

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: June 26th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon and welcome. I'm joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. She has brought with her the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz, Ed's in the front row today. Thank you for being here. Another guy who needs no introduction, on my far left, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Patrick Callahan. And today, we're joined by two special guests, a guy to the left who is another very familiar face, the Commissioner of the Department of Education, Dr. Lamont Repollet, great to have you. To my far right, a treat to have the Superintendent of the Mount Olive Public Schools in Morris County, Dr. Robert Zywicki with us. Great to have you with us, Doc.

Pat, this is for you. I go back to April 11th, and this is for you and Dr. Zywicki. I said the following at our press conference that day, which by the way was Easter Saturday, and right around our peak, Judy, literally as bad as it got, right around then. Colonel Callahan went over to Warren Hills High School near his home and where his own kids went, were students and faculty members from there and nearby Mount Olive High School, assembled 15,000 face shields that will be donated to our healthcare workers. These two schools are often rivals on the playing field and in the gym but today, they showed how we're all coming together to help others. Hats off to you. That begins with great leadership.

As we have noted of late, the Department of Education is releasing its guidance regarding the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 school year. Our schools and our kids and educators just concluded the most unprecedented school year in the most unprecedented of times. For three months, we asked our school



communities to work together through remote learning. We asked our students to maintain their studies against a myriad of challenges outside of their classrooms and for our educators to rise to the challenge. We deputized parents and caregivers to be surrogate educators. And overwhelmingly, they all rose to that challenge.

Now with these unprecedented final months of the school year behind us, our focus turns to what will be an equally unprecedented start to the 2020-2021 school year. And as with any learning experience, it started with listening. For weeks, the department has engaged in regular contact with educators and stakeholders. It has conducted numerous site visits and held weekly stakeholder meetings and discussions with a standing committee of nearly two dozen superintendents, including, I might add, Dr. Zywicki. In total, the department listened to roughly 50 education and community organizations and more than 300 superintendents, and surveyed nearly 300,000 parents and guardians. We are extremely grateful to everyone who has been part of this process, and that Dr. Repollet and his team could do it all in such a compressed timeframe is more than commendable. Well done.

So yes, we have every expectation that our kids will return to their schools come September. The guidance we are releasing today, after listening to all those voices and all those perspectives, comes with one overarching requirement: that our public schools will be open for in-person instruction and operations, in some capacity, with the health of students, their families and educators being the top priority. Now, as I mentioned, and I can't overstate this with enough emphasis. I mentioned at yesterday's briefing and I want to repeat it today, there is no one-size-fits-all approach that we could possibly take. Our state has 577 public school districts, not to mention our charter and Renaissance schools, non-public and parochial schools, and other specialized places of learning. We must take into account the many geographic, demographic, and economic differences which exist among our schools and education communities, which can each vary greatly, even among neighbors.

As Dr. Zywicki, I assume, could attest, what works in Mount Olive won't necessarily work across the line in say a Hackettstown or Chester, or vice versa, let alone in Newark, or Hillsborough, or regional. We could go on and on. The ability to make local decisions has always been a hallmark of education in New Jersey and it still is.

Now while the guidance outlines the standards that every school should expect to be conditional for reopening, it also comes with the flexibility that individual district superintendents and boards of education, working obviously with their school communities will, need to ensure an effective implementation strategy that meets the unique needs of their students, their faculty and staffs and their families. And it also comes with additional items for districts to consider, but which will not be mandated.

Certainly, our guidance has been informed by both the latest data and the recommendations from the Department of Health under Judy's leadership, as has every step down our road back. However, the most vital input came directly from our school communities. I will leave it to Dr. Repollet and Dr. Zywicki to speak in greater detail to the guidance we are releasing today and how it will work for districts, but I will speak to the principles which lay at its base, and those principles are fourfold.

First, ensuring a conducive and open atmosphere for learning. Secondly, supporting our educational leaders in their planning. Thirdly, exploring the necessary backing to our schools through policy and funding. And finally, securing the continuity of learning in the new school year.

In our classrooms, as with outside of them, social distancing will be our guiding principle. Every effort must be taken to ensure proper social distancing of students within their classrooms, whether by rearranging the locations of desks and tables, or other modifications to the classroom layout. Where it can be done, overall class sizes should be limited to more easily reach the standards of social distancing. For some of our larger districts, we recognize that the sheer number of students in a building may make it impractical for all students to be in their schools at once. And for these districts, we are providing them with the flexibility to rearrange their school schedules to allow for grouping or cohorting of students, or by implementing hybrid learning environments in which students receive both in-person and remote instruction.

And where remote learning will continue for some students, this guidance stresses that each school district should work in advance to ensure that every student has a device and available internet connectivity. And it also identifies available funding streams districts can tap into, to ensure access to technology and

connectivity.

Moreover, as we cannot predict the future, districts must be prepared for the possibility that public health could require another switch to all remote learning at any time. That is because protecting everyone continues to be our top priority. The effort to ensure social distancing will extend to other aspects of the school day as well, including cafeteria and recess schedules, and what student activities will be discouraged, such as close reading circles, because of their inherent inability to promote social distancing.

Throughout our school facilities, all faculty and staff and all visitors will be required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit individual health as per CDC recommendations. Students will be strongly encouraged to wear face coverings and will be required to do so when social distancing cannot be maintained, whether that be in the classroom, or in the hallways, or in between belts.

Again, we recognize the challenge this may pose for younger students, for certain students with special needs, or for those for whom wearing a face covering is discouraged because of a health condition. And all schools will work with their custodial staffs, the unsung heroes, by the way, of our frontlines, in implementing procedures for proper daily building sanitation and disinfection. This will go far beyond the restrooms, cafeterias and common areas, but also into each and every classroom, every gym and every locker or changing room.

The same will go for the buses that transport our students and districts will be required to work with their in-district drivers or private sector transportation contractors to ensure all vehicles are properly cleaned on a daily basis. And, while on a bus, if social distances cannot be maintained, then drivers must ensure that students are wearing face coverings.

We are releasing this guidance today so districts can have the entirety of the summer break to plan and prepare. These restart plans will be done collaboratively at the local level with parents, students, staff and local associations and district leaders working together. Nothing should be left to the last minute, and no one should receive an answer of "we're unsure" or "we're unaware" to their questions. And we fully expect that districts will share their preliminary scheduling plans, especially as they pertain to any changes in school schedules, at least one month before the first day of school, so families can have the time they need to plan ahead where necessary, but to also have confidence that every measure for protecting our educational communities is being taken.

As I noted, this guidance sets the baseline of standards that must be met in order to ensure the health and safety of students, educators, support staff, and our communities. It is a toolkit for schools to use as they develop their individualized plans and where appropriate, we expect schools to work with their local health departments.

Yes, there will be hurdles to overcome in a short period of time, but our schools have always proven themselves up to the challenges before them. Just look, for example, how they performed throughout these past three months. And with this guidance in hand, guidance that is the product, by the way, of listening to literally thousands of voices, we have every confidence that come September, our students will walk into the best public schools in the nation, along with superb private and parochial schools, which are fully prepared for their return, and into classrooms led by educators and support staff who will welcome them with open arms into safe and healthy learning environments.

Again, I know that Lamont and Dr. Zywicki will each have more to say on this in a few minutes, and again, I thank the Commissioner and his team for their hard work and I think Dr. Zywicki and his colleagues across the state, along with everyone who took part in this process.

I want to say one thing before we turn to the overnight numbers. I mentioned that we have to have at our ready a plan to flip a switch, to hit the emergency brake, we have no choice. I also mentioned at the outset some remarks I gave in homage to Pat and Mount Olive School District and Dr. Zywicki on April 11, which was just about the amount of time that is from April 11 to today, as between today and day one of the school year. And who could have possibly predicted on April 11th, Judy, where we would be on June 26th? Good, bad and otherwise, including the loss of over 13,000 members of our New Jersey family. And equally. with equal passion. I will say we're happy to answer your questions. By the way. I can't give you the unending list of questions today, I'm going to ask you to limit it to one or two at most. But we're happy to answer your

questions. We'll give you as much of a sense of what we think the day or two after Labor Day looks like, but keep in mind that reality of where we were on April 11th when I last talked about Mount Olive to today, June 26th, and the gap between June 26th and what will be early September. We do not know all the answers.

Look at Florida with 9,000 positive tests in one day. Look at a positivity rate in Arizona which is now, Judy, at 20% and growing, and we wish nothing but please God, we pray and we hope that they each get their states, along with others that are having flare ups, under control. We are still in the fight. We are still in the war. We have come a long, long, long way in New Jersey, but we've had to go through hell to get here and we will do everything we can to stay in a good place.

And I'll say this in a few minutes, we're going to announce 44 more fatalities. We are not in the end zone. We're not out of the woods. And we all, all parents out there, all kids, all educators, administrators, members of the press, all of us, we have to look in the mirror and remember, this is the fight of our lives and while we've come a long way, we are still in it. And as much as this is an incredibly impressive document, and the work has been extraordinary, we have to leave all options on the table.

So with that, yesterday we received another 524 positive tests, the cumulative total is now 170,584. The daily spot positivity rate is back down again and that's a good thing, 2.1%, these are for tests recorded on Monday. The rate of transmission clicked down a hair from 0.88 to 0.86 and again, those are directions we want to continue to see going here. As we have noted practically every day over the past month, both the spot positivity rate and the RT, or rate of transmission, as well as new hospitalizations are the three most important indicators of COVID-19 spread. And together, folks, millions of you have done extraordinary work to push these numbers down and to keep them down. But we cannot let up with our social distancing. We cannot see these numbers spike back. We have to stay away from each other as best we can, wear our face coverings, wash our hands with soap and water. If you don't feel well, stay back.

Every New Jerseyan, by the way, alongside this should go out and get tested. Everyone should know if they're carrying the coronavirus, especially those -- especially those -- who may have been exposed and are asymptomatic, meaning they're unknowingly, unwittingly carrying the virus and at risk of spreading it to others who are more vulnerable.

There are now more than 250 locations across New Jersey to get a COVID-19 test, and I urge you to go to covid19.nj.gov/testing to find a location near you, then go there and get tested. And if 250 weren't enough, we've got two more, Judy, we're going to add. Two new testing opportunities to announce today. On Monday and Tuesday of next week, testing will be available at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Newark under the leadership of Reverend Jorge Acosta, and Wednesday through Friday, at Cityline Church in Jersey City under the leadership of dear friend, Bishop Joshua Rodriguez. At both locations, tests are free, and will be conducted between noon and 7:00 p.m. And again, I want to thank our tremendous partners at Interfaith Urgent Care for working with us and with the Cities of Newark and Jersey City, and with the leaders of both churches to set up these testing locations.

Remember, testing not only lets you know your COVID status, it gives us the much desperately needed data that we need to make the decisions regarding our restart and recovery. So in essence, you're not only helping yourself and your family by getting tested, you're helping us and frankly, all 9 million of us moving forward. Again, we have built the number one per capita testing capacity in the United States of America. Folks, go out there and use it.

Okay, in our hospitals as of last night, the number of patients with COVID-19 implications, 1,118, the number of patients in intensive care 234, ventilators in use, 206. By the way, both of those numbers are down from the day before. There were 59 new admissions of COVID-positive patients yesterday, while 114 live patients left our hospitals. And as we look at the overall two-week trends, we can see that we remain in a good place in the key metrics that we follow.

As we say, as we said a few days ago, while we know we will still see one-day jumps at times, the most important picture we get isn't that one snapshot. And Ed, I would hope, I know would agree with that. But this is a time series. That's what we really need, the rolling seven-day averages which are essential to look at. And we're still seeing a good picture overall here in New Jersey, and we continue to see our standing improve among all other states.

However, given the challenges that we're also seeing, as I mentioned, a rise in other states that means we need to continue to be vigilant to ensure that New Jersey does not fall back, and the only way we can is by taking personal responsibility for the overall health of our communities and to continue with social distancing and wearing a face covering.

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, today we are reporting, with the heaviest of hearts, an additional 44 lost lives among our COVID-19 confirmed positive residents, blessed brothers and sisters, and that total is now 13,060. And as we do every day, let's remember a few of those lives we've lost.

We begin by remembering this guy, Dominick Dickey Giordano, Jr., a lifelong resident of Madison, before he passed at the age of 83. After high school, he entered the army and served until 1962. When he returned home, two major things happened that changed his life. The first was that he met his future wife, Margie, and they remained inseparable until her passing last August, God bless her.

The second was his start in the restaurant business. For many years, Dickey was best known as the proprietor of Poor Herbie's restaurant and bar in Madison. Doc, I'm sure you went there more than once, I know I did. But his interest also reached to other nearby establishments, including the Widow Brown of Madison and the Pizza and Sandwich Bar of Caldwell. But wherever he went, he was never afraid of hard work, and he always made sure his customers left happy and full. That was to be expected, as Dickey was also widely known as quite simply a genuine, good-hearted gentleman.

Outside the restaurants, Dickey was also a Madison community leader and was a founding member of the North Star Athletic Club. Dickey is survived by four sisters Roseanne, Joanne, Patricia and Loretta and his brother Jimmy, along with cousins Gail and Bridget, and I had the great honor of speaking with Gail yesterday. He had nieces and nephews and friends, and of course satisfied customers who he left behind. We thank him for his service to our nation and to his community. And Dickey, may God bless you and watch over you.

Next, we're going down to South Jersey, the longtime home of Mary Davis Macconi of Stone Harbor and Pennsville. Raised as a Coal Miner's Daughter in a small town of Virginia's Southwestern Panhandle, Mary found her way to our side of the Delaware River, when she met her husband of over 50 years Horace, and spent 25 years teaching English at Penn's Grove Carney's Point High School. By the way, Horace was born in Boston, please don't hold that against him, and was a lifelong Red Sox fan and had Red Sox as his license plate. A brave man, among other things.

She was a beloved educator, but she was even more well known as the other half of the team alongside Horace, at Regis Amusement Center in Stone Harbor, known simply as The Arcade by the locals. Whether it be in the classroom or behind one of the counters at the arcade, Mary will be remembered as a passionate and loving woman who touched more lives than even she would know. She is survived by her daughters Gina, with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday, and Beth, and Beth's husband, Alan, along with her two grandchildren, Lindsay and Janae, and four great granddaughters. Mary is now reunited with her beloved Horace, as well as with her son, Richard, and I'm sure they're already making up for all the lost time.

By the way, Rigi's is Richard R-I and G-I from Gina, that's where that name comes from. To you, Mary, thank you for years of educating Salem County's children, and for the many years you gave to make everyone who visited Stone Harbor feel welcome. God bless you and watch over you.

And finally today, we remember Danilo Danny Bolima of Clifton. Danny was born in Manila in the Philippines and came to the United States in 1990 with a degree in nursing from the University of the City of Manila, but he wanted to keep learning. He went on to receive his master's degree in nursing from Seton Hall University, and eventually a doctorate in education. Danny's career took him from being a staff nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center in Paterson to numerous managerial posts with other hospitals across our state. He was also an educator at both Bergen and Passaic County Colleges. For the past two years, Danny was the Director of Patient Care Services, Medical Surgical at University Hospital in Newark, and worked for Judy when she ran that.

Danny leaves behind his mother Clarita, and he was only 54 years old, and I had the great honor of speaking with his mom yesterday. I want to thank Nelson Gramatica who was a health proxy who helped us translate and make that conversation possible. And you can only imagine what that is like for her, having lost her son.

We thank Danny for his years looking after all those in his care and for teaching the next generation of nurses. God bless you, buddy, and God bless your mom. Hang in and stay strong.

So folks, as you head out this weekend, keep Dickey and Mary and Danny and your thoughts. Keep every one of the more than 13,000 residents we have lost to COVID-19 in your thoughts, and remember their families when you put on a face covering and you keep your social distance from others, because that may be the difference that keeps your family from joining theirs in mourning. We all have a responsibility to ourselves, to our families and to our communities, to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to save lives. Let's continue to try as best we can to save every life we can.

Finally, before we turn things over to Lamont and Dr. Zywicki, we must recognize a couple of significant dates in our history that we are reaching this weekend. First, today marks the fifth anniversary of the historic Supreme Court decision that leveled the playing field for millions of LGBTQ-plus Americans in saying that they could marry whomever they loved. New Jersey, thankfully, had been in front of this decision in allowing all residents, regardless of orientation, to marry. But this decision meant that right could not ever be taken away.

This weekend also marks the anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion, which launched in so many ways the LGBTQ-plus rights and Pride movements. It's also the 50th anniversary of the first Pride March. Now we know there won't be any marches this year, but that doesn't mean that we aren't all celebrating our LGBTQ-plus families, friends, neighbors, and communities, and I think it's totally cool that the Mayor right here in the capital city has lit up the Trenton Bridge in the Pride rainbow colors.

And we also must note the impact that COVID-19 has had on the LGBTQ-plus community, and our administration continues its work alongside the community to collect the data that is so important for us to meaningfully address the health disparities that still exist, not just as it pertains to COVID-19, but certainly that, but also other health challenges including HIV. Judy and her team at the Department of Health are working with our healthcare partners, community agencies, and the Rutgers School of Public Health to facilitate this data collection, and the department will soon partner with a number of HIV testing grantee organizations with deep roots in their local communities and longstanding relationships with the LGBTQ-plus community to offer increased COVID testing opportunities in settings that residents can trust and where they feel comfortable.

With that, tomorrow is National HIV Get Tested Day, and everyone should know their status for their health and for their partners and their broader families. But tomorrow will also be a good day to go out and get tested for COVID-19 for the exact same reasons, knowing whether or not you're carrying coronavirus may mean the difference literally between life and death, either for yourself or for someone you love. So whether it be for HIV or COVID-19, go out and get tested. Know your status and know what you can do to keep New Jersey healthy.

With that, I will turn things over, as I've said many times, when the big man joined the band, to the Commissioner of the Department of Education, Dr. Lamont Repollet.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: As always, thank you, Governor Murphy. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm pleased to be here today to share the road back, New Jersey's restart and recovery plan for education. The plan sets forth a responsible strategic roadmap for reopening our schools for in-person instruction and operations in September 2020. Throughout the process of drafting this plan, I've been guided by this quote, "Nothing about us, without us." My staff and I have been in continuous, often daily communication, with superintendents and stakeholders from approximately 50 associations representing every voice with a vested interest in reopening school buildings. We also convened a steering committee here that collected the voices of practitioners, staff, parents, students, community organizations and advocates and state agencies, union leaders and health professionals from around the state. Their collective insight and experience helped make this plan a comprehensive framework that centers on the needs of New Jersey students and educators. On behalf of my team and the department, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all who lent their time and expertise to this important work.

As we present this guidance, New Jersey's in stage two of the road back, restore economic health through public health. As Governor Murphy reminds us, every decision to reopen a sector of New Jersey is determined by public health indicators and capacity to safeguard the public. Data determines dates. And as

such, we must continue to monitor our progress towards the new normal, but it is our expectation that the criteria driving our reopening will continue to improve. Accordingly, absent a shift in data, school buildings will open in some capacity for in-person instruction and operations in September. The reopening of our schools will include necessary limitations to protect the health and safety of our students and staff.

Our plan is built upon that premise but with the recognition that we must be ready to adjust our educational models should the spread of the virus and consistent health data require it. To that end, each district will be expected to develop, in collaboration with community stakeholders, a plan to reopen that best fits the district local needs. In developing these plans, the health and safety of our students and educators is the highest priority. The document we are releasing set forth anticipated minimum standards to ensure safe and healthy conditions for learning. Through this established set of statewide minimum standards, we can ensure both that our state's educational health does not come at the expense of our public health, and that our school districts have the flexibility to plan for reopening in a manner that addresses local needs and circumstances.

We also provide consideration, best practices and resources to help districts strategize ways to reopen standards. The plan is organized into four focus areas: conditions of learning, leadership and planning, policy and funding, and continuity of learning. These focus areas aligned to the recovery framework published by the Council of Chief State School Officers, a national organization representing State Departments of Education around the country. The focus areas reflect national expertise in recovery planning, adapted to meet New Jersey's specific needs and circumstances.

Conditions for learning describe the social, emotional and environmental factors that impact educators' capacity to teach, and students' capacity to learn. This includes health and state safety standards, as well as steps districts can take to address the impact of social isolation and provide the mental health and wraparound services our students and staff will need in the fall. Our health standards ensure safety of students and staff, while allowing district to sustain high quality education programs.

At a minimum, school districts must adopt a policy for screening students and employees for symptoms of COVID-19 and history of exposure and must strive for social distancing within a classroom and all school buses. If schools are not able to maintain this physical distance, additional modifications should be in place, including physical barriers between desks and turning desks to face the same direction. Each school district must also adopt cleaning and disinfecting procedures. School staff and visitors are required to wear face coverings unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health or the individuals under two years of age.

Students are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings and are required to do so when social distancing cannot be maintained, unless doing so would inhibit the student's health. It is also necessary to acknowledge the enforcing of the use of face coverings may be impractical for young children or individual disabilities, and we understand that.

In addition to these areas, we address health concerns related to student entry and exit, contact tracing, procedures, meal services, recess and physical education as well as extracurricular activities. Leadership and planning addresses logistical planning steps to assist school districts to adapt to this new educational environment. It includes a call for districts to create restart committees to create and implement board-approved procedures regarding the opening, and to coordinate with local boards of health to inform local health and safety policies. These committees should include administrators, board members, local education association representatives, educators, parents and students.

It also includes the creation of pandemic response teams in each school in the district. Both the restart committee and the pandemic response teams should represent a diverse cross section of the school and the community. The scheduling of instruction, including in-person as well as virtual and hybrid, as addressed, as districts will need to be prepared as the Governor said, to pivot remote instruction at any time during the 2021 school year, should public health indicators worsen on a sustained basis. We also addressed staffing considerations and provide recommendations, for our districts might deploy staff to design and deliver instruction and assess students in a hybrid and remote learning environment.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic also represents many fiscal challenges for delivery of instruction and related services to students, in addition to basic operational needs. Readyng facilities, purchasing supplies, transporting and feeding students may look drastically different in the upcoming year. The policy and funding

section of our plan focuses on the most effective and impactful use of federal funding and flexibility to ensure districts are able to deliver instruction and related services to students, while also continuing advocacy at the state level around additional resources to address the economic impact of COVID-19.

To provide additional resources for addressing these critical needs, districts were able to apply for federal emergency relief funding under the CARES Act of the elementary and secondary school relief fund, to help address critical needs arising from this crisis. Schools can use these funds for a broad range of needs, from summer learning programs to educational technology, to cleaning and disinfecting supplies. I would like to say this time, Governor, all of our school districts that were eligible have applied, and over 600 have been approved, and the first check we'll be cutting next week.

Finally, our plan addresses continuity of learning. As the 10th-largest school system in the country, we know that each of New Jersey's over 600 school districts is unique, varying widely in physical, organizational and fiscal circumstances, which might require different instructional delivery models in districts across the state. The standards and consideration in the continuity of learning section are designed with that range of potential delivery models in mind.

We recognize that many students likely made less than one full year of academic growth during the 2019-2020 school year. The move to a fully virtual learning environment happened quickly and created significant challenges for staff and students, particularly students already considered at risk prior to pandemic. Addressing this unfinished learning will require districts to leverage innovative practices in design a curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning, delivery of special education and related services, as well as CTE and other key programs.

But without equity of access, no amount of innovative program can boost student learning. This pandemic has truly shined the spotlight on technology and connectivity gaps throughout the state. To strengthen remote learning capabilities and to ensure equitable access to instruction, our plan provides guidance on maximizing resources and opportunities to connect students with devices and broadband. As our educators and families digest the information in our restart and recovery plan, additional questions and uncertainties will undoubtedly rise. The New Jersey Department of Education is committed to work closely with our school communities over the coming months to provide targeted assistance and put the supports in place to implement this guidance. We know that districts will continue to chart a path towards stakeholders at the local level, to address the unique needs of their respective school communities.

In the coming days, the department will be engaging with superintendents and boards of education to answer questions, and to begin the shift to planning for this new school year. So as we roll up our sleeves to prepare for the next school year, I would like to say this. Serving New Jersey students, educators, and families throughout the course of this pandemic has been one of the most proud and humbling times in my career. Thank you again to all our teachers, to our parents, guardians, and to our school community leaders, for your unyielding commitment to meeting the needs of our students and educators during this unprecedented time. You truly set a model for the world to follow. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Lamont, thank you, and thank you and your team for the enormous amount of work that you've put into this and I know will continue to put it into this. And it's no secret that you've got a next assignment in life and you've been running through the tape, so thank you so much for that. With that, please help me welcome the Superintendent the Mount Olive School District, Dr. Robert Zywicki, great to have you, Doc.

Mount Olive School District Superintendent Dr. Robert Zywicki: Thank you, Governor Murphy and thank you, Commissioner Repollet. In early May, shortly after you made the announcement that New Jersey schools will be closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, the Mount Olive learning community came together to imagine what a return to school could look like in September 2020. Our process started with the formulation of a 50-member stakeholder committee that included progressive Board of Education members, teachers, nurses, school counselors, principals, district administrators, custodians, bus drivers and administrative assistants. We examined the guidelines from the CDC, as well as the American Academy for Pediatrics. We also explored international models from countries who had already returned to school. We dove into the plans released by other US states and the framework from the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Our conversation centered around the notion that the return to school is ultimately a healthcare decision which is out of our hands, but we have to design educational solutions in response to those healthcare realities. We quickly determined that there are essentially four options for the return to school in September.

The first option is what we called September 2019. It's a traditional school day and school year with no major adjustments or social distancing. While recognizing this was highly unlikely, we still kept it as our first option as an aspiration for the full return to normal. We now know that our state's health reality will not allow for this kind of a school year, regardless of how much we all wish that September could bring a sense of normalcy for our kids.

The second option we determined is a physical return to school buildings, but with stringent social distancing. Risk mitigation measures include facial coverings, as well as the redesign of normal activities such as lunch, physical education and bus transportation.

The third option is a hybrid schedule that could include split am and pm sessions or alternating days in which some students would be in school, while some other students would attend school virtually.

The final option is to continue with virtual learning as we did this year, but with enhancements made from lessons that we learned during our spring health-related closure. Thanks to the guidance released by the Department of Education and Governor's office today, we are pleased to say that we are going to have to go this route as we begin the school year, and are finalizing our plans for the fall.

After determining our options, we then divided the committees into five subgroups that deconstructed those four options through the lenses of governance and operations, personalized learning, personnel, finance and physical and mental health. Each of the committee's made five recommendations for August 1 deliverables in order to achieve each of the re-entry options. The stakeholders also enumerated honest concerns that we did not yet have solutions to, or that we did not think would be attainable by September. The preliminary draft plan was then shared with our very supportive Board of Education, our parents, and our local OEM that included the Mount Olive Department of Health, our mayor and town council, EMS and the police department. Each of those groups were able to give feedback and lend their voices to our collective vision as to how to bring our students back to school.

In the recent weeks, our plan was disseminated via social media for wider feedback from our colleagues outside of Mount Olive. What we accomplished in Mount Olive can be viewed as an experiment as to how a re-entry plan can be produced by engaging frontline educational professionals, parents and community members. Now that I've had the opportunity to review the Department of Education's restart and re-entry plan, I am happy to report that all of the essential elements from the Mount Olive plan that our stakeholders identified are addressed in the Department of Education's plan.

Most importantly, there is the assertion that we will go back to school in September, but we will do so in a manner that prioritizes the health and safety of our students and staff. The minimum standards in the DOE's plan are reasonable and achievable. The four key subject areas of the DOE plan, conditions for learning, leadership, policy and funding and continuity of learning encapsulate the five lenses from the Mount Olive plan. In viewing the two documents, it is evident that the DOE and Mount Olive stakeholders were having parallel conversations with very similar conclusions on how to keep our students and staff safe in the fall.

With the DOE plan in our hands, we are confident in how we will make final determinations on what our district needs and how we will move forward in the fall. I believe that my fellow superintendents and my fellow board of education members will embrace the flexibility that your plan affords local school districts to make their own decisions about exactly how to safely return their students to school.

Another message that is crystal clear from your plan is that the health environment may shift over time, and we all need to be prepared to return to virtual learning if necessary. I appreciate the number of resources and hyperlinks to best practices that will make the work easier for districts as they develop their own individual local plans.

Lastly, it is apparent that the DOE sourced diverse perspectives from district leaders across the state. I believe that this type of collaboration is essential going forward and that together, we can safely restart and re-enter all of our schools safely this September. Thank you very much.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Dr. Zywicki, and well said, and I love the way you framed this. This is a real, live example of what you all should expect out there in your own respective districts. Thank you so much for your leadership and for being with us today.

Folks, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As the Governor mentioned, tomorrow is National HIV Testing Day and just as we must remain vigilant in containing the spread of COVID-19 in our state by testing, tracing and isolation, we must continue to take the necessary steps to reduce the burden of HIV in our communities. Reducing the impact of HIV on our state starts with getting tested. According to the CDC, HIV testing has decreased substantially across the country as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare professionals should offer an HIV test as part of their routine care. We encourage individuals to get tested. To find free testing, residents can call 1-800-624-2377.

The department continues to work with our vital partners to promote testing and link individuals with treatment and HIV medications that are effective in preventing the transmission of the virus. Our grantees do incredible work across the state to serve individuals at risk. They are leading the charge in caring for this vulnerable population. Nearly 65,000 free, confidential rapid HIV tests were administered in New Jersey last year at more than 140 locations. This testing program delivers test results in about 20 minutes, and people can be linked to a pre-exposure prophylaxis counselor or an HIV clinic.

More than 38,000 people are living with HIV in New Jersey and thankfully, from 2008 to 2018, there has been a 26% decline in the number of new HIV diagnosis, due to highly effective treatments. Unfortunately, due to funding shortfalls in our medication rebate program, we recently needed to reduce funding to grantees. The department, working with our grantees, thoroughly reviewed our programs to ensure that the reductions were made where they would have the least impact on direct services. Every effort was made to focus the 10% decrease in funding on programs that were no longer considered the best practices in HIV prevention and treatment. according to the CDC. We took great care to protect essential services such as housing, testing, and access to PreP. We will continue our dialogue with grantees to preserve vital programs for this underserved community.

To amplify the Governor's comments, the department recognizes the critical steps in addressing any health disparity is collecting the data necessary to define the scope of the disparity and to inform efforts to address it. The Department of Health is working to expand the collection of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, SOGIE data, more broadly, as part of the demographic information collected during routine comprehensive screenings. This information is vitally important to fully understand the impact of health disparities affecting the LGBTQ population.

As the Governor announced, with federal funding, the department will be joining with our partners who serve this community to launch a COVID testing initiative. In July, we will provide funding and technical assistance and oversight to about five or six HIV testing grantee organizations to conduct testing for populations, to provide services to this population. This is part of a critical effort to increase access to testing across the state.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, hospitals are reporting 1,118 hospitalizations of patients with COVID-19 and 234 of those individuals are in intensive care, with 88% on ventilators. There are two new cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children reported today, for a total of 47 cases in our state.

At the state veterans homes, the numbers remain the same, as they do at the psychiatric hospitals. The overall percent positivity as of June 22 in New Jersey is 2.1%. In the Northern part of the state 1.66%, in the Central part of the state 1.81%, southern part of the state 3.83%. That concludes my daily report. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy, get tested for COVID-19 and HIV, so you can know your status. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, Amen to all. Thank you for everything, your leadership day in and day out. Pat Callahan, welcome. What do we got to report from the front?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. One EO violation overnight. It was the second violation issued to a gym owner in Linden. Linden police and local health department will continue to monitor that and I'll just add, I was unaware that Dr. Zywicki was coming today. Gov, and I just point out that I spent my entire elementary school and high school in Mount Olive, so I'm a product of the Mount Olive school system. I hope that's a good thing for all those here. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: There are many rumors that the school district has not been the same since you left it, Pat. I'll leave it to the Superintendent to comment on that. We're going to start over here, Dante. I'm asking you please just give us one or two. There are a lot of folks in the room today and we've got a whole lot of work we've got to continue to get to today. Monday we've got a White House call, I think at 11, so we'll be with you at 2:30 as we were this past Monday, and we'll be with you virtually over the weekend, as we have been for the past number of weekends, unless we think there's a reason to get with you live either in person or on the phone but unless you hear otherwise, it will be virtual Saturday and Sunday, and in person together, back in this room, on Monday at 2:30. And don't be mad at me, I'm going to cut folks off, so I apologize in advance.

Q&A Session

Reporter: Good afternoon. Commissioner Repollet, should schools' children be expecting more outdoor classroom learning environments? Is that part of the best practice within the plan? As well as, will parents be given the opportunity to opt a child out of in-person instruction, you know, with the goal being of course to have kids in buildings, but will parents have that opportunity to opt kids out?

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: So the design of our plan allows flexibility for district leaders. In the guidance we talked about using outdoor space, using outside, going outside as much as possible, weather permitting.

In regards to opting out, when we're looking at modified or mixed instruction, we're accepting the fact that we're not going to have a school with full capacity. So therefore, there will be opportunities to have remote learning as well. So with that being said, we hope that district leaders do not penalize students and parents that opt to use the remote level, but that will be specifically designed for that district. And that district, they know their community. That's why it's important that we have that restart committee, so they can actually get the outside information as possible.

Governor Phil Murphy: I would also just add to that, and we've said this, I think almost every day and Judy and Ed will join me with this. This virus outside is a lot less lethal than inside, so the extent to which you've got the ability/flexibility to be outside, I'll add my voice to, I'll be all in for that. Elise, good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good afternoon. I'm curious about these districts that will need to have shutdown plans in the event that the virus goes through the roof again. Are you also telling parents to have backup childcare and other plans in place to educate their kids at home if they need to? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I mean, as a general matter, Elise, we've got to leave -- I hate to even say this. I can't fathom it, given the hell we've been through, but I think everybody has to understand we can't predict the future. It's that simple. I wouldn't be spending a lot of money on a range of alternatives. I think that would be imprudent to tell folks to, you know, have their options open at great expense. I don't mean that. But I think at least mentally, we have to appreciate the fact we're predicting as best we can, both on the health and today on the education side, but we have to leave all options on the table. Thank you. Please, we'll get to you, ma'am.

Reporter: Two questions. One, there's going to be a lot of additional costs for districts in terms of the PPE as well as catching up students who fall behind. Are there any plans to get additional federal money or state aid to help districts with those costs?

And then the second question, is there any sort of metric that you will be watching to see if the pandemic or the coronavirus gets to a point where schools need to close again? Is there a trigger that will set that?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me start on these, and then Lamont or Judy can come in. And again, we're trying to be economical in our answers, not just in your question. So we want to be up to the same responsibility you are. The answer is yes, we desperately need federal cash, period. We need it in education, we need it in health, we need it in housing, we need it in transportation, in our healthcare networks. We need it. We need

the ability to borrow and we still need the Senate to move on that. Both that's in New Jersey, we need the federal cash assistance. And as the Speaker mentioned yesterday, I want to give him a shout out for saying it because it's not popular, we have to keep all revenue options on the table as well.

The metrics we're going to watch, Judy, unless you or Lamont tell me otherwise, are the ones that we talk about every day, right? So this is rate of transmission, spot positivity, new hospitalizations. I think Judy is obviously watching very carefully the multisystem inflammatory syndrome among kids, for obvious reasons, given we're talking about schools, but those will be the data points, I'd say, that we're going to be watching most closely. Is that fair? Are you good with that? Thank you. Ma'am.

Reporter: Thank you so much. The President was going to Bedminster this weekend. He has since cancelled, he was just in Arizona, which is on the quarantine list. Was your office talking to the White House about this? Was there to be any effort to tell the President he needs to quarantine?

And then a second question regarding education guidance. The guidance today leaves a lot up to the individual districts, which all have varying needs, finances and technology resources available to them. Do you fear leaving many of the specifics up to local leaders could exacerbate equity issues, creating better environments for some students over others?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll start, and Lamont, you should come in behind me. I've made it clear publicly, including in a couple of interviews this morning on network television as well as privately through the senior staff at the White House, that the President is deemed to be in the essential workforce category and therefore, he is welcome to New Jersey. So there was no either private or public signal from us otherwise.

Listen, I'm going to give you -- I'll strike the answer and then Lamont will come in behind me. The death of us, as it relates to things like property taxes, is home rule, right? The other side of the coin is it is the source of great pride, and school districts are no different. And when you add it all up together, we have the number one public school system in America. And that doesn't mean it comes without inequities, because it does, and every lens we use as we look at our society, both in New Jersey and nationally, whether it's healthcare education, who's dying, George Floyd's death, whatever the lens may be, there are enormous inequities that we are trying like heck to close.

But again, the ability to create the school district you want or the community you want locally, while that gives us a lot of challenges, it is also a source of enormous excellence in this state as well. Lamont.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: The guidance, the plan was designed with equity embedded. If you look at the first focus, conditional learning, which include mental health, social and emotional learning, if you look at our funding page, we actually have resources available for connectivity, for ways to kind of pull resources together. We also talk about on that funding page, ways that districts can get funding, whether it's through FEMA, working with Pat and his team, whether it's through our direct aid from the federal government. We've devised this this plan, we designed with the idea of equity. We looked at equity not just in instruction but equity also in connectivity and devices as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I say one other thing as a general matter? Tell me if you're okay with this, and the superintendent should also agree or disagree on this. Not only are we watching the health reality, which might impact this plan, but this isn't as though we're going to present this today and then never talk about public education for the next two and a half months. We'll be back, either Lamont himself, the super, others on the team will be back and I suspect we're going to continue to learn a whole lot more as we go forward over the next couple of months. Thank you. Sir.

Reporter: Thank you, Governor. In May, the Department of Health said that it would provide guidance to employers for testing, but none has been released. Will the state provide guidance to businesses on testing workers and who is who is required to cover the cost of those tests for employees? The federal guidelines say that insurers aren't required to cover employer-mandated tests, so will New Jersey's guidance be the same?

And for Commissioner Repollet, is the state considering adjusting academic testing standards for next year to account for the educational gaps created by the pandemic?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Judy, do you want to hit the employer's questions and then Lamont on the –

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, my understanding is that I know we're following the CDC guidelines for employers. And I thought we put that guidance out. I'm looking at Ed, do you recall? It was quite some time ago.

Governor Phil Murphy: I thought it was out too. We'll come back to that one. Are you good? Lamont, standards.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: The standards are static and they kind of got our instruction so they're in place. What you're probably asking is the assessment. So this year, with the Governor's Executive Order and permission through our regulations, we've asked for a waiver with the federal government in regards to testing, having discussion and conversation internally to ensure that what does it look like? What does that testing requirement look like next year? So that's all forthcoming. Right now, our focus was strictly really trying to get this plan together and in place.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Sir, do you have anything? Sir, you good? You? You're good? No, yeah, I'm going to get you, yeah. You're good though, right? Okay, we'll go back. Yes ma'am, sorry.

Reporter: That's okay. Hi, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: You're way back there today.

Reporter: Yes. I have two questions, actually. One is for Dr. Zywicki. The four options that you went over, which have you definitively decided to go with, or is that still to be determined? And then for Commissioner Repollet, you were able to provide, throughout the pandemic, some concrete numbers on the number of students in New Jersey who remain without the tech they need. Do you have an updated number on that, now that we're gearing up for the next school year?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, Dr. Z, it sounds to me like you're somewhere heavy 2, with a little bit of potential 3, right?

Mount Olive School District Superintendent Dr. Robert Zywicki: That's correct, and with the inevitability that prepping to go back into virtual learning if we need to, so we're preparing for all three.

Governor Phil Murphy: Got it. Thank you. Lamont.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: In regards to technology, we're still gathering information. I think as you've heard from the Senate Education Committee, we've actually really looked into that. So we're actually serving them right now to get an accurate count, because when we first initially, it was in April, and things have changed, and districts have bought technology to ensure they can provide remote learning. I think it's going to be different, so we're actually really right now waiting to hear from districts.

Governor Phil Murphy: And this is, listen, we said this when we shut down, and we were one of the first states to shut. In fact, a lot of districts, we were approving their individual shutdown plans before we said everybody had to be shut, but access to devices and access to a secure food reality are two huge holes and gaps in our state, and we are committed to filling those. Thank you.

Long time. Good to see you, because it's education.

Reporter: Yes, I'm back. Speaking of the technology gap, why do you stop short of requiring districts providing the technology and the connectivity for all students? It sounds like it's still going to be in the tens of thousands of kids who didn't have it over the last three months. And then, I guess for Dr. Zywicki, districts have cried out for guidance for the last couple of months from the state, and this is still pretty flexible and leaving a lot of discretion to districts. Is it too flexible for a lot of your colleagues? Or did they, you know, I had a sense that they wanted something more definitive, and this seems to leave a lot of discretion.

Governor Phil Murphy: So on the first question, but Lamont can come in, in a perfect world, you would. We're not in a perfect world right now. We've had expenses that have skyrocketed in this pandemic crisis, and we have revenues that have literally fallen off the cliff. The only comparable periods, I want everyone to

remember this because we haven't said in a couple of weeks, are the Great Depression in the 1930s and the Civil War. That's what we're dealing with right now in terms of the impact, which is why we need to be able to borrow. It's why we need the federal cash assistance. It's why we have to consider revenues. If we get and, and, and, my guess is our answer and our mode, our MO as it relates to things like devices is a lot more forward leaning. You okay with that? You got anything?

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: Yes I am, sir. And that's why we, in our public funding piece, we talked about cooperative purchasing. We also talked about using the CARES Act money, using state aid. So we're now going to work with districts now to see how they can best use the money. We talked about next week, we'll be cutting the first check for the CARES Act. We also have SAI funds that just hit to our districts as well, and we also have our Title fund. So we're going to work with them to make sure that they can identify which part of funding resources to ensure connectivity technology for our students.

Governor Phil Murphy: And by the way, there are non-government actors where you hear noise -- I'm not going to speak for them but like the Pandemic Relief Fund, I know that's a discussion that they've had; there are other players out there outside of government. Dr. Z, too much guidance, too little guidance? Goldilocks and the three bears?

Mount Olive School District Superintendent Dr. Robert Zywicki: I think it's the perfect amount of guidance that allows for flexibility. I think when we're talking about guidance, the number one thing superintendents wanted to hear was whether we're coming back or not. We now have that answer, we are coming back, and we now have the flexibility. And that flexibility is so important, because in a district like Mount Olive or Sparta, you know, we're very transportation heavy districts, lots of miles. In a district like Bayonne, that is a walking district, that's going to be a different concern. So I think the flexibility is the most important thing, and I think my colleagues are going to be pleased with it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, sir. Let's come down to -- Sir, do you have anything, behind the camera, are you good? You're good. Please.

Reporter: Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Reporter: Governor in light of the arrest in Paterson yesterday related to, or I guess on charges of mail-in ballot fraud, are you nervous at all about doing the July primary predominantly using mail-in ballots? And do you have any plan to help make it better or prevent fraud?

And then regarding the lockdown and visitor guidelines for long-term care facilities, since there have been no serious outbreaks at the children's care facilities, would you or the Department of Health be willing to allow more lenient visitation policies there?

Governor Phil Murphy: On the first, I'll go first, Judy, and you can come in on the second, is that all right? Obviously, no comment on a law enforcement matter, is the specific answer. We are, but we're not taking anything for granted. It's part of the reason why Matt and I had a very spirited discussion with the Chief Operating Officer of the US Postal Service yesterday, as an example. And again, we're trying to get the balance right, as I mentioned many times, between what is right for the principles of democracy and the access to vote, but also protecting public health. And we think that we've got that balance in a good place, but we take none of it for granted and we want to make sure that the Secretary of State, the Department of Elections, are monitoring this very closely as is yours truly. Judy, any comments on lockdowns? I guess for kid facilities in particular, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The general guidelines that we've already put out apply to all. I know the visitation is somewhat restricted. We are working on reopening guidance, and we will work with the stakeholders for that, but it's not ready and frankly, the organizations are not ready, either.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Let's go back, please.

Reporter: Actually, regarding the elections in Mercer County, residents have been receiving their ballots back in the mail. Was that issue discussed with the Postal Service at all?

Governor Phil Murphy: It was discussed, yes. In fact, Matt has followed up since the conversation we had yesterday. This was one of the counties, there were a handful, my memory is Monmouth was on that list. Matt, who else was there?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: There were a number of counties. The issue that's happened, we worked with the US Postal Service to design the ballots so that their scanners would accurately read the return address. The scanners are picking up the sender's, the voters address for some reason, so we've alerted the postal service of that on the call, as the Governor mentioned. Actually, that concern came out of conversations we've had with the various counties, so Mercer's one, but there are several we're aware of it and working on it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Charlie, how are you?

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Good, Governor. Questions for Dr. Repollet today. Is it true that the Interim County Superintendent in Middlesex has signed off on the closure of the Lincoln Annex School in New Brunswick? What do you say to those who feel this type of closure and displacement would not be allowed to happen in a white suburban community?

And finally, on light of the pandemic and the need for physical distancing in schools, how can it be justified to close a public school facility that opened only four years ago at great expense, especially if the district admits that a replacement won't be ready for at least three years, during which time the students would be bused to a converted industrial warehouse building?

Governor Phil Murphy: I mean, you're welcome to answer it if you want. Judy went to the school for crying out loud, she should be answering the question, as we've established before. I've got zero insight on this, other than we've got the number one public education system in America, and there's no reason why it's either schools or jobs in innovation. In this case, it's going to be both. Do you want to add anything to this?

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: Yes, I'm not familiar with this. The last few months, we have been working, really just making sure we can get this plan together. I think my normal business of operation will probably commence on Monday.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. We'll come back to you if we have any. Michael, how are you? Long time.

Reporter: Good to see you. Do you have concerns about whether teachers, in particular older ones who may be more vulnerable to the virus might not be comfortable returning to classrooms? What happens if they don't want to return? And also, is there any thought being given to doing regular COVID testing of school staff?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, let me just made a couple of general comments and Lamont should come in. I've said this many times, and I would reiterate it today, and I think the plan that Lamont and the superintendent and all the other contributors have come up with addresses this, but the biggest challenge, in my opinion, particularly if you look at what this virus, sort of where it attacks and where it's more lethal, is the transmission, as Judy and I, and I think Ed, have spoken about at length from an asymptomatic healthy, probably younger person to a person who's either older and/or has comorbidities. And so the notion of social distancing, face coverings, hyper hygiene, maximizing with capacity limits, using outdoors when possible, having the option to have some remote element involved in it, all of that is intended to address that very specific issue.

And I think you've gone over this extensively with the teacher labor unions, representatives, as well. Anything you want to add to that, or Michael's other --

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: The plan makes it very clear in conditions for learning that we take in consideration the population at risk, and we do not penalize those individuals, whether it's a senior, whether it's a teacher, faculty member or student.

Governor Phil Murphy: What was the second question, Michael, sorry?

Reporter: About whether there are any plans for organized COVID testing of education staff?

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you have anything you want to say to that, or?

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: No, so we talked about that restart committee team, ensuring that so districts, we are not requiring everyone get tested. However, you can go above and beyond minimum standards, and that's what's going to take a local decision to actually whether they test the entire staff or not.

Governor Phil Murphy: We actually, I just had, independent from Lamont, had a conversation literally this morning with Congressman Josh Gottheimer about a potential to pilot a particular technology in a school in New Jersey. So bear with us on that, because that's something we may want to come back and tell you more about, assuming we get it organized. Thank you. Matt, please.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Governor, this gentleman also has a question now too.

Governor Phil Murphy: I thought you didn't? Do you have one? Okay, go. We'll go to you, sir. Thank you.

Reporter: Thank you very much. Any thoughts on lifting the moratorium on evictions for hotels and motel owners? And what advice do you have for them regarding tenants that they have right now who are not paying rent? What recourse do they have?

Governor Phil Murphy: I have nothing to add in terms of lifting the moratorium, and I guess I would just say that this isn't, as I mentioned, when you compare what we're going through to the Great Depression or the Civil War, I think everyone has to realize to say this is unprecedented would be the biggest understatement of the year. I would just say we've got to all bear with each other here a little bit more and have some patience. Thank you. Matt.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Thank you. Governor, will schools be reopening on time or can they delay until October or later, just to meet the guidelines? I realize it's June, but just curious.

And on the deal struck with CWA workers, specifically on the furloughs, I'm curious if Department of Labor workers, if there are any CWA union members there would be exempt from the furlough, you know, maybe specifically people that are dealing with the backlog on unemployment claims?

Governor Phil Murphy: On the former, we're opening on time, unless you hear otherwise, Lamont.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet: So school calendars are the purview of the local and the boards of education, as long as they fit with 180 days, then they can start whenever they want to start, as long as they fit into the statute of 180 days.

Governor Phil Murphy: Matt Platkin, do you want to add anything on the CWA members who are in the Department of Labor community?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: As the contract hasn't been ratified yet, I have to defer comment until the union members are able to vote on the contract.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Just given what's going on at DOL, I mean, is that something that you would push for in the contract, to exempt these folks just so there's not further backlog?

Governor Phil Murphy: I won't answer it specific to the contract, because Matt reminds me and I think it's a fair point, that it has to be ratified. So it's a hypothetical question. But as a sort of general notion matter, there is a core group of folks you need to keep in a time of emergency as we're in, that you need to keep the ball pushing down the field and obviously we're mindful of that.

We covered a lot of ground and I can't thank you enough. I'm going to mask up here as I say my thanks and say a couple of other thoughts here. I want to thank obviously Judy and Ed for being here and for your leadership Pat, as always; Dr. Zywicki, thank you for being a great leader in your own right, but also being with us today, and your partnership on this. Lamont, we love you, buddy. It's great to have you back. I know this was an enormous lift to get to where we are and as I mentioned, I think to your question a short while ago, it's not as though we're slamming the garage door down on where this is headed. My guess is we're going to learn a lot over the next two-and-a-half months. And as we learn more, and as guidance evolves, both on the health side as well as on what's working or may not be working as well on the education side, we will be updating folks.

Again, we will be with you virtually tomorrow and Sunday unless you hear otherwise from Mahen, and otherwise, we'll be together at 2:30 after a White House call on Monday in this room. And again, I want to conclude by saying a huge thank you to everybody out there who's helping us. In your own way, it all adds up to driving the positivity rate down, the rate of transmission down, the number of hospitalizations down, we've got to keep at it as we open things up. We're going to get to malls on Monday, we'll be with indoor dining with capacity constraints and casinos, and Judy's coming up with that guidance, I'm sure sooner than later. As we get more indoors, this becomes riskier and the requirement, the personal responsibility burden, I think, goes up in terms of face coverings, social distancing, washing hands with soap and water, staying away from others if you've got symptoms and don't feel well. So folks, thank you for everything you've done, and keep it up. God bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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