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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER
SHOW**

Brian Lehrer: Hi, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian.

Lehrer: Let me begin by following up on two things we talked about last week both on education. You repeated your long-held position that Albany should allow the city to change the admissions criteria for the specialized high schools not just the single test so they could become more diverse but Politico New York reports today that if you parse the language in the State law governing those admissions it seems only to apply to Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech. The city, as you know, has since created five other specialized high schools all really good and really selective. And for those who may well have the power to expand the admissions criteria – and the borough presidents of Brooklyn and the Bronx are asking you to do so. Do you agree that you have that power under the law and will you try to use?

Mayor: I want to have that power unquestionably and so far in the view of our Law Department it, sadly, is not as straightforward as that. I will certainly go back and look again and talk to our lawyers again because I think this is a matter injustice that has to be addressed. The fact is that many of our specialized high schools, which are some of our very best high school are fundamentally unrepresentative of the population of the city and certainly the population our schools. I don't even understand why Albany gets to decide anything about our specialized high schools to begin with. It should be a local decision. And if I had my way there would not be a single test that determines admission to some of the greatest schools in the country and obviously [inaudible] future. I mean the fact it's based on a single, high stakes [inaudible] makes absolutely no sense –

Lehrer: Right and your position is clear on that but can you talk a little more about your Law Department's interpretation because I think the way that some are reading it is that the law names Bronx Science, Stuyvesant, and Brooklyn Tech and therefore you have more flexibility with the schools created since?

Mayor: And again let me say very clearly I will revisit it because I would love nothing more than to have a pathway to action. I think the challenge here and it refers to everything with our school system is we're still working under a State law rubric in general. Remember I had to go up to Albany last year to get a renewal of mayoral control of education to begin with and it was only a two-year renewal which I think was a mistake but it was what we could get. My point being we do not have the total independence that I think would be ideal for a mayoral control system. But that being said I will revisit it because I want to find any form of action that I possibly can find.

Lehrer: And the other follow up question is about you incoming Chancellor Richard Carranza and the \$75,000 settlement paid by the San Francisco schools to one of the other former top administrators there, Veronica Chavez after she accused Carranza of derailing her career for calling him out on alleged inappropriate flirting with another educator. You said here last week that Carranza “explained that he was not the subject of the lawsuit” but the Daily News published a quote from the lawsuit that claimed “Carranza retaliated against and subjected Chavez to a hostile work environment.” So will you acknowledge that you were not accurate here last week?

Mayor: No, Brian, respectfully I don't understand why you're looking at Daily News stories and repeating them without independently verifying the facts –

Lehrer: They were quoting from the lawsuit. Was that an incorrect quote?

Mayor: It's just inaccurate. Look at the whole lawsuit. It was not directed at him, he was not a subject of it. I mean he's not. He wasn't the defendant. It's clear as a bell. Of course we studied this. That is a line that's true in some of the court documents but he wasn't the defendant, there were no findings against him. This is a case that was settled by a school system. That school system in San Francisco continues to say clearly he was not a defendant, he didn't do anything wrong, and he left that school system after seven years in very good standing.

I don't understand – and I think it's a real problem when there's character assassination without facts. So look at the facts and you'll see he was not a defendant.

Lehrer: The defendant in a case is usually the employer or frequently in this case I guess that would be the district but was the allegation not against him for retaliating against her?

Mayor: [Inaudible] I don't know how many times I have to say it to you and I really don't think it's fair. Look the Daily News has axe the grind here. Let's be very clear about that and I wish it was about the facts but I don't think it is. So the bottom line here is we studied this carefully. He had an excellent record in San Francisco of achieving real change and improvement in that school system. He was respected greatly for being inclusive of all communities. He had leadership that reflected the city obviously in terms of gender and background. There's nothing here. We looked at it and there's nothing here.

Lehrer: New business but also on education – Comptroller Scott Stringer has a new report on homeless students in the city public schools, the number rising during your administration from less than a 100,000 kids to 111,000 if you count kids in shelters and in families that are double

up without their own homes or anyone in a temporary housing situation. And it was a small sample I'm sure you've seen this of about 70 kids but found a very high rate of the schools failing to follow up on absenteeism and absenteeism itself among those kids at the alarming average of 41 days per school year. Do you acknowledged the rise in the number of homeless students and the report's assertion that there aren't enough staff to keep up with the city's obligations to their special needs?

Mayor: I have not seen the report. I haven't read the report. I would say if the question is do we need to continue to invest to make sure homeless students get the help they need and attend school? Yes, we've been doing that we obviously gave for the first time consistent school bus service and MetroCards to homeless students so they could get to school. We're reorienting the whole shelter system to begin with to localize it more, get people to be in their home borough or hopefully in their home communities so kids can go to school in their own neighborhood and not be moved all over the city. We have guidance counselors, tutors, attendance officers in the shelters helping to make sure kids get the help they need. But I'm sure we've got to keep deepening that effort. What I would caution because your listeners I know care very deeply about the fact – when you hear the number it really has to be looked at in its fullness.

The fact is we have a lot of kids in shelter, in our homeless shelter. It is not a good situation, we have to keep driving down that number. We have more families today than we ever had in the past and that has everything to do with the economic reality of the city, the cost of housing, etcetera. But that number, when they talk about those students they include obviously many more students who are not in a shelter. I think it's really important to understand that. Temporary housing which is a definition – I don't know the formal definition of – people who are double up. That obviously is a lot of people in New York City, a lot of families, a lot of individuals who are in those kind of circumstances but it's not all by any stretch kids in shelter. In fact the vast majority of kids are not in shelter, I just want to make that clear.

Lehrer: Fair enough but would you say that the report by Stringer unfairly defines the burden on those kids in other words the kids who are doubled up because their family has lost their home maybe they're able to stay with a friend or a relative temporarily but that that's not having the same kind of impact on their absenteeism.

Mayor: I think each situation is different. I think that the goal is the same goal. If what Comptroller is saying is we have to make sure that no child gets missed when it comes to their attendance and the support they need to succeed in school including overcoming some of the challenges if they're either in a shelter or some other kind of, you know, double up circumstance or something – I agree with that goal 100 percent and we've invested a lot toward that goal and we're ready to do whatever it takes.

I want it to be clear though this has been very central to our strategy starting with reorienting the shelter system to a local perspective because again if a kid – God forbid any family ends up homeless but the kid at least can stay in her home community and go to the same school without having to go to another part of the city, that at least improves the chances of continuity in their education but we know they need extra support. We're going to give it them.

Lehrer: On what support they need – the advocacy groups Advocates for Children and the Citizens Committee for Children of New York called on you to create a Deputy Chancellor position specifically for highly mobile students. Good idea?

Mayor: Well it's an idea I haven't heard that one previously. I think I'd say it a little definitely and I feel this on a lot of topics. There needs to be one of the Deputy Chancellors very specifically focused on this mission and obviously with the new Chancellor we're going to look at our whole structure and figure out what makes sense. We also have a Chancellor who I think is going to be very purposely focused on this. So I appreciate the idea and we'll look at that as something to focus on as we go forward with the school system.

Lehrer: Alex in Harlem you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hello, Alex.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor. Hello, Brian. My research featured in New York Times this weekend showed that 50 percent of bus stops and 40 percent of bike lanes are blocked in my neighborhood of Harlem and probably there are similar rates around the city. With bus service at an all-time low and falling bicycles in dying in the streets, how are you going to fix the problem of enforcement because the laws are there, the NYPD is unwilling and unable to enforce traffic laws. What is your solution? And don't tell me it's a state issue.

Mayor: Well, Alex, respectfully I'll tell you what I want to tell you and I would appreciate if you – I'm listening respectfully your question. I think you should be respectful as well. I disagree with your overall frame. I think you know if you have an ideological worldview that's great but I would ask you to look at the facts too. There are real problem with bus service, no question about it and we're going to very much push the MTA on that front but we're also going to the fundamental investments to change situation which is why we announced 21 new Select Bus Service lines which will be faster and take a lot of investment to give them the lanes they need and the speed that they need and we've been doing that.

But I agree that there's lots of other problems with the bus service we have to address and we will push the MTA and try and work with the MTA in every way on that. I disagree that the PD is not focused on enforcement, first of all from a Vision Zero perspective, I, again, disagree with your characterization of the situation in our streets. As you may know the number of fatalities has gone down, thank God, four years in a row because of Vision Zero and we are going to be adding a lot more Vision Zero elements going forward including a whole lot more NYPD enforcement. It's been ramping up every year against drunk driving, against failure to yield to pedestrians, against speeding. We're going to do a lot more. The plan I put forward yesterday calls for the State to give us twice as many speed cameras around schools. We need to fight for that.

Guess what, pal, that's a State issue. So, you can say what you like but the facts are the facts. It's a State issue to authorize those additional 150 speed cameras. We need them to protect kids around schools. We need State action to make sure that doctors are required to report someone with a medical condition that could cause them to be unable to control their vehicle and kill people as happened in my neighborhood very recently. We need State action to ensure that if someone's car consistently is part of incidents where they're speeding and going through stop

signs and stop lights, that there's a sanction on the car owner including the ultimate taking of their registration.

So, don't for a moment think the NYPD can't enforce. They've been doing more and more and they will and they are concerned about obviously bus stops and any other place that needs enforcement. The first focus is on speeding and failure to yield but you will definitely see continual enforcement of the other areas as well.

Lehrer: Do you think that the caller had a certain ideological axe to grind – you suggested that?

Mayor: It's abundantly clear, first of all when people are reading from a script. It's quite clear. But I understand –

Lehrer: What ideology?

Mayor: I understand there's an advocacy community –

Lehrer: For bicyclists.

Mayor: For bicycles and other things but I think and I've talked to a lot of them over the years – and I think we often agree on core issues including the Vision Zero concept and how aggressive it needs to be. But I don't like when people leave out the facts. We can't do some of the things we want to do without State legislation. I wish we could. If we didn't need State legislation it would be done already. And no one should denigrate the efforts of the NYPD on enforcement. They've been constantly ramping up enforcement in a way you never saw the NYPD do in the past. I wish people would acknowledge that and then say, hey we want more [inaudible] bus stops and all – 100 percent, I want that too. But I don't like when the efforts that have been decisive in bringing down fatalities are ignored.

Lehrer: What's the biggest remaining obstacle to enforcing the bus lanes in particular?

Mayor: I think it is obviously there's always the question of where we put our officers to have the maximum impact. So first and foremost addressing violence and serious crime but again you know in the Vision Zero context, I want precinct officers to focus on intersections where there's been problems with speeding for example or failure to yield. That's where I want the first energy go to protect lives.

I absolutely agree if someone is blocking a bus stop or bike lane – now again I've said it very clearly, I've said it very humanly. If someone's blocking it for – for example, a bike lane for 30 seconds while they take out the groceries or let their kid off, I don't think they should get a ticket for that. If someone leaves their car for any meaningful amount of time they should be penalized and that should be an enforcement priority. But it has to be balanced against the other crucial things each precinct does.

Lehrer: and I know you've spoken about the tragic traffic incident that killed two children in Park Slope. We know now that the car involved had been given many tickets for traffic

violations near schools but the driver's license wasn't suspended I guess because the red-light camera can tell the vehicle's license plate but not who was driving. And you're calling for change to that law, right?

Mayor: That's exactly right, Brian. Look let's be very blunt about this. There is a car culture that must be addressed bluntly in this city, in the state, in the country. For too long the concept is, you're behind the wheel of a automobile, you can do whatever the hell you wanted. And I said very bluntly yesterday, in the wrong hands a car is a weapon and anyone dealing with it recklessly can take another life and we need to understand that and it needs to be seen as something that is handled with a lot more care and a lot more concern than what I think historically has happened both in our culture and in our laws. Our laws need to reflect the reality that if you get behind the wheel of a car, there's real consequences if you harm or kill someone. And when there's negligence involved then there has to be the kind of penalties we would apply to any other situation where someone was injured or killed.

So one of the things that I put forward is the notion that if your car is – it doesn't matter if you're driving it or your cousin is driving it or your kid's driving it or your friend, if your car is consistently involved in situations of speeding, going through stop lights, going through stop sign endanger other people's lives that's on you. If you're giving your car – if you're giving a deadly weapon to someone who uses it recklessly and could take another life that's on you.

And so we are very clear about the fact there needs to be escalating penalties and if there's a consistent pattern in a limited period of time then your registration gets taken away. Look, Brian, I don't want to see this happen to anyone. I don't – the goal we have with all the enforcement like the speed cameras is stop speeding and you won't get a ticket. In fact when speed cameras are around, we see speeding go down 50 percent in the school zones. So people get the point.

I think when there's teeth in the law, people get the point but you can't let your car be used by someone or use it yourself in a reckless manner repeatedly and feel no consequence. You shouldn't be able to use that car if you're going to act that way.

Lehrer: Jessica in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC. Hello, Jessica, you're on with the Mayor.

Question: Good morning. Thank you, Brian and thank you, Mr. Mayor. So I wanted to congratulate you Mr. Mayor on your choice for our New York City Chancellor for education, Mr. Carranza. He [inaudible] real goal for real inclusion and equality in education. I am personally thrilled because Mr. Carranza is of Mexican heritage and I feel that he can serve as a great role model for the Mexican American community [inaudible] students who unfortunately right now are leading in the high school dropout rate – 41 percent of all Mexican American high school students are dropping out of high school. But to get to my question – I'm wondering why it is when a student transfers to a new school after October 31st, the funding for that student doesn't transfer to the new school.

This is of concern because we see this trend happening a lot in charter schools right before the State test.

Mayor: Well, Jessica, I appreciate that question a lot. I think that's a very fundamental question about how we are guiding our schools. First of all, I agree with you about a Richard Carranza. I think he's going to be a role model for kids of all backgrounds I think obviously because he is so very proud of his Mexican culture and history and heritage, and because he is bilingual – actually spoke Spanish at home before he ever learned English. He learned English in school. I think a lot of kids are going to be inspired by that. I think it's a very important moment for the Mexican-American community of this city that is very big already and growing a lot.

On your question, look, it gets to a core point. There are charter schools who I've said some do what I believe is exactly the right thing the same as traditional public schools, they take all children regardless of ability and need, they take them all. Special-ed kids, kids who are English-language learners, kids who don't take tests necessarily so well, and work with them and help them. There are some others that work explicitly to push out kids who don't take tests well or have other challenges. That is unacceptable to me so I have not heard that previously Jessica that there's a funding dynamic that may in some way incentivize the wrong behavior by a school. I want to look into that and if you'll get your information to WNYC, I'll make sure we get you an answer because I think that's a very important question.

Lehrer: Jessica, thank you. Hang on we'll take your information so the Mayor's Office can get back to you. A question Mr. Mayor about the new report yesterday Public Advocate Letitia James on the gender wage gap in the city which the report says includes that women employed by the City government suffer a gender wage gap two-and-a-half to three times larger than women working in the private sector. Also the wage disparities for women of color in New York City are significantly worse than the national average. The most specific request of you in that report is for you to issue an executive order prohibiting City agencies from asking for previous salary information of job applicants, and ensure that agencies provide a salary range to applicants in job announcements and advertisement. So have you read the Public Advocate's report and would you issue such an executive order?

Mayor: I haven't read it. We already banned City agencies from asking salary history so I'll certainly get analysis from my team of the different items in the report. But no, we – I happily signed a bill and I give the Public Advocate credit, she pushed that concept very hard. I happily signed that bill. I believe we should not be asking about salary history and the City government does not ask about salary history any more.

On the bigger issue look, again, in an administration where the majority of the senior positions are held by women we believe in addressing the inequalities of the past. I am very adamant with everyone that we have to address any pay inequity. I don't know if those numbers that the Advocate put forward are accurate. I want to caution. I'd like us to do our own analysis and put that out publicly. But there's no question we don't tolerate pay inequality.

Lehrer: If the pay wage gap – sorry the gender wage gap for women of color is bigger in New York City than the national average, that's not about the government, I think that's about all the employers in the city. Is there – are there additional ways, or ways that you already are, addressing that?

Mayor: Well, obviously beginning with the ban on asking salary history that affects public sector and private sector in New York City and I got the usual flurry of calls from some business leaders concerned about it and reminded them that the history was unacceptable and we have to do something bold and this is the kind of strategy to really make an impact. So that's the law in New York City for all businesses. We're certainly going to look at anything else we can do to push the private sector and you know if there's overt discrimination, there's opportunity to bring complaints to our Human Rights Commission, for example. But we are looking to see if there's any other measures that we can put in place to keep pushing tangible progress on pay equality.

Lehrer: Phineas in Harlem, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Phineas.

Question: Yes, hi. I'm a senior – 65 years old. I'm confined to a wheelchair and I was arrested several years ago for selling acid out my apartment. I lost my apartment. I was evicted and I lost my Section 8 which I had. I was subsequently in a drug treatment program and all the charges [inaudible] 18 months intensive treatment and all the charges against him were dropped. I'm trying to get my Section 8 back and I filed for a special accommodations and the City is adamant about not giving it to me. I've had three informal hearings rules at HPD and I filed two Article 78s at the Supreme Court for a special accommodations and the City is adamant. I think that people should be offered a second chance. I've really struggle to get my life together and right now living in very difficult circumstances.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Phineas, I, first of all – I'm very sorry for all you've been through and obviously we want to in any way we can help you get to housing. I don't know obviously the facts. I want you to give your information to WNYC so we can follow up. My fear when I hear you tell the story is that we're running into a problem with the federal guidelines of Section 8. Remember Section 8 is a federal program. It is funded federally but that means different requirements have been put on it over the years that we have to abide by it so I don't know if that's part of the problem or not but that's my thought initially when I hear you say that. Let's see. I'll have senior folks at HPD follow up and see if there is either a way to address this through Section 8 or if there's a different kind of approach we can take to help you get affordable housing.

Lehrer: Phineas, hang on and [inaudible] in Queens you're on WNYC. Hello [inaudible].

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. HI, Brian.

Lehrer: Hi, there.

Question: I have heard the Mayor talk about Vision Zero and I am a driver myself and I think it's a great time but I've never heard of you talk about how high beaming affects the drivers at night. I've seen that so many drivers right now are using high beams cities with no reason. High beaming can really affect our vision and some cars have like – they added some more LED beam lights on the front of their car and it's really, really bright and it just blinds me and I think it blinds everyone [inaudible] and so far I've seen more and more of them but I've not really seen anybody doing anything about it. That's the question.

Mayor: [Inaudible] thank you. Brian, this is the epitome of what is good about your show and the opportunity for New Yorkers to call in with ideas because this is one that makes a lot of sense to me. In all of the Vision Zero discussions over last four years, I actually have not heard high beaming focused on him but as someone who used to drive myself I agree with [inaudible] entirely. When high beams are on the car coming the other way it can be blinding and I agree that some of the new lights are even more intense.

I will go back to the NYPD to see both where this stands legally in terms of whether there's any light [inaudible] being used that shouldn't be used legally or what the laws are about using high beams when they're not absolutely necessary and if there's an enforcement opportunity there. We also might want to do a public education campaign on it to remind people that it can cause a real problem for others. So this is a very helpful suggestion and give me a few weeks to sort it out and I'm happy to follow up. And [inaudible] give your information please to WNYC so we can keep you updated.

Lehrer: Christine in Brooklyn on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Christine.

Question: Hi. Hi, Brian. Hi, Mr. Mayor. Thank you for taking my call. You'll have to excuse me, I'm a little nervous if my voice waivers.

Mayor: No worries. No worries. Be at peace.

Question: My partner in the Executive Director of the Big Reuse. They are a nonprofit now based in Gowanus, Brooklyn. They divert building materials – building and construction materials from landfill and they also sell the salvaged building materials in the store to fund their community programs which include composting and work training programs. They do work with some City agencies so I hope I'm not stepping on any toes here but what I wanted to bring to your attention is that they recently lost their warehouse in Astoria, Queens due to a significant increase in their rent. The landlord more than doubled it and so they had to leave. Now they're facing in the same thing at their Gowanus, Brooklyn location where the landlord – obviously Gowanus is a hot spot right now and he is going to raise their rent so they're looking for a new location. So, I guess – not my question but I guess I want to bring this to your attention because they provide such an incredible service to the City and they have an incredible warehouse. You know when anybody re-does their kitchen, they [inaudible] kitchen and replace it. They take all those things and then can re-sell them at a huge discount to other consumers –

Lehrer: So this is like a rising commercial rents problem?

Question: Yes exactly, exactly –

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor – and I'm going to jump in there because we're going to run out of time soon but I think you know Mr. Mayor this one comes up time and time again.

Mayor: Sure but I want go to the first issue which is recycling and so, Christine, I think this is a fantastic idea. You know taking the salvaged material and not allowing them to going in to

landfill. That's very consistent with the vision we have for the city of intensifying all forms of recycling. I'm a personally obsessive recycler and look to make sure everyone's putting everything in the right bin around the office or one thing or another. So I love this idea that there's a systematic effort to take the building materials and divert them.

I want to see if we can help you and your colleagues with this. So, I'm going to have our Sanitation Commissioner follow up to see if we can find an appropriate location that would make sense. Of course to Brian's point, it is caught up in the rising cost of housing and land in the city we grapple with all the time. But for something like this – this is something the public sector can get involved and we have City facilities that might make sense and City land that might make sense for something like this. So this one, because it's about a public service, I think we can find hopefully a creative way to find you guys a right home.

Lehrer: One more. Anna in Greenpoint, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Anna.

Question: Hi, there. Thank you for taking my call. Hello Mr. – Mayor de Blasio. I am calling – first I want to thank you for all your support of the student walkout and on the issue of gun violence. I am a promise leader with the Sandy Hook Promise. I'm not sure if you're familiar with it half but it was founded by Nicole Hockley and Mark Barden who lost their children at Sandy Hook, and they've been working tirelessly on this issue and this is a program – the goal is to stop gun violence before it starts through grassroots education and outreach programs. And one of the programs is called Start With Hello and that's an elementary school program. And I'm going to be implementing it – I'm a parent as well. I have a kindergarten student and we're going to be implementing a Start With Hello Week at P.S. 31 in Brooklyn. And we're trying to get other schools in the area involved and of course my dream is to implement Sandy Hook Promise citywide.

So, my first question is, are you familiar with it, have you considered it? And I've already spoken to your Director of Community Affairs and sent some information to you but I wanted to invite you personally to come to our Start with Hello Week.

Mayor: Anna, thank you. Thank you for the work you're doing. I would love to see this in action. I am not familiar with it, no, but I would love to see this in action. I want to note because you mentioned the walk out – the numbers are amazing. What we're seeing is almost a million kids participated around the nation, all 50 states. This is a change moment that we've never seen before when high school students and even younger are taking this matter into their own hands in such a positive, productive way. So this is a very big moment our history and I think we're going to see a lot more so I certainly want to keep supporting it.

But I like what I'm hearing of what you're doing. I would love to see it in action.

Lehrer: And so to finish up Mr. Mayor maybe you can give us an update if you have one, on the preparations for next Saturday's March For Our Lives. There's going to be the big one in Washington but [inaudible] pretty big one here in New York too, locations around the country and certainly including the city. Do you have a route, do you have the time? Has that PD been working with the organizers? Can you give us an update?

Mayor: Yeah I don't have in front of me the final route. I believe the time is 10:00 a.m. on Saturday and look we're going to do everything to accommodate the marchers and make sure it is safe and people can get their point of view out as we would with people of any point. So I expect it will be substantial. I think that obviously the number one focus is on Washington but I do expect it will be a substantial march and we're going to work with that. But we'll have more details forthcoming on the final details on the march.

Lehrer: And we'll get to speak one more time before that next Friday. Mr. Mayor as always thank you very much.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian.

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