



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** June 4, 2018

**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. As you heard before the break, Mayor de Blasio has unveiled a plan that would eliminate the admissions tests for the eight specialized high schools in our city claiming that the exam perpetuates segregation in the school system. Mayor de Blasio joins us now from the Blue Room inside City Hall to talk about that and more. Welcome Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you, Errol.

**Louis:** The plan you unveiled – I’m certainly in the camp of those who think, long overdue, a great start, but bringing it to the attention of Albany at the very end of their session almost guarantees that they’re going to punt on it, doesn’t it?

**Mayor:** Well, Errol, look, the stars are really aligned here for action on this issue. It’s not just that there’s clearly an unfair reality with these schools. I mean let’s be really clear, only nine percent of the students in all eight specialized high schools are black or Latino. Nine percent in a city that’s majority black and Latino, Stuyvesant the most vivid example, only one percent of admitted students last time were African-American, three percent Latino. That just doesn’t make sense in today’s day and age, it’s not fair, it’s not right, but it’s also the question of the test itself, a single standardized test determining a child’s entire future makes no sense in this day and age.

So there’s a couple really crucial fairness points going on here and the stars are aligned because this issue has gotten more and more attention in recent years, and certainly even in recent months. I’m in – I’m beginning second term, we have a new Chancellor, we, I think, we’re going to have a new State Senate. There is a lot of reasons why it makes sense now to put this forward. The Assembly was very enthusiastic about this idea, the State Commissioner of Education, the State Chancellor of Education came out strongly in support, we sort of have a critical mass moment now.

Now look, if we can get everything to work in this legislative session, I’d love nothing more, but it’s also a good way to start what has to be a very important discussion in this city and this state, looking forward to next year –

**Louis:** Okay –

**Mayor:** If it doesn't get acted on now, it's going to be front of the agenda next year and I think with a different Senate and a great opportunity for action.

**Louis:** If I could ask, when your son, Dante de Blasio, was preparing for the SHSAT was there additional prep for him? How much time in – how much time was devoted to getting him ready to take that single high-stakes test?

**Mayor:** You know both my son and my daughter took the test, and as I said at the press conference my daughter Chiara got into Brooklyn Tech also but chose in fact to go to Beacon High School, and every kid has to make a choice between what is more and more a lot of good options and we want to provide more strong high school options for our kids. I don't remember vividly an elaborate prep process honestly and I don't want to misquote, I don't remember him taking separate tests – I mean separate courses for example, but it was a while ago.

But the fact is for a lot of kids, obviously, those separate courses that exceptional preparation really is crucial and a lot of families just can't afford it, and why should they have to afford it? It gets back to, in my mind, the insanity of a single test determining one's destiny. You know, I made a very simple point yesterday, the finest colleges in America, the finest graduate schools in America, they don't admit based on a test, they never think of admitting based on a single test, they look at a whole host of things starting of course with grades. And that's crucial to our proposal, put grades which are a much more universal measure of how someone has done over years in the front of the process, but the best educational institutions in the country, no way, no how, would they choose their admitees based on a single test.

**Louis:** You know, it's interesting you raise that because I was looking – there is a group of black and Latino alumni organizations from these elite schools, not the official groups that claim that they are stakeholders and they step forward and try to speak for all the alumns, but you talk to the black and Latino alumns and they say that the test includes topics that are not even taught in the standard middle school curriculum. If that's the case, I mean you know, the test has got to be looked at itself, right?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. Look, this test makes no sense because it's a single test and it also doesn't make sense because of its content. You're right. It's not connected to the curriculum. By the way you have to go out of your way to take it, which means a lot of kids don't even take it.

The idea we put forward is, of course, phase one with the Discovery Program to increase right away the number of kids who are disadvantaged who get in even with the current test system. But the real goal, and the thing we need legislation for, would be to change the entire system. Junk the test. Get rid of it. Go with a system based on grades and based on performance on something much more universal which are the State exams that all kids take, every single kid takes, in math and in English, combine those results to get a real composite of how a child has done.

That's a much more fair approach and obviously the focus, as you said, on ensuring that every middle school is represented. This is based on a system you may have heard about. University of Texas made a very bold decision some years ago to admit the top, I think it's ten percent of all high school students. Each high school class in Texas, the top ten percent of each school, gets automatic admission to the University of Texas system to guarantee kids of all backgrounds are able to get in, regardless of economics, regardless of race.

We have so many talented kids who are black and Latino who will never, under the current system, see the inside of a specialized high school, but actually bring a ton of talent that if it was measured properly, they would be amongst the first to be admitted.

**Louis:** Well I mean – look, I love everything you are saying, and that University of Texas model I am familiar with it, but it was explicitly implemented as a way to sort of break down segregation in the University of Texas system, and I don't want to sort of hung up on nomenclature, but it really is important to say that that's what the goal is, right?

I mean because when the debate starts – I've already seen some of this on social media – people default to this mushy kind of, well let's all make the schools great or, you know, as we said in our news report, some of the Asian families are saying, well why are we being penalized if we figured out a way to sort of dominate the outcomes, why should we have to take less? Where it becomes like sort of a political spoils system.

**Mayor:** Well, you are raising big, powerful points. So I always talk about my own personal history, when I was growing up, I grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that went through an effort to diversify its schools but at the same time as I was in high school, there was a horrible fight over desegregation in Boston and very, very negative dynamic. And what got lost in the whole discussion was making schools better for all kids, so it ended up with tons of conflict and actually very little improvement in educational opportunities for kids.

Our vision here is Equity and Excellence, it's the guiding principal of our school system under this administration, we've got to do a lot more to improve schools across the board and provide many more great options at the high school level. We talked yesterday about, we're going to look to expand the number of seats in the specialized schools and also to improve a lot of other high schools and improve the options there. The Chancellor is going to come back with a plan to do that, so we want to lift the whole boat.

But I will tell you what we don't want to do, we don't want a situation where in the name of a crucial social and fairness goal, we forget the question of improving schools. You got to literally do both at once. You got to walk and chew gum here. You have to address the need to diversify while simultaneously improving the schools across the board. I think this model will do that, I think the specialized schools are the jewels in the crown of the New York City public education system. They need to look like New York City, it's just not fair if they don't. This is the breeding ground for the leaders of tomorrow, we want leaders of all backgrounds who actually represent the city, if we don't fix this that's not going to be possible.

**Louis:** Okay, very good. We're going to leave that there for now. Right now we're going to take a short break. I have more with Mayor de Blasio when we come back. Stay with us.

[...]

**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. Mr. Mayor the recent suicide of yet another driver, we've now seen livery drivers as well as sort of commercial drivers, for in one case an elite service, and yellow taxi drivers – all under very severe stress. The City Council is considering a number of bills. I wanted to get, I guess, your take on what the City, your side of City Hall is prepared to do and what steps you might be taking to deal with the severe financial stress a lot of the medallion holders in particular are dealing with.

**Mayor:** Yes, and my heart goes out to these families and this is a horrible situation Errol. But I also have to say and I've said it before if anyone is in financial distress they need to seek help. If anyone is feeling suicidal because of their finances it is crucial to seek help, 8-8-8-NYC-WELL is the place to turn because this is not a typical situation. Obviously a lot of people are struggling to make ends meet in New York City. We got to get these folks help personally in addition to on a bigger level.

And in terms of the bigger change.? We tried to already bring more parity to all of the different for hire vehicles, the yellow cabs and the green cabs and all the other types by trying to create more even and consistent rules for example around disability access. We want to do a lot more in terms of ensuring the rights of drivers, the rights of customers, you know, make sure there is fairness across the whole sector. There hasn't been up until now. Obviously the City Council looking very seriously at the question of putting caps on some of the for hire vehicle categories – I think there is more and more reason for that now given the congestion problem and more linkage to congestion with the services like Uber for example.

So the Council is putting together legislation together on that, I'm certainly supportive of that idea. We have got to do everything we can to address these issues and by the way there's also a serious issue of what the real wages are for a lot of the for hire vehicle drivers because I think what some of these companies like Uber have done is encourage more and more people to drive their own cars but there is less and less business to go around. A lot of these folks are making very little money and that's a real concern too we have to address so –

**Louis:** Well I mean in some respects this is analogous, I'm talking now just about the yellow medallion owners to what happened in the housing crisis ten years ago. Right? Where people buy the medallion at say \$700,00, \$800,00, \$900,000 – the market has crashed for a lot of different reasons and those same medallions are now worth \$200,000, they are underwater. One of the solutions ten years ago was at the federal level at least was buying up a lot of those underwater credits just to make sure that people are not running in place and constantly falling behind. Is that a possibility for New York City?

**Mayor:** It's a different reality. The federal government obviously literally prints money. This is a very different reality here what that economic impact would be, would be a very big deal for

taxpayers and I don't think it's the right way to solve the problem. Look the underlying problem as you said there is a lot of reasons, some of them are technological change and changes in consumer choice, the industry also needed to deal with that, needs to still deal with that. I think they made some strides to reaching a better way of addressing the current condition but there was a lag there. So there's a lot of moving parts. What the City has done obviously in addition to the items I've talked about is we are no longer selling medallions we are trying to help strengthen the value by not putting any new ones into the market. And we do believe the value will start to go up over time. It's a finite resource, there still is a real demand for yellow cabs, I mean you see it all over the city. They still provide a service that is different than some of the other for hire vehicles and we are going to work with them to strengthen their hand and raise the value of those medallions.

**Louis:** New topic, the NYCHA settlement with the federal government that a lot of folks are waiting on. We've heard estimates that it could cost the City as much as a billion dollars. Would there also be a continuing obligation that we would expect to see in the settlement that the City would have to put in a certain amount per year going forward?

**Mayor:** Well it's a settlement – it's a legal settlement discussion that's obviously a very sensitive matter. I've said publicly I think the conversations have been very productive and I respect the way the U.S. Attorney's Office has handled this but it's not appropriate to go into the details of the discussions. The conversations are ongoing and I'm hopeful we can come to a positive resolution.

**Louis:** And can we expect that any time soon?

**Mayor:** Look there has been a lot of good productive conversation that could result in a resolution soon but you know it's also a very complex subject matter – trying to basically address decades of disinvestment, you know bluntly by the federal government and the State government, both of which stepped back from obligations to the Housing Authority and even the City over decades didn't pay as much attention as I think it should of. I'm very proud in our administration we have invested over \$3.5 billion, new money into NYCHA to fix roofs, to fix the heat situation, a whole a lot of over things, provide more repairs. But this is complex stuff, it will be ready as soon as it is ready but we're certainly hopeful of a good result.

**Louis:** On a different topic, it was reported today that with all of your City-paid legal bills aside following the various encounters you had with the federal prosecutors, there is still something like a quarter-of-a-million dollars for which you are personally liable. You or some campaign entity is you can create one, where does that leave you and how do you expect to get out of that?

**Mayor:** Well there has to be some kind of new law to clarify how to go about putting together that kind of legal defense fund entity. There is not really an operative law in this city so that's something that would require legislation.

**Louis:** You've asked the City Council for this in the past, is this something you have talked about with the new Speaker? He's only been there for a few weeks but the issue remains.

**Mayor:** Yes, they are looking at it. I don't know the exact state of play but there are certainly looking at the issue.

**Louis:** When we talk about what's going to happen with the taxi medallions, one thing that pops up is that Michael Cohen, the top aide to the President is an owner and dealer and trafficked and has trafficked and frankly got rich dealing in some of this stuff – he had some nice things to say about you just in recent days. I was wondering if you were aware of that, he said he was thinking about running for mayor at one point but then decided Mayor de Blasio is doing a fine job.

**Mayor:** Well, I think Errol, this really proves I'm a coalition builder. I mean if I've got Michael Cohen supporting me, imagine that. I was surprised. I don't really know him. Obviously I disagree with his mentor but it was pretty funny to see. I'm very surprised he ever thought about running for mayor but hey, anything is possible in New York City right?

**Louis:** Okay no plans for a beer or a drink or anything like that?

**Mayor:** God bless him, I think he has better things to do right now.

**Louis:** Indeed, okay we will see you next week, thank you for spending some time with us Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Errol.

###