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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS PRESS AVAILABILITY ON
IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL PRE-K, ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Ok, I just want to address – give you an update, first, on our pre-k program, and then we'll take some questions on that, a few other quick topics.

So, as we said last week in great detail, the focus here is on doing something that will change the lives for tens of thousands of our children, giving them full-day, high-quality pre-k – but also of paramount importance is making sure our children will be safe. I say that as a parent. I say that as a public-school parent. And we said very clearly last week – in any instance where we think a program cannot provide that safe, healthy environment, or we don't think a program is up to our quality standards, that program would not go forward. And I think everyone knows we had, thank god, ample alternative space and options available, because the response to the pre-k program was overwhelming. We had many more seats available than we were able to fund.

In terms of our determination to protect health and safety, in a handful of cases, as you know – nine cases – we came to the conclusion that either because of health and safety, or qualitative issues, those programs should not open this year. We have 36 other cases where we found a temporary problem, a problem that can be resolved, in many cases, in just a few days. We'll have further information today and tomorrow on exactly the disposition of those 36, but many of them will be open on Monday. So, in many of the cases, it will be just a two day delay.

And I want to say again, as a parent, I understand two days delay is a real inconvenience for parents. We regret that. We're working hard to resolve the issues as quickly as possible. But every parent would say the paramount concern is getting it right, making sure these sites are ready to go, that they are up to code, that they're safe, that they're healthy, that everything is in place for our children. So, nine sites will not open this year; 36 sites are experiencing a delay. In many of those cases, that delay will amount to two days, and those sites will be open Monday.

On the nine sites, that accounts for 265 children – 265 children. Of the 265, as of a few hours ago, 125 have been successfully placed in alternative sites. So, we're almost to the halfway point in terms of getting these families situated. Let me emphasize to all the parents who are concerned – every child will get a seat. That is guaranteed. They will get a seat. They will be offered a seat as close as possible. In the case of those nine programs, 265 families – again, already 125 have accepted a new alternative. Of the remainder, they will get an offer of a seat as close as possible to their home – or they may prefer a seat closer to their work, for example – but every single child will be offered a seat.

In terms of the 36 sites that have been delayed – they all will come on line in short order. Every one of those seats is guaranteed for the children who are enrolled. We will start tomorrow with over 50,000 children in full-day pre-k. This is going to be a historic and important moment for this city. And for the families of those over

50,000 children, it's going to be a fantastic day. For the families who are still waiting for their situation to be resolved, we pledge to get this done very quickly, to resolve their issues. We have people working non-stop right now to do it, because we want them to know they will be accommodated, and we will make sure that every child is served. With that, I will take some questions.

Question: Mr. Mayor, what would you say to the families of those kids who are now without places to go because the nine schools were closed?

Mayor: The nine schools – again, that's about 265 children. We care very deeply about those 265 children, and my message to those families is, work with us immediately to find a different placement for your child. We guarantee them an alternative placement – again, full-day high-quality pre-k for free, that is guaranteed to them. We have enrollment specialists who are working with parents nonstop. Any parent – and I want to emphasize – any parent with a question about their own child's situation can call 3-1-1, and they will be transferred to an enrollment specialist. So, any parent that's not sure about tomorrow, or not sure about their specific site, call 3-1-1, and they will be transferred to an enrollment specialist who can do real, detailed work with them. This is a crucial point – I need everyone's help in getting this message out, as a bit of public service. They literally will get someone specifically trained in pre-k, who will walk them through their options, and has the ability to sign them up, right then and there, into an alternative program.

Question: Mayor, what would you say – and I'm being facetious here – but someone who would look at this and say, what a colossal screw-up this is?

Mayor: I think the numbers speak for themselves. Look, this is a very human endeavor. I say it as a parent. Again, I remember the first day that Chiara went to pre-k. I remember the first day that Dante went to pre-k. So, I understand for parents what an important moment this is, and we want to get it right for every family. And again, I regret any inconvenience that's occurred for our families, but I think the numbers speak for themselves. Over 50,000 kids will show up tomorrow for full-day pre-k, and everything will be ready to go. That's more than 30,000 children additional in comparison to last year. So, think about it – last September, 20,000 kids showed up for full-day pre-k. Tomorrow, over 50,000 kids are going to show up successfully for full-day pre-k. For a small number of children, we have some more work to do. But they are guaranteed a seat.

Question: The organizers of the 5th Avenue St. Patrick's Day Parade said today that they would allow just a single openly gay group to march. Critics say that tokenism [inaudible], so part one, is it tokenism? And second, would you change your position not to march in that parade?

Mayor: Look, what I do know about the announcement – obviously it just occurred a few hours ago, and we're still trying to get more information – but what we do know is it's a step forward. This is progress. What I've called for for a long time is an inclusive parade. This is a city of inclusion. That's the values of this administration. It's the values of the people of this city. We need a truly inclusive parade. Whatever the details, this indicates progress. This is a step forward. But I need to know more before I can tell you how we're going to handle something six months from now.

Question: You can't say, Mayor –

Question: Mr. Mayor, at this point, all of the 265 kids – will it be another week, or two weeks?

Mayor: So, let me break –

Question: And secondly, I have a second part to this – are you confident that universal pre-k sites have done the thorough check [inaudible] 50,000 children [inaudible]?

Mayor: Absolutely. Again, the personnel, and the talent, and the energy, and the resources that have been thrown at getting this right are extraordinary – fire department, health department, buildings department, Department of Education – a nonstop effort. You would be worried if we didn't find problems. If we didn't find problems, that means we weren't being blunt about the reality and transparency. We did find problems. In nine sites, those problem were such – both, again, physical and qualitative – that we said, those sites are not going to go forward. They cannot fix their problems in time to go forward for this year. In the remaining 36 sites, we're confident they can fix their problems, in many cases as early as Monday. So I am absolutely confident. Look, I hold a simple standard, would I send my own child to one of these programs – the answer is yes. For over 50,000 kids tomorrow, they're going to walk through the door of a pre-k that's going to have the same quality standards as the ones that Dante and Chiara went to. That's the standard I hold. Until a site is ready, we're not going to open it. But the message is, do everything we can to open that site the first available moment, once we know it is 100 percent safe.

Question: Mr. Mayor, you were the first – back on St. Patrick's for a second – you were the first mayor in 20 years to not march in this parade. If the position of the organizers right now is one group, one banner, that's it, will you march next year?

Mayor: I need to know more. I've got to be honest with you – we heard this just a few hours ago – I want to hear directly from the parade organizers before I assume what their position is. I want to talk to community members. But I know it represents progress. I know this is a good day for New York City, and it's a step forward for inclusion. But I need to know more before I can decide what I'm going to do in March.

Question: Mayor, do you plan to make any more endorsements in state senate or assembly races or are you done for now?

Mayor: At this moment, we're done, but I always hold the possibility that we may choose to jump into a few more, but we've obviously gotten involved in a number of races where I thought it was important.

Question: On the pre-k health and safety violations, and also the quality of violations – can you be a little more specific about what the violations are that you're finding, what are you encountering, what's [inaudible]?

Mayor: I can get you – our team can get you details on some of those sites. But again, in a lot of cases, we know these are things that can be fixed in a day or two. A number of you were at the press conference a few days back, where we detailed the types of things that often have to be fixed. A lot of them are things that can be fixed, literally, in a day or two. But until they're fixed, we're not moving forward.

Phil: Last question, guys.

Question: Did you expect to encounter these sorts of issues with the pre-k rollout?

Mayor: Absolutely. Look, we are doing something not only historic, but on a vast scale, and it had to be done. It had to be done. We had to reach our children more effectively. And the fact that for many, many years the vast majority of our kids couldn't get full-day pre-k was holding back our children, holding back our school system. This had to be done. We projected clearly throughout this process that there would be some challenges in the beginning, and that we would resolve those challenges. Now the numbers, again, are very powerful – over 50,000 seats that are working as planned, a small number proportionately that aren't. We also have been talking to parents throughout this process. So, in some of these 36 sites, where there will be a few days of delay, we were able to project that to a number of parents in advance so they can make alternative plans. But yes, this – something of this endeavor – I think you've seen some of the discourse in the last few days – nothing has been attempted in our country, in any city, on this scale before. It is groundbreaking. It's fundamentally important. Of course it was going to come with challenges, but we're navigating those challenges quickly.

Phil: Thanks, guys.

Question: Mr. Mayor, very quickly. Your position on the poor doors – so called poor doors – and are you in favor of amending the civil rights law of the city to avoid discrimination in certain buildings that maybe don't give access to certain amenities to some affordable housing residents?

Mayor: I have not looked at the question of the civil rights law. I can tell you what our stance is, and I think the deputy mayor spoke to it the other day. We want to create fairness and inclusion in all of the buildings that we're involved in. There's a lot of ways to do that. We have some buildings that were already in the pipeline. Where we can, we'll make some modifications, but going forward, we're going to come up with a new policy that emphasizes fairness and inclusion. Thanks everyone.

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