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CHANCELLOR BANKS OUTLINES VISION FOR TRANSFORMING AND BUILDING TRUST IN NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NEW YORK – Schools Chancellor David C. Banks today will deliver remarks on his vision for New York City public schools and the Department of Education’s priorities. At the center of Chancellor Banks’ vision are his four pillars, which include reimagining the student experience; scaling, sustaining and restoring what works; prioritizing wellness and its link to student success; and empowering families to be our true partners.

Below are the Chancellor’s remarks as prepared:

Good morning! Thank you all for joining me today here at Tweed both in person and virtually on our live stream.

Just over two months after becoming Chancellor, I thought it would be a good time to share with all of you more detail about my vision for New York City public schools and how we are going to go about achieving that vision together. I also want to share my gratitude for what we have already accomplished in a very short period of time.

First, Mayor Adams and I can’t tell you how proud we are of our students, families, teachers, and staff for stepping up in the face of the Omicron virus surge. Together with the New York City Department of Health, the Test and Trace Corps, the New York City Police Department, Governor Kathy Hochul, UFT President Michael Mulgrew, CSA President Mark Cannizzaro, District Council 37 Executive Director Henry Garrido, Local 237 President Greg Floyd, 891 President Robert Troller, and many other partners, our Stay Safe, Stay Open plan succeeded in reducing rates from 16% at the beginning of January to below 1% since the start of February

It was so important to this city that we kept our doors open, because returning to school was a big step toward returning to normalcy. Our public schools are essential to the fabric and economy of New York City. Our families depend on our schools so that they can do their own jobs while knowing their children are in a supportive environment where they will be academically challenged and held to high expectations every single day.

And Stay Safe, Stay Open has worked! On January 3, the day I took office, our attendance rate was 65%. Yesterday it was 89%.

During the long months when the pandemic forced our school buildings to close, our children suffered. Taking away the routine of going to school, missing the pat on the back from a teacher,

having lunch with their friends — all of those normal things that we used to take for granted — there's no doubt that negatively affected the mental and physical well-being of our students. So many of our youth, particularly our LGBTQ+ students, may have been in homes where they weren't free to be their true selves, perhaps even to feel truly safe. Our team will be working closely with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and its new commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasani to implement innovative, comprehensive strategies to support students' mental and emotional well-being.

And as we help our students and staff heal, we are pushing forward with our return to a new normal. Now, our students and staff are back, more students are able to compete in PSAL, the energy in our classrooms and hallways has returned, and masks are off at recess -- and hopefully in classrooms as well within the next week! Let's give a round of applause to everyone who made that happen!

Let's be clear: Covid is far from the only challenge facing our schools. Our schools have lost over 120,000 students over the past five years — a trend that began prior to the pandemic and has since accelerated. Our families have been voting with their feet, and we need to aggressively respond right now. Part of rebuilding trust is being honest about the challenges we face:

- Not enough of our students graduate ready for college or a career;
- A large number of our schools continue to have safety issues;
- Too many of our schools don't provide enough academic rigor and opportunities for accelerated learning;
- And an unacceptable number of our students don't learn how to read by the third grade; among others

We have to face up to the hard truth that a system that spends \$38 billion a year leaves on average two-thirds of Black and Latinx students failing to achieve proficiency in Math and English Language Arts.

For our schools to deliver on their original promise of serving as the engine of the American dream for all of our students and their families, we will need to do things very differently in ways that build trust one big step at a time.

Our schools need to connect our students to the real world and what matters to them. We need to provide meaningful academic experiences that are safe, fun and engaging. Our schools need to prepare our students to excel in our economy when they get out of school. And I mean *all* students, whatever language their families speak at home and whatever special needs or other difficult circumstances they might have.

Every parent wants the best for their children.

But that's not happening for far too many of our students, especially those of color who look to school to be the pathway to economic prosperity. So today, Mayor Adams and I are absolutely committed to transforming our system so that each and every one of our students graduates with

a pathway to a rewarding career, long-term economic security, and equipped to be a positive force for change.

How We Will Realize That Vision

More than three decades of conversations with families, fellow educators, and students have shaped what I call my four pillars for improving and building trust with our families:

Let's start with pillar number 1, which is reimagining the student experience.

I recently visited Riker's Island and engaged with young men and women who were getting OSHA training and learning carpentry skills, and they were very focused, on-task, and clearly excited about what they were doing. When I asked them about their past school experience, they all said negative things. But they were engaged now, not because they were in jail but because what they were doing was meaningful and relevant to them. They saw a future for themselves. One young man put his hand up and said, "If I was doing this when I was in school, I would have went to school every day."

When I talk about reimagining the school experience so that it's relevant to our students and excites them, this is what I mean. Why don't we provide the kind of experiences where kids can't wait to get up in the morning to get to school?

Central to our reimagination of learning is a new set of commitments to students and families that we are calling our Career Pathways Initiative. This initiative is creating career-connected learning and pathways for all our students to help activate their passion and sense of purpose.

In partnership with educators, unions, state government leaders, community and business leaders, we want to ensure that all students graduate with a strong plan and head start on a pathway to the middle class.

Starting this fall, we will be laying the groundwork to get there. This includes piloting models that establish new career pathways – including early college credit, creating system-wide infrastructure to support this work — including new STEAM Centers and expanding career-focused classrooms — and developing our teachers and school leaders to support students in developing their passions and plans. We will help young people see themselves in good jobs and careers they might never have heard of, because "you can't be what you can't see."

Moreover, New York City is the financial capital of the world. As educators, we need to prioritize personal financial education, so our students graduate financially literate and empowered to make strong financial decisions.

Reimagining learning also connects with our goal of graduating students who are equipped to be positive forces for change in our communities and our city. Some of our schools already do a fantastic job of nurturing a highly active student government and other efforts to engage students civically in ways that benefit their schools and surrounding communities. For example, the Brooklyn Occupational Training Center, a District 75 School, has continually innovated to engage students with wide ranging learning needs in a quality civic education. Teacher Matt Gorin has adapted Participatory Budgeting resources to engage students through big circle

mapping in the cafeteria, which allows verbal and non-verbal students to graphically represent their ideas and engage in discussion, debate, and to show support for each other.

This civics work is so important because it is essential to our democracy to nurture engaged citizens. Some of you may remember the recurring bit on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno where he would walk down Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles and ask people the most basic questions about current events or how government works. Folks with high school diplomas would give him the most comically ridiculous answers, but at the same time it wasn't funny at all. It's not good for our democracy that so many Americans don't vote or know much of anything about government. Public schools are supposed to produce young people who are civically engaged so they can participate effectively in our democracy.

Today we have a number of electeds in the audience, and we want every student to understand what you do. I want young people to graduate from our schools excited for civic participation, preregistered to vote, and ready for their first election. It's not enough to tell kids that they can be leaders. We have to give them opportunities to practice so they understand why voting is important and impacts their lives.

I am thrilled that we have our new **Chief of Student Pathways, Jade Grieve**, to be leading this work. You can expect to hear more from our team in the coming months on how we will bring this north star to life.

For all of our children to be launched on a pathway where they are deeply engaged by the time they reach high school, nothing is more important than supporting them starting at the very beginning of their lives to become strong readers. All of you who work at Tweed no doubt recognize the man who stands out front when you arrive in the morning, regardless of the weather, holding this sign. And he's absolutely right! The gentleman's name is Bill, and he was a teacher in Ohio for more than 20 years.

Thank you, Bill, for your daily reminder to all of us about the importance of **literacy** to everything else we do. When we talk about equity and learning disparities, gaps in reading are front and center and are connected to challenges we face with our students with disabilities and multi-lingual learners. This is the biggest equity issue we confront and we are going to tackle it in ways that I hope will enable Bill to retire from having to hold up his sign.

Our approach to the teaching of reading has not gotten the results we need. So we are going to make sure every single one of our students is getting strong, phonics-based literacy instruction from the very start. We will also be building on the universal screening tools that identify risk for dyslexia to tailor more effective responses at the earliest possible ages. That will include adopting approaches that have proven to be effective at the Windward School, an independent New York City school that uses multi-sensory approaches to remediate dyslexia and related challenges. Our plan will also include teacher supports and capacity building so they can implement effective strategies to support students with dyslexia.

We also will be creating an Advisory Council on Literacy, which will include some of our most successful teachers to make sure we are doing everything we possibly can so that all our students become capable readers. Across literacy and all of our subjects we will have a culturally

responsive, sustaining curriculum that is relevant to all our students, where they can see themselves reflected in the literature. As Frederick Douglass said, “Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.”

We are also going to strengthen early childhood education, not only in 3-K and Pre-K, but beginning at birth. If we want our students to become capable readers, then we must provide young children with critical literacy and language supports from the start. Learning doesn’t start at age 4. In fact, the first three years are not only most important for children's growth and development, but a child's first three years have a profound impact on their future learning and their life-long health and well-being. This is particularly important for working parents who are relying on us to have high-quality care and education for their child. More details to come on the steps we will be taking, but we recognize our CBO providers are an invaluable cornerstone of NYC's early childhood community and we will ensure they—and all public school early childhood classrooms—are fully supported and uplifted in serving our youngest children and their families. That work will take place under the leadership of **Deputy Chancellor of Early Childhood Education Dr. Kara Ahmed**.

Another vital element of the reimagined experience is **virtual learning**. In March 2020, all our educators became digital educators overnight, whether they were ready for it or not. The hard lessons learned over the past two years can’t be left behind as we emerge from this pandemic. Virtual learning is here to stay and has the potential to open our classroom doors to let the world in.

So in the coming weeks we will launch a Digital Learning Advisory Committee of educators, administrators, families, and students to explore ways we can most effectively integrate technology into the learning experience. That will include piloting virtual course models where students learn from teachers trained and equipped to provide the highest quality digital learning.

The advisory committee will also explore how we can give our teachers the training and resources they need to incorporate blended learning into their daily practice. We look forward to building on the work we have been doing with the UFT on these important issues.

Going forward, we should always be able to provide high-quality, real-time remote learning whenever we need to. More than that, we ought to be using what we learned the past two years to provide good options across the city; some of our students prefer virtual learning; some need to work during the day; some are disengaged and would come back to school if they could take some classes in person and some on-line. We're going to create those options for students who need or want them.

And relatedly – we need to rethink how our students demonstrate mastery of course content. We need to think beyond standardized tests so that students have the flexibility to progress through material at a pace that fits their needs and so that schools have the space to implement innovative, out-of-the-box ideas for teaching and learning.

So that was pillar one about reimagining learning. Pillar 2 focuses on scaling, sustaining, and restoring what works.

This entails identifying the amazing practices throughout our system and sharing them so that they become models that other schools can try to emulate. We have so many terrific examples to hold up:

University Heights High School in the South Bronx offers a STEM program that is based on experiential, project-based learning. Students at the school present original science or engineering experiments for graduation and have an award-winning robotics team. The school offers a variety of advanced math and science courses, including at the college level, and related internships.

Bronx International High School serves newly arrived immigrants in the Bronx who are new to learning English. Their program is designed so that students can graduate with CTE certifications in areas such as Construction Engineering, Historic Preservation, and Web Design. It also developed a robust Urban Farming program.

So, under the leadership of **Deputy Chancellor of Teaching and Learning Opportunities Carolyne Quintana**, we are building on the excellent Showcase Schools and Learning Partners ideas that former Chancellor Carmen Farina launched. We are going to build a state-of-the-art knowledge-sharing system so that every leader and educator can find best practices in any area a student needs by taking out their phone and searching. They'll find tools, videos, and how-to guides so they can put these practices into place so that all schools can benefit.

This effort is all about enabling our innovative principals in schools that are shining—including charter schools—to expand their practices beyond their own buildings. At the same time, it will support principals whose schools may be struggling by providing them with access to promising approaches.

We want to build a culture that incentivizes schools to share their best practices. We want to celebrate and lift these teachers and leaders up so that every school in NYC can see what they're doing. Too often, we criticize schools that are struggling and we admonish them to get better, but we don't do a good enough job of showing them how to get better. For too long we have had a system of winners and losers. When schools lose, kids lose, families lose, communities lose, and our city loses. I want everybody to win!

That's also why ultimately there should be opportunities for accelerated learning in every school. High-quality gifted programs provide opportunities for students to accelerate their learning and excel—which is what every parent wants for their children. So we're going to scale these programs all over the city.

Pillar 3 is prioritizing wellness and its link to student success. That includes safe schools, access to green spaces, high-quality nutrition, and comprehensive whole-child support for a broad range of each student's needs.

Students who feel healthy, safe, well-nourished and intellectually stimulated are best able to concentrate and engage with their academic work. Creating that sense of well-being for our students in itself is demanding and requires just as much care and effort on our part as teaching core subjects. These are a few examples of what we will be doing to prioritize wellness:

- We are working with the Mayor’s office to increase the number of School Safety Agents, including a new class of SSAs that will be graduating in the coming weeks. As a former SSA myself, I know how SSAs can be an integral part of a school community. Just as importantly, we will also be engaging credible messengers and mentors in collaboration with community-based organizations to help keep our schools safe. Expanding training in conflict resolution and restorative justice is an important part of that. But we also need to hold our kids to high expectations around their behavior in schools. And making learning engaging and relevant in and of itself improves how students conduct themselves.
- Collaborating with community-based partners to support school safety, mental health, attendance, and enrichment. With the loss and pain caused by the pandemic, we need to address students’ mental health needs while proactively making sure they attend school regularly and receive additional enrichment.
- Extending learning beyond the four walls of the classroom to feed the souls of our children with visits to museums, parks, and activities in the great outdoors. One recent study found that students who took six field trips over two years to cultural centers showed greater academic progress compared to a control group that didn’t make those visits. We need to take full advantage of the rich cultural environment that surrounds us in our remarkable city. That includes all of the arts: music, theater, dance, painting, sculpture—*everything*. So, you’ll see more field trips and more partnerships with cultural institutions. This is so important right now as we come out of the pandemic — one of the most effective ways to help kids recover emotionally and academically is through the arts. Spending time painting a picture or walking through a park is a healing experience our kids don’t get enough of.
- We are going to increase our schools’ capacity to provide quality mindfulness practices, including yoga and meditation, that are scientifically researched, evidence-based, and culturally responsive.

Under the leadership of **Dr. Jawana Johnson, Chief of School Culture, Climate and Well-Being**, this work will become a critical part of our system’s approach to holistically supporting students and their families.

Finally, pillar 4 is engaging families to be our true partners, which in and of itself is a powerful pathway to building trust.

We will be making sure that we are in close communication with our families, surfacing their expertise to enable all of us to more effectively educate and support our children. Research shows that of all the factors that determine positive student outcomes, family engagement is at the top of the list.

Parents know their children. We know that when our expertise as school educators meets with the influence of families, magic happens: children succeed not just academically, but physically, emotionally, and socially. We will be engaging with families in policy creation and

implementation procedures at all levels. I do not want to create policy where families have not been part of the process.

Our Families and Community Empowerment department will also be supporting superintendents, school leaders, and other school staff with professional development to find ways to permanently embed families' voice in their particular school communities. That includes supporting governance structures like Parent Associations, PTAs, School Leadership Teams, and Citywide Councils so they can provide policy recommendations that work for our schools and the system as a whole. It also means adjusting and updating our DOE website to make it more family-friendly. I am so excited to see this work unfold under the leadership of **Deputy Chancellor of Family and Community Engagement and External Affairs Kenita Lloyd**.

For us to strengthen all four pillars, and every aspect of what we do, we need to make the NYC Department of Education more responsive and efficient, and more reflective of the values we work toward everyday; diversity, equity and inclusion. We will be doing this through our newly formed DEI Office, led by Chief Diversity Officer Karine Apollon, and through a reevaluation of how our central office teams function. At the announcement of my appointment as chancellor, I created some discomfort at our central offices by saying that if you couldn't demonstrate how your job makes a difference for our students or families, then the job shouldn't exist. Let me clarify: we are going to reorganize our central offices to make sure we're using every penny of taxpayer dollars productively while ensuring that all of us, including myself, are working in service of schools and the people working directly with our students and families.

My intention is to push resources closer to our schools. That includes making sure our superintendents are the right folks for the immense task of leading our community school districts and high schools, and providing more resources to the right individuals when they are in the seats.

I'm formally announcing now that we will be eliminating the executive superintendent position because it adds a level of bureaucracy without adding enough value to schools and students.

And we have asked each superintendent to reapply for their job so we can assess whether they are the best individuals to support innovative schools and school leaders, as well as our new commitments related to long-term economic security. We are going to engage in a process that involves the community, encouraging school leaders from across the city to apply. Additionally, we're going to create a real high school division that has a system of supports that currently does not exist.

And finally, one thing I know for certain is that our biggest opportunity to create dramatic change in our schools is to fully support the work of great school leaders. As a former principal of two different schools over 11 years, I can attest to the fact that most of the innovative things that principals do they do in spite of the DOE, not because of the DOE. These innovative leaders are the ones who really hold the key to the transformation of our system. So we will build a system that provides great leaders with a level of autonomy that allows them to truly innovate and not be derailed by the traditional bureaucracy.

Our First Deputy Chancellor Daniel Weisberg and Deputy Chancellor of School Leadership Desmond Blackburn will work closely with me on these efforts.

Conclusion

This is the vision and set of goals for serving NYC's students and families that Mayor Adams and I are committed to. But, let me be very clear, this is the start of the process, not the end. Now my team and I will be engaging with students, families, educators, our unions, community and elected leaders to discuss how we're going to transform education in our city. That process won't be one and done. The engagement will be continuous, because listening to our stakeholders is not just the best way, but the **ONLY** way we're going to have *sustained* improvement.

I know that the vision Mayor Adams and I share is bold and ambitious, but incremental steps won't fundamentally transform how our families feel about our schools. We are already off to a strong start thanks to Stay Safe, Stay Open, and we are going to keep building on that early progress in generating newfound trust.

Finally, as any good teacher would do, allow me to summarize the highlights of what we will be working on together to make that happen:

1. Streamline our organization and focus everyone on supporting schools.
2. Develop high quality care and education for children birth to five.
3. Use proven phonics-based literacy instruction so that each one of our students is able to read by third grade.
4. Adopt new screening methods to identify at an early age dyslexia and other conditions so we can respond to them far more effectively.
5. Create new and deeper collaborations with partners in the private and non-profit sectors with the overriding goal of ensuring long-term economic security for each and every student while committing that every student will leave high school with a diploma AND a pathway to a good job and career.
6. Use technology to facilitate the ability of our schools to share best practices and learn from each other.
7. Build on successful initiatives to support the social and emotional needs of our students and families after two years of this traumatic pandemic.

Look, we need to bring our families back, urgently. In partnership with them, everything I have talked about today will help to build that essential ingredient of trust.

And that includes trust in each other. One of the people who works here told me the other day that she is feeling a new sense of hope in this building and among families she has talked to. We have already begun to change our culture in positive ways, and we are just getting started! So let's get to work!

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