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Covid patients at a hospital in Tianjin, China, on Wednesday. Municipalities are reporting hundreds of thousands of infections a day.

Hasidic Schools Seize on Special Ed Windfall

By BRIAN M. ROSENTHAL

Less than a decade ago, New York City drastically changed the way it provided special education to thousands of children with disabilities.

State law requires cities to deliver those services to students in private schools, even if the government has to pay outside companies to do it. But for years, when parents asked, New York City officials resisted and called many of the requests unnecessary.

In 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio changed course. Responding to complaints, especially from Orthodox Jewish organizations, he ordered the city to start fast-tracking approvals.

The policy has made it easier for some children with disabilities to get specialized instruction, therapy and counseling. But in Or-

Close Ties to Growing Network of Private Providers

thodox Jewish religious schools, particularly in parts of the Hasidic community, the shift has also led to a windfall of government money for services that are sometimes not needed, or even provided, an examination by The New York Times has found.

Dozens of schools in the Orthodox community have pushed parents to get their children diagnosed with disabilities, records and interviews show. At least two schools have sent out mass emails urging families to apply for aid. A third school provided parents with a sample prescription to give

their children's doctors, saying a diagnosis would bring more resources for the school.

Today, at Hasidic and Orthodox schools, which are called yeshivas, higher percentages of students are classified as needing special education than at other public and private schools in New York City, a Times analysis of government data found.

In the fervently religious Hasidic community, where Yiddish is the dominant language, schools focus on teaching Jewish law and prayer, while often providing little secular education in English. The Times found that at 25 of the city's approximately 160 Hasidic yeshivas, more than half of the students are classified as needing special education. Records show the classifications are routinely justified by citing the students' struggles

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Travelers Out Of China Need Negative Test

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG and BENJAMIN MUELLER

The Biden administration, fearful that a surge of coronavirus infections in Beijing could spawn a new and more dangerous variant, announced on Wednesday that it would require travelers from China, including Hong Kong and Macau, to present negative Covid-19 tests before entering the United States.

The requirement will take effect on Jan. 5, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which made the announcement. Officials at the agency say they are concerned over China's lack of transparency about its outbreak and, in particular, its failure to track and sequence variants and subvariants that are circulating within its borders.

C.D.C. officials said the requirement for testing will apply to air passengers regardless of their nationality and vaccination status. It will also apply to travelers coming from China who enter the United States through a third country, or who connect through the United States to other destinations. Italy and Japan have already imposed similar restrictions, and India has mandated negative Covid-19 test reports and random screening at airports for passengers arriving from China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand.

But as they did when President Donald J. Trump imposed pandemic travel limitations, some experts questioned whether the testing requirement would do any good — especially given the surge in cases in some parts of the United States. In the northeast, scientists say virus spread is being fueled by an Omicron subvariant, XBB, which appears to be spreading more quickly than ones related to the dominant variant in Beijing.

"I understand politically why it must be done, but the bottom line is, it's a false sense of security that we're really slowing transmission," said Michael T. Osterholm, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota.

China's Covid outbreak has been worsening in recent days, with local governments reporting hundreds of thousands of infections a day. Videos obtained by The New York Times show sick patients crowding hospital hall-

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Hopes for Talks Dim in Ukraine As Sides Dig In

Hard-Line Terms Keep Leaders From Table

By SHASHANK BENGALI

As the battle for Ukraine turns into a bloody, mile-by-mile fight in numbing cold, Ukrainian and Russian officials have insisted that they are willing to discuss making peace.

But with a drumbeat of statements in recent days making clear that each side's demands are flatly unacceptable to the other, there appears to be little hope for serious negotiations in the near future.

Ukraine this week proposed a "peace" summit by the end of February, but said Russia could participate only if it first faces a war-crimes tribunal. That drew a frosty response from the Kremlin, with Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov saying that Kyiv must accept all of Russia's demands, including that it give up four Ukrainian regions that Moscow claims to have annexed.

"Otherwise," he said, "the Russian Army will deal with this issue."

Russia does not fully control any of those regions, and has even lost territory there in recent months as Ukrainian forces fight to reclaim all the land seized by Moscow. But on Wednesday, the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, said it was impossible to accept a peace plan that did not recognize those four Ukrainian regions as part of Russia.

"Any plan that does not take into account these circumstances cannot claim to be a peace plan," Mr. Peskov said, according to the state-run Tass news agency.

The hard-line positions suggest that both sides believe they have more to gain on the battlefield, analysts say.

"This suggests there is not necessarily a push for a negotiated peace or even some sort of negotiations, but still a push for whatever endgame is being sought militarily," said Marnie Howlett, a lecturer in Russian and Eastern European politics at the University of Oxford.

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U.S. TRIES TO STOP IRAN FROM GIVING DRONES TO RUSSIA

TASK FACES OBSTACLES

Officials See Tehran and Moscow in Alliance of Convenience

This article is by David E. Sanger, Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt.

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration has embarked on a broad effort to halt Iran's ability to produce and deliver drones to Russia for use in the war in Ukraine, an endeavor that has echoes of its yearslong program to cut off Tehran's access to nuclear technology.

In interviews in the United States, Europe and the Middle East, a range of intelligence, military and national security officials have described an expanding U.S. program that aims to choke off Iran's ability to manufacture the drones, make it harder for the Russians to launch the unmanned "kamikaze" aircraft and — if all else fails — to provide the Ukrainians with the defenses necessary to shoot them out of the sky.

The breadth of the effort has become clearer in recent weeks. The administration has accelerated its moves to deprive Iran of the Western-made components needed to manufacture the drones being sold to Russia after it became apparent from examining the wreckage of intercepted drones that they are stuffed with made-in-America technology.

U.S. forces are helping Ukraine's military to target the sites where the drones are being prepared for launch — a difficult task because the Russians are moving the launch sites around, from soccer fields to parking lots. And the Americans are rushing in new technologies designed to give early warning of approaching drone swarms, to improve Ukraine's chances of bringing them down, with everything from gunfire to missiles.

But all three approaches have run into deep challenges, and the

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PAUL RATJE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Surge at the Border

Migrants are lining sidewalks in El Paso as a fight persists over a policy known as Title 42. Page A17.

Guns' Toll on New York City's Children: 149 Shot

By HURUBIE MEKO

The laughter of sisters once filled the bedroom as they jumped and danced to 1990s R&B. Shayma and Tayma Roman were known around the neighborhood as twins even though they were about two years apart: One was rarely spotted without the other

close by. Their room sat silent in early October.

Shayma, a 17-year-old cheerleader, basketball player and fashion lover, had been in front of her grandmother's apartment in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, with her sister Tayma, 19, when gunmen opened fire on Sept. 28, hitting her in the torso. Shayma, who

relatives said was held in Tayma's arms as she bled, died at Brookdale Hospital.

Tayma didn't come to a memorial service days later on a misty October night. It was too difficult for her to return home, family said. Instead, she was mourning blocks away, surrounded by friends.

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Right and Further Right Fight To Helm the Republican Party

By JONATHAN WEISMAN and KEN BENSINGER

Since former President Donald J. Trump's narrow victory in 2016, the Republican Party has suffered at the ballot box every two years, from the loss of the House in 2018 to the loss of the White House and Senate in 2020 to this year's history-defying midterm disappointments.

Many in the party have now found a scapegoat for the G.O.P.'s struggles who is not named Trump: the chairwoman of the Republican National Committee, Ronna McDaniel.

But as Ms. McDaniel struggles for a fourth term at the party's helm, her re-election fight before the clubby 168 members of the Republican National Committee next month may be diverting G.O.P. leaders from any serious consideration of the thornier problems facing the party heading into the 2024 presidential campaign.

Ms. McDaniel, who was hand-picked by Mr. Trump in late 2016 to run the party and whom he en-

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Tempers Flare Over Blizzard

As the death toll grew and public criticism mounted, the Erie County executive criticized the Buffalo mayor and the mayor responded. PAGE A18

Santos Faces Investigation

The Nassau County prosecutor said she would investigate whether Representative-elect George Santos had committed crimes related to false claims. PAGE A21

Frozen Temperature, and Pipes

The weekend's bitterly cold weather has crept out of the Southeast but the fallout remains in the form of crippled water systems. PAGE A18



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Germans Seek Energy Options

Fearful of power outages and rationing, many people are turning to solar panels or wood to heat their homes. PAGE B1

Southwest Chief Facing a Crisis

Bob Jordan heralded the company's performance just weeks before a storm revealed glaring weaknesses. PAGE B1

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Israel's Hard-Line Agenda

The country's president told a far-right coalition partner that he was raising alarms over bias. PAGE A14

Benedict XVI Is 'Very Ill'

Pope Francis called on the faithful to pray for his 95-year-old predecessor, whose health has diminished. PAGE A14

SPORTS B7-8

Happily Retired in Her 20s

Ashleigh Barty, who left tennis while ranked No. 1, says she has "slipped quite seamlessly into this life that's just like everyone else." PAGE B7

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Museum Mile for Miles

In Los Angeles, shrines to skateboarding, tattoos, bunnies, neon, aviation, sneakers, citrus trees and other niche topics pepper the sprawling region, highlighting its diversity. PAGE C6

She's the TikTok Organist

Anna Lapwood has become the world's most visible champion of her instrument by posting clips from the silly to the sublime on an app known more for pop than classical music. PAGE C2

OPINION A26-27

Natalie Koch

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THURSDAY STYLES D1-6

A Profusion of Self-Expression

In the party renaissance of 2022, colors blared and prints thrived. From flowery frocks on all genders to animal purses, individualism reigned. PAGE D4

