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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON CNN'S NEW DAY

Alisyn Camerota: Okay, big announcement this weekend, New York City's public school system will reopen for in-person learning for elementary school kids next week. The move marks a reversal from just ten days earlier when the Mayor shut down schools and moved to remote learning. So, what changed? Let's ask New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

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

Camerota: I'm doing well. So, just take us inside your thought process. What changed from November 19th when you shut down in-person learning to yesterday, when you announced reopening?

Mayor: Alisyn, we had to reset the equation to create something that would be sustainable for the long haul. We had said back in September, we would open our schools – biggest school system in the country. Most cities weren't opening schools at all. We did, but we also said we'd have really strict standards. And I said, if we hit the three percent positivity, that would be the point where we'd have to do something different. Now we have a different approach. We're adding a lot more testing, weekly testing in every school. Kids will have to have a testing consent form to come to school. This is going to allow us to get back up with our school system next Monday – elementary school, early childhood, special education programs. And we're going to keep building from there. And Alisyn, one of the other things we're going to be able to do now is have five-day-a-week instruction in a lot of schools, because a lot of parents did choose remote learning. Other parents want their kids in the classroom. We now have the ability to give them more days in the classroom, which is going to be really great for those kids.

Camerota: Yes, and for the parents. I mean, obviously this is music to the ears of many parents, but just help us understand, did you consult different doctors or different scientists in terms of why was the three percent threshold considered dangerous 11 days ago? But now the city's positivity rate is 3.9 and it's not too dangerous for kids to go back to school.

Mayor: Alisyn, I certainly understand the question. The real question is back in August, September, when we laid down that three percent, we did not have the information we have now. And so, we had put it in place to say to folks, we'd be very stringent, to parents, teachers, staff, we're going to keep them very safe. We put all sorts of measures in place to keep schools safe. Everyone wears a mask, for example, in our schools, kids and adults alike, always. It worked.

So, the previous standard proved to be effective, but now it was time for something different. Alisyn, what happened was that that three percent standard, after we had so much experience with the schools, proved to be different than we thought it would be. And then we said, what can we do now to sustain our schools for the long haul, all the way to having the vaccine present? We decided we needed a lot more testing and to make that in every school. That would be the difference maker. That was the new measure we needed. We did consult with the State, with all the stakeholders, and we agreed that was the way.

Camerota: And so, you're going to be testing students every week. Now are these rapid tests?

Mayor: Well, these will be the PCR test, the diagnostic tests. And we'll get results very quickly. Our City has been able to turn around tests typically in a day or two with our public facilities. So, we'll be able to really quickly know what's going on in each school and act accordingly.

Camerota: And so, what's the new threshold now? So, now that, with your new information, you've decided that the three percent is too low, I guess, of a threshold, what's the new threshold now for if you were to have shut it down?

Mayor: It's a different approach now, Alisyn, overall, because what has happened is we've proven the schools could be extraordinarily safe. I mean, the schools are some of the safest places to be right now in New York City, which is a credit to our educators and our staff and our parents. We know it works, but you have to constantly monitor that testing. And if we see multiple cases in the school, we do an immediate investigation with our Test and Trace Corps, and in a lot of cases we will close that school either temporarily or even for a two-week quarantine. So, that ability to school-by-school make those adjustments, that has proven to be the most effective tool. We don't think that the specific number has as much meaning as a single number. That's how we started. That's what we thought was necessary to get the school system started. Now we have a much more comprehensive testing system than we were able to do back then and a strong, what we call our situation room that determines whether a school should stay open or not, each school at a time. Those are the checks and balances we need to keep the school system going all the way to when we have a vaccine. This is going to be a sustainable model now.

Camerota: And so why not apply that model to middle schoolers?

Mayor: Oh, we will, but we're just not ready to do it yet. The amount of testing we need, the sheer capacity requires us to focus on elementary school, special education, and early childhood. Over time we're going to certainly move to middle school and high school as well.

Camerota: And when? What's your target date?

Mayor: Well, it's not going to be the next few weeks. I mean, obviously from now until the Christmas break, the focus will be on the younger kids. But when we come back, especially because we need to fight back this second wave that's bearing down on us now over these next weeks, when we come back, my hope is we can then move quickly to middle school and high school.

Camerota: And so just so I understand in terms of the elementary school, starting on Monday, they'll now – every student will now be tested twice a week?

Mayor: Once a week. It's been once a month up to now. It will now be once a week. Every child is required to either be tested, have a consent form, or have a medical exemption from testing. So, we're going to be comprehensive. We're going to be doing this every week.

Camerota: And then if somebody is positive, does their classroom stay home? Does their grade stay home? Do you have a plan for what happens when there's a positive test?

Mayor: Well, Alisyn, that's what's been working so well these last few months, and that's why we were able to open New York City public schools and keep them safe. We have a very rigorous procedure. Yes, if there's a case in the classroom, the classroom quarantines, it's a kind of pod system so you can just quarantine that classroom. If there's multiple cases in a school, there's a careful investigation to determine whether the school only needs a temporary or a full two-week quarantine. That has worked and it's allowed us to keep the vast majority of our schools open the vast majority of the time. But it's also given us the ability to pinpoint when there's a problem and address it quickly through our Test and Trace Corps.

Camerota: Mayor Bill de Blasio, thank you very much for all of the information. I know that parents are, you know, all ears this morning to see how it's going to work moving forward. We really appreciate it.

Mayor: Thank you, Alisyn.

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