrew Yang topping the polls, people saying his name all over in New York? Do you think it's a real phenomenon?

Mayor: I just – I'm trying, honestly, to answer you as someone who's done this work for a long time, I really think it is too early to tell. I think he has a lot of name recognition and that is a huge factor right now. Look, what we've been doing over these last eight years, which is addressing inequality in investing in 3-K and Pre-K, changing the relationship between the community and police, neighborhood policing, investing in affordable housing. I mean, these are things that I think are very broadly what New Yorkers want to see. I think New Yorkers are going to embrace today the announcement of 100 percent fair student funding in our schools. I think these are changes people want, every action that can be taken towards equality, and that's what we've been doing for eight years. So, I think that's the mainstream of thinking in New York City. I think New Yorkers have to decide who represents those values and can best make them work in the years ahead. But again, it's just, it's early. It may seem late to some, but I am telling you this election has just taken its sweet time and it's really early still. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more first. We'll go to Alex from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hey everyone. So, my first question is about the fair student funding announcement and just with the sort of overall infusion of state and federal funding, and now the full funding of fair student funding, do you believe that New York City public schools are now funded at the correct level? I mean, is this the right amount of funding for schools? I know the City has long

made the argument that schools are underfunded. Is this, are we now at full capacity funding-wise?

Mayor: Alex, I don't think there is such a thing, and I think the Chancellor would quickly agree with that. I don't mean that you just spend money for its own sake. I think we're talking about our kids, and I'll let the Chancellor to speak to this too. This is about our kids, and the New York City public schools serve more kids with profound needs and any place in the country. Whether it's kids with special needs or English language learners, or kids who very sadly have grown up in poverty, there's tremendous need. So, the resources we're finally getting are going to be put to really good use, and they're going to change lives. You know, I don't think of it as money. I think of it as a tool to change the lives of our kids, and it's long overdue. We need to make sure, to your question, Alex, is it sustainable? These are amazing actions have been taken in Washington and in Albany, or now we have to create something that is sustainable after the next few years, but certainly it, you know, the most important thing, and I would talk about it in my budget testimony in Albany year after year is get us the campaign for fiscal equity money, and a lot of times it felt like a distant dream, but it's finally happening. That was the goal we all held and is finally here. We just need to make sure it is sustained. Chancellor.

Chancellor Porter: Yeah, I would just say that this investment positions our schools and our system in a really phenomenal place to move forward, and I would also add, you know, as a parent, what wouldn't we invest in our children? And so answering the question of, is it enough? It speaks to, you know, pushes us to really think about when is it enough, and I don't think that there's ever a moment when we stopped investing in our systems and in our students and in our schools. But this is a moment that really positions our schools, in a moment when it is so greatly needed as we come out of this pandemic to do our very best and put our very best foot forward in terms of resources, in terms of teachers, in terms of social workers, in terms of enrichment programs, this just opens up the door for opportunities for schools, for principals, for teachers to do great things for young people.

Mayor: Amen. Go ahead, Alex.

Question: Yeah. My second question, I know you addressed a little bit the miscommunication that happened last week with respect to the move to three-feet, but I'm sort of wondering more broadly, like why schools don't have detailed guidance in hand yet. I mean, this is happening in a few days. I know that some principals are really frustrated that, you know, these big announcements happen, and then there aren't really details about how they're supposed to implement it until just a few days before the day that students are returning. So, I'm just wondering like why their principals don't have detailed guidance right now so that they can plan for more students to return to their schools?

Mayor: Well, I'm going to turn to the Chancellor. I'm not sure I share that assumption. I mean that the vast majority of what we need to do for health and safety is the guidance that people have had for months and have been acting on. Again, and the vast majority of schools are not moving to three-feet because they don't need to. But those who need to it is about resetting rooms. It's, you know, there's some pretty straightforward things that need to be done, and I think that principals and superintendents are pretty aware of how to make those changes. So, I would

just be a little more positive about the ability of our educators to adjust when they see something coming, you know, weeks ahead. But Chancellor, why don't you speak to the guidance that's been given?

Chancellor Porter: Yeah, so we – first of all, we acknowledged from the beginning that every school community is different and would approach this moment differently, and we also weren't rushing schools to three-feet, but wanting to leverage three-feet and in places in which it would help us get more schools to five days a week in person for students as possible, and so we took a survey of all schools and are working directly with schools and our union partners that need to go to three-feet so we can follow the guidance from the State, but also make sure we're working with, again with individual schools based on the need to go to three-feet. Many, many, many other schools are just welcoming students back in at the six-foot requirement. So, we're just working with schools based on the need, based on the requirement, and based on the guidance that we've all received from the State.

Mayor: Excellent, thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Glenn from 1010 wins.

Question: Good morning, Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Hey, how you been?

Question: Good. Juliet has some time off, so it's an honor to chat with you today. I usually don't get to see you anymore. So, nice to see you and nice to talk to you.

Mayor: It is a pleasure. You're the designated hitter today, huh?

Question: Yeah [inaudible] she's getting some downtime, but my question – I wanted to circle back quickly about Times Square. I spent some time this morning here, you know, it's such an exciting and great place to be at any time, really. I caught up with Tom Harris, who's the new president of the Times Square Alliance, and he has concerns about, you know, some of the things that have been going on in recent months, obviously a lot connected to the pandemic, admitting, you know, that the spotlight is always on Times Square. But in terms of crime and homelessness and drug use – he's looking for what he calls a sound plan where the effective tactics, and I know you can't go into it now, but when you think, you know, just off the top of mind here, what, what is the plan going to need to be to move Times Square forward?

Mayor: Yeah, Glenn, I'm real hopeful. First of all, Tom Harris does great work. I've known him for most of 20 years and he's doing really good and important work in Times Square and thinking very compassionately about how to address issues like homelessness, working with the Department of Homeless Services. So, look, I am real hopeful. I think you're going to see Times Square come back to life starting summer. We are going to unquestionably benefit. We're all going to benefit from life coming back to normal in any way, and remember, there's been huge dislocation because of this pandemic. When there's folks out enjoying the city, shopping, going to restaurants, going to museums and cultural institutions, that's going to help everything. But

what we're going to talk about in the coming weeks is more and more of the efforts to ensure safety in this summer and beyond, to address homelessness on the streets more and more. We have a great vision with the journey home plan it's been working. We're going to go double down on that, but we also want to work really closely with the Business Improvement Districts like Tom's, to ensure we hear the concerns of local store owners that we address quality of life issues, and we're going to have more and more resources to do that. We're going to have the City Cleanup Corps, which is going to be really exciting, 10,000 strong out there cleaning up our streets, getting rid of graffiti. I think you're going to see a wonderful rebirth in Times Square this summer. Go ahead, Glenn.

Question: To circle back, this connects back – question regarding the Chauvin matter and George Floyd. I guess, what would your message be to those who do come out? As you know, the emotions and the passions involved with this case, in terms of those, we do want to come out and protest, and maybe in Times Square or wherever, Brooklyn and New York, what would your message be to those who, who are going to come out and possibly very big numbers?

Mayor: For everyone who was just profoundly troubled and disgusted by what happened in Minneapolis and seeks justice and seeks change. I'd say your voices have been heard in this city and all over the country, and a lot of changes are being made right now. A lot of reforms, a lot of things we need to do different and better in the way we police communities and work with communities and more needs to be done and more will be done, and that is achieved through peaceful protest, and so I won't prejudge anything that's going to happen this week. I only say if folks have feelings they want to express, do it peacefully, it does make an impact. It does make a difference, and the very few who do something that's not peaceful, actually take away from the meaning of everybody else, and I always say to peaceful protesters, I've been involved in many protests myself over the years, if you see anyone in your ranks, attempting violence, reject them, separate from them, let the message of the peaceful protest shine through so it can help us foster real change.

And with that, as we conclude today, look today's the day when we're able to thankfully offer a lot of good news for this city, but it's really because we talk about people's efforts and efforts have changed in this city. It's really been working thing we're talking about today with the fair student funding is an example, 20 years ago, people started that movement for fair student funding. State Senator Robert Jackson, my former colleague from the City Council marched all the way to Albany and walked the whole way with activists to fight for fair student funding for New York City public schools. There were good days and bad days over the last 20 years, but mostly it felt like it was going to be a dream denied or dream deferred. Now it is a dream realized because the activists and the folks who believe in change never gave up. So, I'm a believer that people should stick with it, do it peacefully, but stick with it. Cause it, it makes a huge difference, and today we celebrate a real example of that progress. Thank you, everybody.

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