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Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: August 12th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

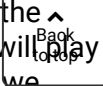
08/12/2020

Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. We have a lot of ground to cover and there's going to be some nasty weather which Pat will give more details on, so we're going to get right at it and ask if you all could be economical with your questions, we've got a full house today. I am joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, today we've got the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, another familiar face, Dr. Ed Lifshitz; great to have you both. To my far left, another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Patrick Callahan. We're also joined today to my left by Interim Commissioner of the Department of Education, a guy who's been here before, Kevin Dehmer. Kevin, great to have you here. To my far left, Willingboro Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Neely Hackett, great to have you with us. And to the far right, East Brunswick Public School Superintendent, Dr. Victor Valeski. Thank you all for being here today. We also have our Chief of Policy and former Secretary of Higher Education, Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis with us today. The Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples. If that weren't enough, the Head of our Intergovernmental Affairs team, Mike DeLamater is with us, and many others.

Before we get into education matters, I want to say that about an hour ago, the New Jersey Supreme Court rendered its unanimous decision allowing us to move forward to borrow the funds we need to protect the vital jobs and programs that are critical not only to our ongoing response to this pandemic, but which will play a huge role in our overall recovery. I am grateful for this decision, because we knew that not only were we



right in our decision to take this step, and I want to give a particular shout out to the Legislative leaders, Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, who took these steps with us and I've had a good exchange with each of them in the past hour. So we were right collectively in our decision to take this step, but also because the alternative would have been something that no one up here or anywhere would have wanted to experience.

This means that, for instance, when I present our new budget for the fiscal 2021 year in roughly two weeks, our schools can be funded, our residents and communities can be protected and our state can move forward. We are going to continue our work to strengthen New Jersey's fiscal foundation and build on the progress of our first two years. However, I must be clear that even with this decision, we are not declaring victory. We have a long road still to travel.

We still need the federal government to step up and provide direct assistance to us and our fellow states. This cannot continue to twist in the political winds. This isn't about red or blue. This is about keeping our nation strong and preventing this recession from falling into a depression. And we cannot rely on half measures that were proposed over the weekend that have no clear guidance, and which push even more costs onto states. Money, I might add, that we don't have.

For example, the President's proposal for additional unemployment would actually cost New Jersey an estimated \$1.725 billion just this count, and that's just in potential benefits, not even the cost of setting up a system that we don't even have. We need Congress to act. We need Mitch McConnell to finally get something done, and we need him to do it now. You know that phrase, go big or go home? It's hard to believe this, but he went home. At this moment in American history, it requires an American response that we've seen over the past two-and-a-half centuries. And with all due respect, Senator McConnell, history will be kind to us and to you if we overshoot, if we go too big; but history will be unsparing if we come up small, as you have so far.

Borrowing is not anything that any one of us wanted to have to do, but Washington's inaction and indifference has left us no choice. As we battle this pandemic and look to our recovery, we must be prepared to have every tool in our toolbox at our disposal to protect our state and to keep it a great place to live, to work, and to raise a family. And when it comes to raising a family, Kevin, that turns us invariably to educational matters.

And with that, today I am signing an Executive Order officially clearing both our pre-K through 12 schools and our colleges and universities to reopen for the upcoming academic year. As many of our colleges and universities have continued offering classes during the summer, in-person instruction may fully resume immediately, should institutions so desire and so long as social distancing, among other protections, are strictly adhered to. And any student who chooses to continue remote learning must be accommodated. We have held ongoing discussions with the leaders throughout our higher education system and we believe they are ready for this step. In fact, I have a call with presidents of colleges and universities on the books for tomorrow.

And throughout the summer, we have continued to work alongside our school districts and educational communities including educators, parents and other stakeholders to ensure that come the beginning of the school year in September, plans are in place to ensure the safety of all students and staff. I have personally been a part of, I think at this point, scores of those deliberations, consultations, discussions.

Let's begin by reiterating a very simple truth. Not only will this not be a normal school year, furthermore, there is no one size fits all plan to this very difficult situation. As we have mentioned here before, we are home to nearly 600 public school districts, plus charter and Renaissance schools, non-public and parochial schools, and other specialized places of learning. Each one faces its own unique challenges, serves a unique community, and has its own unique character. I think Commissioner Dehmer and Drs. Hackett and Valeski can certainly attest to that.

And in fact, we don't just recognize these differences in New Jersey; in many ways, we celebrate them. The simple fact remains the New Jersey system of education has long been rooted in local control and decision making, based on local input. I would not ask the students and parents, for instance, in Willingboro to decide what's best for East Brunswick schools and vice versa. And so for the past six weeks, we have relied upon the work of local educational communities to determine the best way for their schools to reopen. We have provided significant flexibility, including providing parents and guardians with the option to choose all-remote

learning for their student while also at the same time adjusting expectations based on the latest science and data such as, by the way, last week's announcement of mandatory face coverings for all students while in school.

But in every twist and turn on the road, we have been willing to listen and to accommodate, and today we are continuing to show our willingness to listen, to learn and to act accordingly. This clear principle has guided us from the very start and it will continue. We are flexible because we value listening and we are listening because we value flexibility. This is not a change, of course; this is a continuation of the process that we set up from the very start.

The Department of Education has put forward strong guidelines that put a premium on health and safety of students and staff, while allowing in-person instruction to resume. However, we recognize that for some districts, there are legitimate and documentable reasons why some of these core health and safety standards cannot be met on day one. So for these districts today, we are reaffirming our commitment to provide the flexibility for districts to do what is best for their school community. Both public and non-public schools must certify to the Department of Education that they are able to meet the health and safety standards necessary to resume in-person instruction. Districts that cannot meet all the health and safety standards for safe in-person instruction will begin their school year in an all-remote fashion. Public school districts will need to spell out their plans for satisfying these unmet standards, and a date by which they anticipate the ability to resume in-person instruction.

As I mentioned, throughout this process we have talked directly with administrators like Drs. Hackett and Valeski, with educators, with parents, with national experts and with countless other stakeholders. And just as importantly, not only have we spoken with them, we have listened. Our goal has not changed. Our commitment to meeting the conditions on the ground with flexibility has not changed. And most of all, our focus on protecting students, families and educators has not changed. When our schools opened in September, they must be ready to provide the high quality education to all students that is a hallmark of New Jersey. We know the first day of school is not going to be like any other in our history, and we are fully committed to getting this right for students, our educators, our districts, and every family that everyone who enters one of our schools goes safely home at night. I know Judy will have more to say on this, in addition to our educational experts, Judy will have more to say on this in a few minutes as it relates to the health perspective on this, so thank you to each and every one of you.

With that, let's turn to the overnight numbers. Today we're reporting another 484 positive test results for a statewide total of 185,938. Judy, our numbers are generally good, but I would be remiss and I know you would as well if we did not say that both for today and yesterday, we are reporting positive cases that hovered just under 500 per day. Let's keep all of that in mind, folks.

The percent positivity rate for tests from August 8th was 2.09%. That's very good, it's up a little bit, and the rate of transmission currently sits at 0.92 and that happily is down a little bit. In our hospitals there were 296 COVID-positive patients being treated, with another 296 patients listed as persons under investigation pending their test results, for a total of 592 persons hospitalized with COVID-19, either symptoms confirmed or presumed. There were 111 patients in intensive care and 35 ventilators were in use.

Today, with heavy hearts, we report that another nine deaths are now confirmed to be due to COVID-19 complications, bringing the statewide total to an unfathomable 14,046. The number of probable deaths has been adjusted slightly to 1,839. Last night, Judy, there were as I read the dashboard here, 13 deaths reported in our hospitals, and these are still again pending confirmation that they're from COVID-19 complications, meaning they're not included in that slide but that should also give us a moment to reflect and remember those folks. Of the nine deaths that we are reporting today that are confirmed, there is one each of the four days from August 6th to 9th. The other five range in dates from as far back as July 16th to August 3rd. Now let's take a moment, as we do every day, to recall several more of those we have lost. Today is an extraordinary, I want to brace everybody for this, an extraordinarily tragic story.

We remember Larry and Vicki Freda on the left, and their son John on the right, one family. On April 22nd, John lost his battle with COVID-19 one month shy of his 52nd birthday. He was a Jersey product all the way. He was a graduate of West Essex Regional High School and Raritan Valley Community College. He was an optician, most recently helping customers at the Walmart Optical in Riverdale, in Bergen County. His family

speaks of his creative soul, of his love of writing and drawing and working on art projects. He was an avid reader and movie buff, especially anything dealing with superheroes. He loved his family and friends and would dedicate hours to searching for the perfect gifts. The four words that best summed up John were funny, thoughtful, intelligent, introspective.

But only two days, folks, after losing John, the Freda family lost both Larry and Vicki, I believe within an hour or two of each other. Larry was just weeks shy of his 86th birthday and Vicki had only recently turned 83. They had been married for 62 years, and had spent 58 of them together in Fairfield, where they raised their family. They were inseparable, and there is a tragic poetry, as I mentioned, that they would both leave this life on the same day, literally within hours of each other.

Larry was born in Newark, and served in the United States Army during peacetime stationed in Europe. After his service ended, he began a 24-year career at the former Pabst Blue Ribbon Brewery – I mentioned to their son Alex that I was formerly a large customer of theirs – in Newark before becoming a custodian at West Essex Regional High School where his children, by the way, as I mentioned, were educated. He was a fixture in Fairfield and nearly everyone knew him for his tremendous sense of humor and infectious smile.

Vicki was also born in Newark, a member of the Westside High School class of 1954. She made her career serving the Township of Fairfield before her retirement in 2007, with her final posting being as executive secretary to former Mayor Rocco Palmieri who eulogized her as, quote, "The epitome of what a public servant should be." And by the way, you should look up that eulogy, their son Alex said it was extraordinary. Outside work, Vicki could fulfill any request for a Halloween costume, an art project or a holiday ornament and she often composed special poems for family and friends. Obviously, she passed her creative talents on to her son John. She was a den mother in the Cub Scouts for each of her three sons, but even more, she loved being the den mother of a large New Jersey Italian family.

Neither Larry nor Vicki wanted to sit still in retirement and they settled into their second act as full-time grandparents going to sporting events, plays, and choirs, anything that meant spending time with their family. They also enjoyed taking gaming trips to a casino, always having fun regardless of whether they ended the day up or down. And while Larry did break away for early morning to have coffee with his friends in downtown Fairfield, he always waited to return home to share breakfast with Vicki.

So their son John leaves behind his sons Brian, David and Adam. Those are three of Larry and Vicki's six grandsons. And for reasons I won't get into, please keep those three lads in your prayers that they will find inner peace. Larry and Vicki also leave behind their two other sons, John's brothers, Larry and his wife Mary, and Alex with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Wednesday, and his wife Joanne. Larry and Vicki are also survived by their three other grandsons and John by his three nephews, Matthew, Kevin, and Alexander Jr., along with countless other family and friends.

Three tremendous and loving souls, all taken from the same family within a span of 48 hours. The Freda family remains in our thoughts and our prayers. May God bless Larry, Vicki and John. Larry, thank you for your service to our nation and may the good Lord bring peace to the Freda family whose grief was compounded beyond any comprehension.

The Freda family is just one of thousands of families who know all too well the awful strength and power of this virus. For them and for us all, we must continue to do everything we can to slow the spread of this virus and save lives. We must keep up with our social distancing, and we must continue to wear our face masks. We have to think of others, of our own family and friends in our communities, and put the common good above all else. We have lost over 14,000 of our fellow New Jerseyans, likely 16,000 and more. Remember that 14,000, 16,000.

Unrelated to these deaths and unrelated to COVID, I do want to give a shout out to some dear friends in an iconic New Jersey family, the Tisches, who suffered an enormous tragedy earlier this week. They may not live necessarily in New Jersey, but they hail from, in many cases, Atlantic City. Newark continues to benefit from their philanthropy and along with the Mara family, they continue their stewardship over the New York Football Giants. Their loss, their memory, their family is in our prayers.

Switching gears, I'd like for us to recognize another of the small businesses who not only make our economy as diverse and as strong as our people, but we'll be relying upon in the weeks and months ahead as we rebuild and recover from this pandemic. Let's hear it for Fern Glenbeigh, and she is the power behind CardPlus Empower, the Hillsdale-based electronics payment solutions firm that she founded in 1996. Unlike many of our businesses which had to close their doors during the pandemic, Fern is one of the businesses we have found real opportunity, and her small businesses now helping countless other small businesses across our state to convert to cashless and contactless point-of-sale technologies.

Fern was able to use a grant from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to not only shore up CardPlus Empower, but to help them reach out to the merchants they work with to ensure their viability as well. In this new business environment, CardPlus' technology is having a true impact and at least two of her clients already report that they are now bringing in more business revenues than before the pandemic hit.

I had the great pleasure of speaking with Fern on Monday, and I thank her not only for making New Jersey CardPlus' home, but for also all she is doing to help other small businesses not just survive, but thrive in one of the most challenging times imaginable. I am proud that through the DEA we've been able to partner with her to make some of that happen.

Additionally, today I am proud to announce that the EDA is launching the first phase today of the New Jersey small and micro business PPE Access Program. This \$15 million program is designed to ensure that our small businesses and nonprofits have access to fairly priced personal protective equipment. For more information, please go immediately to [covid19.nj.gov/PPE](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/PPE). Partnership is what has gotten us through the past nearly five months. It's the partnership that we have forged with our businesses, with our communities, with our healthcare systems, with our essential workers, with each and every one of you. Together we are proving that there's nothing New Jersey can't do if we all pull together, and with Kevin and Drs. Hackett and Valeski, we are showing that our partnership with our educational communities will produce results that ensure that our schools remain strong and our communities safe and healthy.

Now, before I close, I want to make a quick observation about the selection of former Vice President Joe Biden of Senator Kamala Harris to be his running mate. I'm thrilled for each of them and by the way, I say this, my comment is actually a lot less about politics. It's a nice note about, Judy, New Jersey. I feel like the in-laws here, by the way, as I say this. Both Jill Biden and Senator Harris's husband, Doug Emhoff, have New Jersey roots. Dr. Biden was born in Hammonton and Doug grew up in Matawan, so both halves of the Democratic ticket have New Jersey roots. Why should we be surprised by that? Every good story runs through the Garden State.

And so with that, it is my pleasure and honor to introduce the Interim Commissioner of the Department of Education, the guy to my left who's doing a terrific job with his colleagues, please help me welcome Kevin Dehmer.

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: Thank you, Governor, for the opportunity to be here today and I want to thank Dr. Victor Valeski, Superintendent of East Brunswick Schools, and Dr. Neely Hackett, Superintendent of Willingboro Public Schools, for all you do for the students in your districts.

In June, we issued our initial school reopening guidance. We explained that it was created with the input of hundreds of stakeholders. As we said previously, this document will continue to evolve based on changes in health-related data, direction from the New Jersey Department of Health, and input from stakeholders. As we prepare for school to resume, stakeholder input continues to be a hallmark of our guidance. With more than 600 school districts and charter schools, there isn't a one size fits all plan to reopen schools. We've shown that we've been responsive to the concerns of stakeholders. We saw an example of this just last month, when the Governor announced that every parent will be able to select all-remote learning for their child if they choose. This option to give families a greater sense of ownership over the decision to resume in-person instruction was a direct response to feedback that we received from both parents and school officials.

Today, this Executive Order addresses two of stakeholders most pressing needs. First, ensuring schools can resume in-person instruction while meeting health and safety standards. And second, allowing the time that school communities need to plan for and implement those health and safety standards while continuing to

provide instruction and other school services remotely. Educators and pediatric experts around the country agree on the importance of in-person instruction to a child's educational and developmental growth, and we all agree that in-person instruction needs to be done as safe as possible.

This Executive Order reinforces that school districts must open to students for in-person instruction, where the school district meets the department's health and safety standards for reopening, as set forth in The Road Back. However, we're also sensitive to the concerns of those school leaders who say they need additional time to implement the health and safety precautions identified by the Department of Education and the Department of Health, before they can return any portion of the student population to in-person instruction. The flexibility we're announcing today provides school districts that time, while ensuring that the entire state continues progress towards safe in-person instruction.

The two superintendents here today demonstrate why we need this flexibility. One district has been able to meet the health and safety standards in the state's guidance. The other district is committed to returning to in-person instruction, but needs more time to meet those health and safety standards. Districts that need this flexibility must demonstrate that they are unable to meet one or more of the state's health and safety standards. They must continue to make good faith efforts to meet those standards to safely reopen school buildings, and they must define the date by which they anticipate in-person instruction to resume.

To support districts' planning efforts, the Department of Education has been working closely with the Department of Health. We thank our partners at the Department of Health for their invaluable leadership and expertise in developing forthcoming guidance to local health authorities on public health recommendations for school settings, and for their expertise in developing the minimum standards that districts need to implement in order to safely open to in-person instruction for the upcoming school year. We're confident their guidance will provide a useful guidepost for schools and local health authorities to develop procedures for responding to and mitigating the potential spread of COVID-19 in school communities based on local needs and circumstances.

By balancing the educational and developmental benefits of in-person instruction with the planning time necessary to implement health and safety standards, this Executive Order provides a strategic and responsible reopening of New Jersey schools, ensuring that educational health does not come at the expense of public health. I want to thank the Governor for his continued leadership to ensure that the health and safety of our students and school personnel remain a primary focus as we approach reopening our schools. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Kevin, thank you. I also want to give a shout out to Deb Cuernavaca, Deputy Chief of Staff who has been right in the thick of the educational and other policy areas over the past many months. Deb, good to have you there. Thank you, Kevin, for your leadership, for your teams and I know some of them are with us today. We wanted this to be the least abstract discussion we could possibly make it given the capacities and we're right at the edge of our social distancing here, so forgive us for that. We have more people on the dais than normal but we felt strongly that it made sense to have a couple of superintendents with us today who are at the frontlines of this, and who were facing different dimensions depending on the school district. As we've said many times, there are no two school districts alike, and we repeat that. It's both a source of big challenge in terms of as it relates to policy and getting everything in line, but it is also a source overwhelmingly of the best public education system in the United States of America.

So with that, please help me welcome for a few remarks from East Brunswick, a great New Jersey community, the Superintendent of their Public Schools, Dr. Victor Valeski.

East Brunswick Public School Superintendent Dr. Victor Valeski: Thank you, Governor Murphy and Interim Commissioner Dehmer. Beginning in mid-March when we all shifted to distance learning, East Brunswick began a comprehensive investigation into how our recovery would look and how it could meet the needs of our unique constituency. For us, an essential part of that process was evaluating our daily activities and reevaluating every action and interaction around six distinct priorities.

1. First was analysis of the spaces we utilize for teaching, learning, gathering and transporting students.
2. Second was placement and organization of students and staff within those spaces.
3. Third was integration of medical, social and emotional supports with academics.

4. Fourth was communication that is timely, accurate and consistent for families and township leaders.
5. Five was, of course, environmental safety.
6. And six was physical security.

Our objective was to exceed the minimum requirements articulated in The Road Back guidance from the Department of Education. Our stakeholder groups represented the diversity of our schools and community. They all share the same desire to make our plan the absolute best it could be under the conditions and constraints we know now. Our plan had to be flexible and adaptable, as we know those constraints could change between now and our anticipated start of school.

Above all, safety must remain our dominant decision factor. Based on the feedback from a survey we distributed to families, nearly 70% of the respondents desired some form of hybrid instructional model for their children, about 30% for the full virtual option.

We are pleased to say that in East Brunswick, we will be able to meet the health and safety standards outlined in The Road Back and returned to our classrooms in the fall, all while keeping our students and staff safe. While a return to full-time, in-person instruction is not possible for East Brunswick public schools, we are confident that the hybrid plan we are offering our students will ensure that all students, regardless of where they'll be during the school day, receive a high quality education. This plan will allow us to provide safe transport for our students as well as follow social distancing protocols for our classrooms and in our hallways.

Our classrooms will be set up to maintain physical separation between students and teachers. In our model, all students will participate in virtual learning to some extent, but our standard grading, assessment and attendance policies will be enforced.

Our elementary schools model begins the school year with two cohorts, each designed to accommodate 50% of the school's enrolled population. Also in our elementary schools, special area teachers move to students rather than students moving to them, limiting student interaction outside their classroom bubbles.

In a similar fashion, our secondary schools model has four cohorts, each representing 25% of each school's enrolled population. Our cohorts of elementary and secondary students will follow our established arrival times whether they are face to face or virtually logged in, and while we will not be serving lunch in our cafeteria is because of social distancing limitations, grab-and-go meals will be available under the same guidelines as regular lunch service and across the district after midday dismissal, allowing time for students who have attended school to be transported and have their lunch. Virtual instruction and support will continue until the end of each school's regularly scheduled day.

One of the features incorporated into our model is sibling alignment. So, to the extent possible, children in the same family unit attend school on the same days. Additionally, to protect the health and safety of our staff, we have constructed enclosed security vestibules for our school security officers who manage entry into each of our school buildings. Plexiglass barriers are or will be installed at high volume secretary desks and where we cannot maintain adequate distancing between staff workstations.

I also want to take this time to thank Governor Murphy for the additional funding you have provided to close the digital divide. Those resources will accelerate our efforts to ensure each K-through-12 student will have current and reliable instructional technology for their individual use and can remain connected to teaching and learning while not physically in school.

I know my peers in Middlesex County as well as my peers throughout the state, along with their school boards and district leadership and township leadership are working hard to develop and implement plans that address their unique constituencies. Funding and human resources, as well as facility space and childcare, became limiting factors for many of the solutions that we all had considered. East Brunswick's plan is just an example of a collaboration among many that attempts to meet the needs of many of the stakeholders in East Brunswick community. Along with the East Brunswick Education Association, the East Brunswick Principals and Supervisors Association, our Board of Education and parents, we will continue to refine our model as we develop solutions to unexpected challenges and look forward to our complete return to school.

As I told our community, our plan is built with passion, but implemented with compassion. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dr. Valeski, thank you. Incredibly well said. Again, East Brunswick is one of the great New Jersey communities and its school system is a big reason for that, so thank you for your leadership and to all the stakeholders there, your staff, educators, principals, parents, community organizations, and most importantly our precious kids, so thank you.

And we are thrilled to have another incredible and iconic community represented here today. Willingboro is with us. Again, one of New Jersey's great communities and with us today is the Superintendent of its public school system. Please help me welcome Dr. Neely Hackett. Dr. Hackett.

Willingboro Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Neely Hackett: Thank you. Good afternoon. I'd like to thank Governor Murphy and Interim Commissioner Kevin Dehmer for their commitment to flexibility as school districts work to reopening plans during this unprecedented time. I'd like to acknowledge the Willingboro Mayor, Dr. Tiffany Worthy who is present this afternoon, Dr. Worthy. It is an honor to participate in this press briefing and represent the Willingboro Public Schools, the Willingboro School Board and the entire Township of Willingboro. To my colleague, Superintendent of East Brunswick Public Schools, Dr. Victor Valeski, I applaud you, your staff and your community for the development of a comprehensive reopening plan, and I wish you much success for the upcoming school year.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to commend the Willingboro Reopening Committee, subcommittee members and parent and community participants on their tireless efforts expended in creating a comprehensive reopening plan for the Willingboro Public Schools. The plan is grounded in providing students with a quality educational experience under the umbrella of an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for all. The reopening plan was developed using real-time data and information from the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey Department of Health, the Burlington County Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, and parent and staff surveys.

The reopening plan includes options 1 and 2. Option 1 is designed to divide the school into two groups, an A group and a B group. Each group would attend school face to face for two days per week, either Monday or Tuesday, or Thursday and Friday. The remaining three days per week, students would be engaged in virtual learning. Teachers would work all four days instructing the A and B groups, and they would also post work to Google Classroom for students who are assigned to virtual learning. Parents can request an all-virtual learning environment for their students. Our most complex learners with individual education programs and pre-kindergarten students will attend school all four days, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Option 2 is designed for students to learn virtually all five days. Synchronous instruction will begin at 8:00 a.m. and conclude at 1:00 p.m. Class periods will run approximately 45 minutes to one hour and students and staff will have a 30-minute recess period. The five days of live instruction will be recorded so that students who miss class can watch at a later time. While our goal remains to achieve in-person learning, our district determined that we were simply not ready to move forward with option 1 at this time. To this end, on July 27th, the Willingboro Board of Education, under the leadership of President Carlos Worthy, voted at its public meeting to submit Willingboro's reopening plan to the New Jersey Department of Education with the request to move to option 2, the all-virtual learning model for the first marking period, September 8th through November 18th.

It is imperative that I note that the Willingboro Board of Education members are committed to the return of students to the classroom for in-person learning. This is the ultimate goal. However, before this return is possible, the Board of Education members must know that all appropriate safety precautions are in place. Although the staff of the Willingboro Public Schools has worked extremely hard over the last several months, there is still much work that needs to be done to ensure the safety of our students and staff.

Some of our current challenges are as follows:

Number one, inadequate HV systems to properly ventilate rooms. This can serve as a major issue in regards to the high temperatures during the month of September. Many of our schools have only partial air conditioning, making the early months of the school year an additional challenge. We're currently researching appropriate ventilation systems.

While we have worked to secure protective equipment, we still face some back order issues. We plan to provide all of our staff and students two face masks per month, which would equal 8,000 face masks per month.

Similarly, we face supply issues preventing before we see an installation of physical barriers to protect our students and staff when necessary. We are waiting additional delivery of devices so that we can have a one-on-one initiative in our schools. We currently have one-on-one initiative for home instruction. We believe we need additional time to fully train our staff on the complexities of the synchronous hybrid learning model and enhanced cleaning protocols.

I also want to acknowledge that in collecting feedback from our families, we found that the overwhelming majority were not comfortable sending their children back to school. This is why I'm grateful that the Governor and administration provided the parent choice option a few weeks ago to opt out for all remote learning. To ensure all our parents have full visibility and awareness of our enhanced safety measures, we also plan to provide comprehensive virtual training and safety briefings to demonstrate how the district has prepared for in-person instruction and implemented safety protocols.

As a community, we are committed to providing Willingboro students with an education that is grounded in 21st Century thinking and learning. We will remain committed and will work toward every necessary step to prepare our buildings, students, staff and parents for in-person learning to begin on November 19th, 2020, the start of the second marking period. We are truly experiencing unprecedented times. However, it is during this difficult time that I find encouragement in knowing that the future leaders and change agents are students in our public schools. They are our hope for a better tomorrow. I commend all of the public school districts for their laser-like commitment to developing a plan that will benefit the students and staff of their respective communities.

The 2020-21 school year will not be normal in any sense of the word, but it will be productive for the Willingboro students. With the support of our community, we will provide our students with a quality education within a safe and secure learning environment, and I look forward to the time that we can return to in-person learning. I wish all the best to my colleagues across the state of New Jersey as you work towards one of the most essential responsibilities of a community, the education of its youth. May God bless our children. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you so much, Dr. Hackett. So well-constructed and so well-thought out. I have to say, one of the shortcomings of wearing face coverings is I'm less able to recognize people like I used to, so huge apologies and shout out to one of our dear friends Mayor Tiffani Worthy who is with us today. Mayor, bless you. Great to have you with us and your leadership and Willingboro. Dr. Hackett, again, thank you for everything you do.

And Burlington County, I'll just pick an example, Herb Conway who wears a couple of different hats, including in his health capacity in Burlington County, Chairman in some of the most important Assembly committees, a great Assemblyman. It's a county that works. It's a community that works and to you, Mayor, to you, Madam Superintendent and to all the folks with whom we deal, as you said, especially God bless the kids who are going to benefit from all of the great leadership. So again to Dr. Valeski, thank you. Dr. Hackett, thank you and Kevin, thank you for your leadership.

With that, let us turn to the woman who needs no introduction, not just for her daily update, but also her take on some of the educational matters that we're discussing here, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. Well, the Department of Health continues to collaborate with the Department of Education as they plan for the upcoming school year. Our guidance in this regard is being finalized and will be posted shortly. To assess the spread of COVID-19 in the state and how it may impact schools, we have been in daily meetings with the Department of Education to develop guidance that fulfills our mission to provide a safe environment for students, teachers and staff.

New Jersey Department of Health is implementing a statewide approach, but with a regional and local focus to be responsive to the local characteristics of school participation. We've divided the state into six regions. These regions are similar to how we manage flu surveillance. These regions are the Northwest: Mars, Passaic, Sussex and Warren; Northeast: Bergen, Essex and Hudson; Central West: Hunterdon, Mercer and Somerset; Central East: Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean and Union; Southwest: Camden, Gloucester, Burlington and Salem; and the Southeast, Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland. As I said, this is not new. These are similar to how we manage flu surveillance and provides a guide as we continue our journey in mitigating COVID-19.

Now, depending on the community risk and transmission, there will be four color-coded categories: green, yellow, orange and red. Where a region falls in the color coding categories is based on three criteria that are scored numerically and updated weekly. The number of cases in the past week, the percent positivity in the past week, syndromic surveillance in the past week. This regionalized system will provide a view of transmission more locally and help inform decisions on the ground. The risk assessment provides guidance for the local health departments.

Risk levels green, yellow and orange require staff and students to stay home when they're sick or if they have been in close contact with someone with COVID in the past 14 days, and school administrators should be notified of that illness. It provides tools for parents to screen students before sending them to school, screen staff for symptoms upon arrival, and have plans for students and staff to report symptoms during the day. In conjunction with the local health department, it identifies rapid testing resources when staff or students develop symptoms. It offers guidance on cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, at least on a daily basis, if not more. It ensures adequate hand hygiene supplies are available, implements physical distancing measures, and source control through wearing of face coverings.

If a child becomes sick at school and it is suspected to be COVID-19 related, the child should be isolated immediately, and then sent home as soon as possible. It is advised that the child see a healthcare provider for evaluation on whether testing is needed. The guidance will provide information about the length of school exclusion, the role of testing, and the steps to take to respond to suspected and known positive students in schools.

Moving on, I want to report that this is National Health Center Week, a time to recognize and celebrate our community health centers as innovators in delivering high quality and cost effective and accessible care to the residents of our state. New Jersey is home to 24 federally qualified health centers, with more than 130 locations around the state that provide a full range of medical, dental and preventive healthcare services for more than 2.1 million patients a year. They provide a medical home for 590,000 individuals in our state, including many who are among our most vulnerable, including those uninsured and underinsured.

These vulnerable populations are also disproportionately impacted by maternal morbidity, infant mortality, elevated childhood lead levels, asthma, diabetes and other chronic diseases. The theme of this year's National Health Center Week is Community Health Centers: Lighting the Way for Healthier Communities Today and in the Future. During this once in lifetime pandemic, they have stepped up in a big way to help New Jersey confront COVID-19 public health crisis. They have taken the lead in testing more than 80,000 people as of early August. They have made testing available since the beginning of the pandemic for our most vulnerable populations, including persons who experience homelessness, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, and people who are uninsured, underinsured, underserved, undocumented and living in urban centers. FQHCs have been testing in mobile vans, on site at farms and shelters, and in clinics throughout New Jersey. The seasonal farm workers have benefited from testing from the four FQHCs who serve them, Zufall Health Center, Complete Care Health Network, Ocean Health Initiatives and Southern Jersey Family Medical Centers. As of August 12th, more than 4,780 seasonal farmworkers have been tested.

The department has also included persons experiencing homelessness among its vulnerable population strategy. We are in the early stages of a pilot program to provide point-of-care testing to this population. Point-of-care testing is testing is recommended for people experiencing homelessness due to the transient nature of the community. The department is collaborating with our FQHCs and local health departments in shelters on this program. To date, we have run two pilots and have tested 244 individuals in Trenton, Ewing, Camden, and Patterson at our homeless shelters. Interestingly, all individuals have tested negative. We will scale up testing in other regions of the state for this population using federal funding.

Moving on to my daily report, our hospitals, as the Governor shared, reported 592 hospitalizations with 111 individuals in critical care. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children.

However, we are also reporting 484 new cases. That is a slight uptick over the past two days. We are not reporting any significant outbreaks in this regard, but are watching increases in counties with over 25 new cases. That's Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Essex, Gloucester, Hudson, Middlesex and Passaic. The children affected by multisystem inflammatory syndrome have either tested positive for COVID-19 or are positive for antibodies in this regard.

Of the nine deaths we are reporting today, five occurred in August, four occurred in July. The veterans homes and the psychiatric hospitals, their numbers all remain the same.

Our percent positivity in the state as of August 8th is 2.09. The North is 1.90, Central 1.82, and the Southern part of the state reports 2.64. That concludes my daily update. Stay connected and stay safe. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for everything. Two things, one related to what you mentioned and maybe one, would love you to give 30 seconds if you could on an unrelated topic. The final guidance as it relates to education in schools is being hammered out outside of the health department, just it has to go through and this is obviously one we want to get exactly right. It's our guess, yours and my guess that by tomorrow latest that should be up, we would hope. Ed is kind of nodding his head over there.

Secondly, you were on, I know, with a bunch of representatives from Health and Human Services in the federal government. The topic of that was the so-called craft teams, which HHS, if a state raised its hand and said we'd welcome you to come in and sort of give you a whole of HHS assessment in certain parts of your state, and I think in our case it's Ocean and Atlantic counties. Any quick sense of what they're hoping to get out of that and more importantly, what we're hoping to get out of that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I met with five representatives from HHS. This is a team that comes in and does an assessment of what are a particular county's maybe hotspots, and they identified Ocean County as a place that they wanted to visit and look at our mitigation activities, how we're monitoring the county, how the local health department is doing, how we're doing with testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine. So I had an hour meeting with them this morning. I have to share that they were impressed with the work that the individual counties are doing and the state is doing as a whole. Extremely impressed with our contact tracing dashboard, which we're pretty proud of, and impressed with the amount of testing sites that we have within the state. They will do an assessment of Ocean County, give us their feedback, and we have asked them also to look at Atlantic County.

Governor Phil Murphy: Great, really well done and we thank Alex Azar and the HHS team for coming in. In fact, they picked Ocean County and we suggested, you know what? You need to contrast and suggested Atlantic County as well. We thank them. Again, thank you for your leadership. Pat, anything you've got on any topic, compliance, PPE, etc. but we've got some nasty weather coming, which I'd love you to hit as well if you wouldn't mind. Great to have you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thanks, Governor, good afternoon. With regard to Executive Order compliance over the past few days, Beach Haven Police Department responded to the Seashell Resort and Beach Club for a report of violations and they did observe several individuals not socially distance, not wearing a mask and did cite the owner. In Gloucester Township, Gloucester Township Police Department responded to a massive pool party that had been advertised on social media. They found approximately 270 partygoers there not socially distancing or wearing masks. Not only the owner was cited as was the party organizer. In Elizabeth, Elizabeth Police Department responded to lookers that reportedly had 300 to 400 people inside many without masks. The manager was cited. And in North Wildwood, a patron at Flip Flops Bar was cited. He was warned several times to put a mask on and did not and was subsequently cited.

With regards to the weather, you're correct, Governor. There's a flash flood warning in effect for 16 of our 21 counties. The heat index, especially in the Northeast counties, is expected to be over 100 degrees this afternoon. We have severe thunderstorm watches also in place, right on cue. There was the thunder here. It

was supposed to hit Trenton pretty nasty as well, so ready.nj.gov and 211 with regards to cooling centers or any unmet needs are the two best resources to walk anybody and prepare anybody for the afternoon weather that's coming. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, again, ready.nj.gov and the best number to call is 211 for cooling centers or beyond. I also wanted, I don't know where Dan Bryan has gone, but with Judy's and Ed's blessing, once the health guidance is up and official, I'd love it if we could get a chart up on Friday that just sort of shows that green, yellow, orange, red continuum by the six regions. And then also over time, a sort of bar chart would be great. So again, we'll be with you virtually tomorrow unless you hear otherwise, and together Friday at 1:00 p.m. And we have a big crowd here today, so I'd ask each and every one of you, Ashley, I think I am going to start with you if that's all right. Brendan's got the microphone, if you could keep it, both because of weather and because of time generally, thank you all. Ashley, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Ashley Balcerzak, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. Could you tell us a little bit more about this certification process? What are the specific health and safety standards districts must meet? If a district says they can't meet all the standards and submit a plan, does the state or DOE have to approve that plan?

Governor Phil Murphy: Can you get closer to the microphone, please?

Ashley Balcerzak, Bergen Record: Sure. Do you need me to repeat anything, or?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think I've got you so far.

Ashley Balcerzak, Bergen Record: Okay. So just how is the state going to handle this influx of plans with only a few weeks until school starts? Will there be support for parents who need childcare if their district is approved for all remote? What happens for the parents that have to work and there isn't anyone to watch their child?

Will districts that don't operate in person get less state aid, for instance, since their expenses may be lower than districts who have some in-person operation, and in-person districts may have extra expenses for PPE?

Governor Phil Murphy: One more, please.

Ashley Balcerzak, Bergen Record: Okay. The Willingboro plan seems like it could be quite expensive, reworking a whole HVAC system, barriers, PPE, etc. What happens if a district puts together this sort of plan but can't afford to implement it? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: So there's are a lot of different ones. I think Ashley, your first question is sort of what's the certification process? It includes, and I've got this in front of me -- again, this is still in final draft form -- it's six feet social distancing, face coverings, routine sanitization. There's a ventilation piece to this. I think, Dr. Hackett, you mentioned ventilation as part of yours. So some of these are as simple, and you also mentioned face coverings. Some of them, Kevin, correct me if I'm wrong here, are fairly simple fixes, and others are more complicated and take longer. And just as we did when we closed school in March and we reviewed each plan, that's the exact same process that's going on with Kevin and his team on reopening.

I'm not sure we've gotten anything new for you on childcare but obviously we've said from the get go, and childcare, remember, we went from full childcare, then we skinned it down to essential workers only, and then we reopened childcare back up. We recognize the fact and I think both your question on childcare and the fact of whether or not it's a key issue, correct me if I'm wrong here as well, where you've got two income households that have no choice and if your system is in virtual mindset, I would just say this, we're going to work with each of those districts, both financially and as well as sort of going through their checklist. I don't think there's a whole lot more to add to that.

In Willingboro, your question was basically it could cost a fair amount of money. And the answer is yes, similar answer. We're working with the districts. It is another, so we'll be there with them as a state but it's another opportunity and thank you for giving it to me to shout out, I'm glad we're able to borrow. We need federal direct cash assistance for exactly the sort of discussion that we're talking about today. There's

nothing frivolous. States put money, counties put money, communities put money, Mayor will agree with me, on the street faster than any other entity, private sector or otherwise. It's another reason why we need – we'll be there as a state for these districts. We need more federal cash ASAP. Thank you. Elise.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Hello. How many districts have indicated that they'll be remote only, and do you have any estimates on how many students affected? For instance, has any district just flat out raised their hand and said, there's no way we can do this and we definitely have to go remote?

Also, how often must districts certify? What happens if they run out of supplies or personnel, and no longer can guarantee a safe environment? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Kevin, you'll correct me if I'm wrong here. The vast majority of districts have at least a hybrid, some form of in-person education. I don't have the answer. Do you know how many that are full remote?

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: So we're just receiving the plans now.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, we're just getting these in so we're a little bit in the middle of the game right now. What's your sense of the proportion right now?

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: Vast, vast majority are hybrid, and there's a select number that have come in remote only, or requesting that as was pointed out earlier, but by and large, these are hybrid plans.

Governor Phil Murphy: And how many students are impacted? Can you bear with us on that? Because it's again, a work in progress so we could probably give you an interim number, which we'll get to you. Dan, wherever you are, you'll make sure of that. Zakiya, do you have to have a number? Okay, Zakiya says thank you but we'll still get back to Elise. I'll play the middleman on that one. How often are districts going to need to certify, Kevin, in terms of things like PPE, etc.?

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: So there's an initial certification that will be required before the school year starts. Other than that, it's just going to be continued monitoring throughout the year and coordination with our county offices. So it's one point in time certification, then it's continued engagement.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's an important point and Kevin, if I say this differently, or either of the superintendents can correct me if I'm wrong here. We do portray this, it's our fault, that this is like we're in some intense process in March when you close. We're in an intense process in September when you open and we don't speak to each other in between. That's just not the nature of the beast here. There's constant communication at all levels.

East Brunswick Public School Superintendent Dr. Victor Valeski: Yes, Governor you're exactly right. It's what I call continuous improvement. We look at every day, and how do we improve upon the plan that we had yesterday based on circumstances that have changed overnight? I think our mindset is going to be that and as we encounter situations with staffing, or unfortunately we got ahead of the game with PPE, we started to order early. We started warehousing that. We are limited, though, by vendors who have said we're going to be distributed only certain amounts of PPE per week, but we think we got far enough ahead and stockpiled that we're going to be in good shape. But any condition, that could change, could change us overnight.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, the principles, let's repeat the principle. I'm going to add, particularly today, with today's statements. It's health and safety above all else. It's high quality education. It's equity, to Ashley's question about maybe remind everybody, not every family can do the same things as another family. And it's flexibility. I think those are the sort of four that continue to guide us. I would almost add iterative here, because as Dr. Fauci would remind us, Judy and Ed, we don't dictate the terms. The virus dictates the terms. We can do whatever we can and have done to mitigate against it, but we're dealing with something that sets its own rules. So thank you. Carly. Is that you? I can't see. Hello.

Carly Sitrin, Politico: Hi, thanks, Governor. On your last point about equity, the DOE's latest estimates show 230,000 kids in New Jersey lack access to the internet or devices for online learning. In Patterson this week, we learned that 13,000 Chromebooks will not be delivered for another month and we heard from

Superintendent Hackett who said her district is experiencing the same. What do you plan to do for schools that are not ready to reopen in person, but experience concerns about remote learning as well?

Assemblywoman Jasey today is calling for districts to delay school start dates to give teachers and staff additional time to be trained to teach more effectively virtually. Will that be allowed?

And the other day you showed a video clip from vox.com illustrating how the coronavirus spreads indoors at a restaurant. Wouldn't the same principle apply to schools, especially when kids and teachers are eating indoors, and knowing that many school buildings in the state lack adequate HVAC systems, ventilation and windows that open?

Governor Phil Murphy: So on the equity point and the access to the internet and the devices, we are pounding away. You're absolutely right. Dr. Hackett mentioned this. It's a frustration for many of us. You know, we have committed the dollars we need to close the digital divide, which is both devices and access. But you know, in this environment particularly, you cannot turn on a dime. Kevin may want to come in and give some more details on that.

I think based on what -- I didn't see what Assemblywoman Jasey has said, and she's been a giant on the educational front. I think if you're saying that schools should be given the opportunity to delay, I think we're saying yes, the answer to that is yes, assuming it's justified. Assuming there's a rationale associated with it, there's a game plan that's being put in place. I think Dr. Hackett walked through why that first marking period is not going to happen in Willingboro but why she's got -- and I don't want to speak for her, but you should weigh in Dr. Hackett, that November 19th is the date as we sit here today. What is today, August 12th? That looks like a reasonable date for you to be open for business.

And yes, ventilation we've already mentioned. I think you mentioned again, I don't want to keep putting -- you should speak for yourself, Dr. Hackett, but ventilation is one of your challenges, but let's remember one other thing. I think Dr. Valeski mentioned that you wouldn't be in the cafeteria eating and there's a reason. There's a big difference between restaurants and education, putting aside that going to a restaurant is a volitional step, getting our kids educated is our responsibility, period. So I'll put that bigger reason aside. You do not have your mask on by definition if you're eating or drinking. But again ventilation, that's not to say ventilation is not an issue. Dr. Hackett, please.

Willingboro Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Neely Hackett: Thank you, Governor. Yes, ventilation is an issue for Willingboro and we are currently researching appropriate ways that we can alleviate the problem, but we also believe by November heat will be less of an issue and that the ventilation would not be such a great concern, but we are looking at ways to do things to decrease that issue. That is definitely a major problem.

We do have the devices and the protection devices. We did start ordering early as well, but because we need so many our goal is to give every student two per month, which I said earlier would be 8,000 per month. It's making back orders very concerning for us. But we did start ordering early as well to prepare. It's just the number that we need at this point. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Let's use this -- Dr. Hackett, thank you -- as an opportunity to remind everybody, particularly when the weather allows outdoors a lot better than inside. So anything, any district, any school could do out of doors, is less risky for the virus than indoors. Kevin, real quick on access or devices.

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: Sure, we released the Digital Divide Grant Program. The initial phase of that has already been submitted by most of the districts that were eligible and we're going through that now. We're also reviewing in partnership with EDA a lot of information that was submitted through their RFI process with a good deal of information. We're going to see what we can do to dig through that and see if there's anything we can do to mitigate these delays in delivery of devices.

Governor Phil Murphy: Kevin, thank you. Thank you, Carly. Alex, please.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Reporter: On borrowing, what happens next? Can you walk us through the process? You have a speech scheduled, I believe for August 25? Will you be delivering it in person? When do these bonds actually go out and what kind of market do you think there'll be for them if you go on to the bond market? And I know that you speak frequently about how you don't get up in the morning wanting to do this; you are doing it. What's your reaction to the fact that there are New Jerseyans who haven't been born yet who will be paying off this debt and that future governors will have to grapple with this problem since the bonds will be paid off for the next 35 years, potentially?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, there's also New Jerseyans that haven't been born yet whose parents were trying to keep alive so that the kids can be born. So this is a pandemic, unlike anything that's ever happened to us before. It's a fiscal crisis unlike anything that's ever happened. Again, we only compare this to the Great Depression and the Civil War, and those were both big deals as far as I can recall. So I don't wake up wanting to borrow, but we're also in a corner and we've got to be there for our residents at their hour, darkest hour of need.

Very modest things to say about what's next other than I'm gratified by the decision. It was unanimous, which I think is important. I do deliver a budget by August 25th. We haven't decided whether that'll be in person or not. The one thing I think the Supreme Court stipulated which was the whole reason we started this process is I have to certify, in the budget which we would have done anyway, that the reason to borrow, any borrowings are because of implications from the pandemic. And other than that, there's the process, the grinding of the wheels in our Treasury under Liz Muoio's leadership that will get the process going in earnest. I don't have a whole lot more to add other than sooner is better than later, and again, that's all related to the budget which again, I'll be submitting, if my math is right, Judy, within the next 13 days. Matt, are you good with that? Anything? Okay. Thanks, Alex. You good, sir? Okay, let's go back to Nikita and then we'll come down to you, Brent.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. So on school cafeterias, I know that East Brunswick plan isn't going to have them use it but the guidance, as far as I'm aware, doesn't bar their use and kids aren't going to be able to wear masks while they're eating either, so how exactly is that different to indoor dining? And why is their use allowed while indoor dining is still banned?

And then I was wondering if you had a take on President Donald Trump's nominee for the Ambassador to Germany, Douglas McGregor, he's faced some criticism over anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim statements, among other things.

Governor Phil Murphy: I can certainly say I wasn't expecting that but I do have an answer. Your question on eating meals is why is this so different than indoor dining?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: By the way, I commend everyone to read, the New York Times is not with us today, there's an article in today's paper, *The Cost of Dining Out This Summer*. I recommend everyone reading that article, *The Cost of Dining Out This Summer*. So with all due respect to everybody who wants to get us back yesterday to being indoors and dining indoors and getting in bars, I want to get there too. The places that have done it have paid a big price in terms of this virus, so this is not just willy nilly.

Kevin, any comments on -- I heard very clearly Dr. Valeski's, I thought good words on student lunches and how the cafeteria is going to work or not going to work. Anything you want to add to that?

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: Sure. Within our guidance, and this has been put out since June and has been refined since then and further discussed, there's a lot of planning that school districts can do with cohorting and social distancing within their spaces. Kids have the ability to eat in a room with the same kids, and it's the difference with dining with the public. There's quite a few reasons why in the school system it is different and by and large, it's the ability to plan and all of this opportunity that districts have had to adjust to that.

Governor Phil Murphy: And again, I know the superintendents and Kevin know this, I'm going to beat a dead horse here, is if you can get outside, lunch is a classic example where you don't even have the instructional element, Mayor, right? You can just get outside, get some fresh air, but not today. I just got word from the

Board of Public Utilities, Ocean County right now is getting crushed by these thunderstorms. There are already 66,000 outages since we sat here a short while ago.

I don't know the person, but I don't like what I've heard and that includes, I have to say, from two very senior retired members of our military, two extraordinary leaders. It's not pretty. And so again, I don't know the person. I'm told that he is a fluent German speaker, which is a good thing. But between anti-Semitic comments, the sort of rush to judgment in his role way back when, pre-Iraq war, the data points are not comforting. Beyond that, I don't have much to add but thank you for asking.

We're going to come down to Brent. Again, if you could make sure we try pick this up, just because I'm worried about the weather toppling us here at the moment. Go ahead. Brent.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Why didn't you choose to just declare statewide that all schools should go remote as you did in the spring? And are you setting up weeks of confusion for parents here as they wait to hear what their school districts will do? Two, who has to review the school's plans to open remotely and will the state simply accept every district's assessment that it cannot open, or will the state tell some schools that it believes they are ready and must open? And can districts that have already submitted hybrid plans go back?

One more for me and one from Dan Munoz. What is your reaction to the Big 10 presidents voting to postpone fall sports and the college football season at Rutgers for the first time in more than a century?

And from Dan Munoz, have you read the letter from the Business Coalition calling for you to lift more business closings, or at least do it on a county-by-county basis? What is your reaction and do you think you'll allow indoor dining and gyms to open by the end of the summer, by the end of the year? Any idea when?

Governor Phil Murphy: You do talk fast, Brent, I give you credit for that. Remote, I say with great respect, why wouldn't you just say go remote all, does it plant confusion? Does the DOE and Kevin and his team sort of rubber stamp these? The answer is no to all of the above. If I heard Kevin right, the overwhelming amount of plans that have been submitted so far envision some sort of at least hybrid experience. So that's the so-called market at the moment. This is the opposite of confusion. Again, health and safety, educational experience, equity, flexibility. This is, in my judgment, a big step and I give Kevin and the Supers and others associated with this a lot of credit for the flexibility they're showing.

And again, this is an iterative process. We didn't start out two months ago thinking, given where the data was then, Judy, that we had to be all masks for kids, all the time. We now in our deliberations believe strongly that that is the case. It must be the case. We did not start out two months ago with a decision we announced a month ago that parents, if they wanted the choice to have their child learn remotely, that that was available. We did not start out two months ago but promised we would listen and have discussions about whether or not we would give the same flexibility to districts that we were giving to parents in terms of the remote option.

I think this is basically as we had predicted. This was going to go along the path and we have the ultimate objective of getting some form of in-person education, but to do it safely and responsibly, and at the right time. And as we sit here on August 12th, to repeat, Dr. Hackett and her team and the Mayor and others have determined the first grading period they can't justify a safe and responsible return, but their objective is November 19th when that second grading period begins. That's their objective and we're going to work with them in the meantime.

And it's not a rubber stamp. I mean, this is an iterative -- Kevin, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but the reason we asked for these is not to check a box. Zakiya I think would agree here, right? We take these completely seriously through the Department of Education with input from Judy and Ed and their teams. Is that fair? I don't want to put words in your mouth. Kevin is saying yes.

Big 10, I'm not surprised. I mean, my heart breaks for the young men and women who won't have that season this fall. They've left open the possibility, as I understand it, to play those sports in the spring. Zakiya, I believe that's accurate, but I'm not surprised. I mean, particularly when you add the element of travel, and it's not just traveled between, you know, Bergen County and Middlesex County, we're talking about travel across state

lines and in some cases, including travel into states that are having real challenges with this. Again, my heart breaks for the student athletes. Hopefully we get, please God we get to the point where those, it's not just a hope but it's an actuality that that those sports are played in the spring.

The Business Coalition, I read the -- listen, I'd say a couple things. Number one, what that Coalition said versus the day-to-day interaction that our team has with the members of those coalitions, in many cases there's a fair amount of daylight, I'll be diplomatic, between what that letter said and what we hear from the individual members of that Coalition.

And secondly, again, I have nothing but sympathy for the economic chaos and crushing reality this pandemic has led to with so many small businesses, individuals who are out of work, there's no lacking of sympathy. But the fact of the matter is public health creates economic health and we've seen what's happened in other states. We saw what was beginning to reemerge in this state and we took action, not with any joy, but Judy and we decided indoor gatherings had to come down. Pat and colleagues determined enforcement had to be even stronger, that we had to use the bully pulpit.

We're still in the midst of this and with all due respect to folks who see only the economic health side of this, they're not seeing the whole picture. I say again, with great respect, if you don't factor in public health, you will never get the economic health that you aspire to. Let's stop kidding ourselves. We've got to break the back of this virus. That is job number one and only then do we get the economic health that we all aspire to including yours truly, I hope indoor dining comes, and gyms come under certain, I suspect, heavily capacity constrained constrictions. I hope it comes sooner than later.

I was asked the other day, did I think we needed a vaccine? Please God, no, I hope it comes a long time before that. I'm actually speaking with the CEO of Moderna right after this press conference, by the way, speaking of vaccines, but public health creates economic health. And if you only look at it from the economic health side of that, you will forever be disappointed because you will never achieve the economic health that those very folks aspire to, that I do as well, but we need to create the backbone of public health first.

Sir -- we've got you, sir. We will get to you, I promise you. We may have to push dinner back, but we'll --

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. Will districts be allowed to resubmit virtual plans if they've already --

Governor Phil Murphy: The answer is yes. I meant to say that earlier. Kevin. I assume if a district has submitted with today's step, you'll allow them to resubmit. The answer is yes. I apologize for not saying that earlier.

Reporter: Okay. And when will the state finalize approval of all plans?

Moving on to rentals and tenants, how many reports of evictions, foreclosures has the administration received and which agency is responsible for doing what if there is an illegal eviction?

How are families and educators to feel being told that it is potentially safe for them to return to in-school instruction in some districts and not others?

Governor Phil Murphy: Say that again?

Reporter: How are families and educators to feel being told it is potentially safe for them to return to in-school instruction in some districts and not others? And if numbers do not improve or regress, do you see a chance that you will amend your order further before school starts?

Governor Phil Murphy: Real quick, resubmit we already hit. When are the final plans reviewed, Kevin?

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: So we'll review them as they come in as quickly as we can. I don't have a specific timeframe. As we just said, some will be going back to resubmit, so we're going to work on them as quickly as we possibly can through our county teams.

Governor Phil Murphy: Evictions, foreclosures, I want to remind everybody that there's a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures that is in place until at least two months after the public emergency has been declared over. I don't have a specific number on what we're dealing with, but we'll make sure we get back to you, Dan Bryan. DCA is the department.

How should folks feel about different districts dealing with this in different ways? That's the reality of the state we're in. We've said this many times. We have no two districts that are alike. Some may be broadly similar, but each one has its own uniqueness. Look at East Brunswick and Willingboro, to pick two great communities with different realities. It's not a coincidence that we have two great leaders from those school districts with us today. I think that's just a fact.

Judy has, again, the health guidance is in the final stages of approval and God willing, it'll be up in lights by tomorrow. We'll show you a little bit more color. I think Judy has enunciated sort of a regional notion that we've used in other public health realities. You mentioned the flu, it would be measles, whatever it might be in the past, that regionalization has tended to work well from the Department of Health standpoint and we see no reason why it can't work well here.

And do we reserve the right if the numbers go south? I think is the genesis of your last question. The answer is yes, sadly, we have to. Again, remember as Dr. Fauci reminds us, the pandemic dictates the terms, not us mere mortals. Thank you. Sir, back there. I know you've got one or two, please.

Reporter: Thank you, Governor. I was at Newark Airport interviewing passengers who arrived from all over the world on Monday. And according to the CDC, if you look at their map, I think there are only two countries in the entire world that they do not label as high risk.

Governor Phil Murphy: Two countries in what, sorry?

Reporter: There are only two countries on their map that are not labeled as high risk. Are you concerned and are you keeping statistics and do you know how many COVID cases are attributable to international arrivals? The most recent stat available is from May and more than 13,000 arrivals just at Newark Airport alone.

My other two questions are for the superintendents. Are you concerned at all about liability? What are your attorneys telling you and what role did that play in your decision?

And number three, on an average school day, a nurse's office in a school is overwhelmed, even pre-COVID. Have you made any particular plans to supplement help for nurses in your school districts? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't have an answer on passengers, but I guarantee the numbers in May bear no semblance to the numbers in August. We can come back to you though and give you those numbers. I also ask regularly to look at the international flights into Newark Liberty and the frequency and the number of countries they are coming from. That list has narrowed dramatically. And so I'm not saying we don't take it lightly and Judy's going to want me to say that we take the same care with someone coming in from a high risk country as we would with a high risk state.

I'll answer your first question of the superintendents on their behalf. You heard our principles: health and safety, high quality education, equity, flexibility, liability was not on the list. I'll let them speak for themselves but in particular, this question about school nurses is a good one and we get asked this a lot. I'll ask Kevin, any comment and then very quickly ask Kevin, Dr. Hackett and Dr. Valeski to give us a quick thought on that. Kev.

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: With nurses we've been working with the Nursing Association and trying to find ways to go outside the box to find additional support within our schools outside of the traditional school nurse certification. That's something we're working closely with the School Nurses Association, to help alleviate that shortage.

Willingboro Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Neely Hackett: Thank you. So we also have a nursing agency for substitute nurses to assist us. We also have the pandemic response team, which is a requirement to help train our students on various protocols for health, and we also have a safety team to assist our nurse. So we are galvanizing our entire staff to assist in training our students on health and safety protocols to prevent visits to the nurse's office.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Dr. Valeski.

East Brunswick Public School Superintendent Dr. Victor Valeski: Just to reaffirm what Dr. Hackett and Governor Murphy said, our nurses will be supplemented by an isolation room that's located in each of our schools as required by The Road Back plan. And we have required that parents have a family member who

can respond to the school within 30 minutes to pick up a child who is symptomatic.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you both. Outages, by the way Pat, already down from 66,000 to 42,000 in Ocean County as we sit here, so I don't know what you're doing, but you've got magic over there. Mike, is that you? Okay, Mike and then Dave. One more time.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: My questions have been asked and answered. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, please slip Mike \$100 bill please. Mike, I'll never forget that.

David Matthau, 101.5: Thanks, Governor. We've talked before and you mentioned that daycare centers are open. Again, we've talked about this as a possible problem. But have you given any thought or is there any discussion on a state level or perhaps with the counties about trying to really do something? Because you're talking about a lot of parents, especially with this situation may change with school, you know, the kids may have to be at home alone or the parents have to go to work. So should the district's perhaps think about trying to do some kind of cooperative with the parents associations, the groups, to try to have some kind of childcare help? Governor, what are your thoughts about this?

With regard to the school plans if a school meets health and safety standards, can they still opt to start the school year remotely or do they have to go hybrid? Do they have a choice? If a school does not meet the standards, how much time do they get to meet the standards? Is there a limit? Is there a deadline? If not, why not?

And final question perhaps for Judy and/or Ed, with regard to spot positivity. I think a lot of people assume you know, today the spot positivity rate is 2.09, I believe. So probably that means like 2% of everybody who's getting tested is positive for COVID-19. But is that the case? Is it more complicated than that? I had a brief conversation with Dr. Lifshitz before we started and apparently it's rather convoluted. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, nothing new on daycare other than we all agree that if you've got, particularly either a single parent or two parent income households, daycare is an important backbone. And as I said earlier, we will be there, whether it is literally policy, although we've reopened daycare from essential workers now to the broader community for now two or three months, but also financially, the state and the feds.

Two things about this. School plans, there has to be a rationale associated with not opening, at least in hybrid, and that's a decision that Kevin and his team with input from the Department of Health make. There's got to be a reason for it. I think the word reasonable would be a word that would describe Kevin and his team and Judy and inputs. We won't take any health risks but tie goes to the runner sort of notion here. And there does need to be a date. We need to understand what the shortcomings are and when you expect them to be addressed. Is that fair, Kevin? I don't want to put words in your mouth but that date is something that we need to work with the district on. Ventilation is a lot different reality than getting face masks, but Kevin, anything you want to add?

Interim Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer: That's right, so districts will identify the date by which they think they can address that issue, and then make good faith effort in the interim towards that, and we'll work through our teams to make sure that they are making a good faith effort towards that goal.

Governor Phil Murphy: So, Dave, on your last question, spot positivity today 2.09% as of August, tests taken on August 8. I do think I'll let Ed and Judy come in for the last word. I'm not sure I'd use the word convoluted, but that is directionally, at least, what the facts are, which is plus or minus 98% of the people who are getting tested these days are coming out negative, and that is plus or minus the reality. I don't know if Ed, you want to add anything to that.

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: I've been told I have a remarkable ability to take a very simple concept and make it sound very complex. Let me apologize for that. As the Governor said, yes, what we do is we just take one day's worth of data and we look at every test that was done on that day, and then we see the results on that one day. What we do is we go back four days, because that gives us enough time to get those results back. Today, which is August 12, what we've done is we looked at every test that was done on August 8, and if it was positive it counted as a positive, if it was negative it was counted as a negative, and it's just a percentage of all those tests that were done on August 8th.

Governor Phil Murphy: And we usually on the dashboard, it says this, it does say the date that they're associated with. I'd love to be able to say they were as of yesterday or today, there's always been a lag of a few days. But it's pretty real, Dave. It's pretty real time.

With that I'm going to mask up and give a lot of thanks here to Judy and Ed for being here every day. Pat, to you and your team and a treat to have Interim Commissioner Kevin Dehmer with us today. Kevin, thank you to everything you and your extraordinary team are doing. These are challenging moments and you're doing a great job. To two great superintendents, Dr. Neely Hackett from Willingboro, again, one of our state's great communities. Thank you, Dr. Hackett and likewise East Brunswick, an iconic community and Superintendent Dr. Victor Valeski. Thank you, sir, for being here today. I also want to give another big shout out to Willingboro Mayor, Mayor Tiffani Worthy. Thank you, Mayor, for everything you do. Zakiya Smith Ellis, the whole team with us today, I say thank you.

Again, we're going to continue to listen. We're going to continue to be flexible. Let's remember, this is a virus that dictates the terms. We can do a significant amount to mitigate it but at the end of the day, it is the boss and so this is something that we're doing our best on August 12th as we did on June 12th to predict what things will be looking like three or four weeks from now and we will do our very best to do just that. So whether it's the flexibility that we gave a month or so ago to parents to allow your child to remote learn, or the step we took last week on face coverings for all kids, or today to say to districts assuming they've got a rationale and the plan supports their decision to be remote for a period of time so that they can safely and responsibly, ultimately at a date certain, reopen. That's another step in flexibility. Again, let's remember health and safety, high quality education, equity. Not every family, not every district, not every school is the same and around all of that, flexibility.

To each and every one of you out there, thank you for your patience. Thank you for your compliance. Thank you for overwhelmingly doing the right thing. Again, we'll be with you virtually tomorrow and unless you hear otherwise, we'll be back with you at 1:00 p.m. on Friday. God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

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[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](/governor/initiatives/#Education)

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