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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH WARBY PARKER TO PROVIDE FREE EYEGLASSES TO STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Richard. And thank you, you've been an extraordinary leader of our community schools effort. I know you are a true believer. I know you were a true believer you became deputy mayor in your previous role as the head of the Children's Aid Society, which is really one of the organizations that brought this whole idea to the fore and made it something that's now being discussed all over this nation as a better model for education. So, thank you for your leadership.

It is a great honor to be here at PS 50. PS 50 is one of our community schools and one of our 94 renewal schools. And for those of you who have been paying attention to the renewal school effort – all renewal schools are also community schools. That's one of the key investments we're making in our renewal schools.

Today here at PS 50, about 200 students are receiving eye exams for free. This is going to be something that makes a huge impact on the lives of these kids. It's happening before our very eyes. Get it?

[Laughter]

Thank you. That was good, huh? I write my own material.

Over the next four years –

Unknown: [inaudible]

Mayor: That's right. That's all it took – was some one-liners.

Over the next four years, every – every community school student – every student in all 130 community schools will get a free eye exam. This has never happened before in the history of New York City. This is an amazing thing, and this will be a big deal for these kids.

[Applause]

The city is investing \$10 million dollars in this effort over the next four years. And every child, who as a result of that exam need a pair of eyeglasses, will get a free pair of eyeglasses. Now, that last part is because of a great public-private partnership. And you're going to hear from the leaders of a company we're very, very proud of. We're proud of it because it is a homegrown New York company. We're proud of this company because they're so profoundly charitable, and it's part of their very mission and their sense of mission to be charitable while at the same time running their company. I want to thank the leaders of Warby Parker that you'll hear from in a moment – you'll hear from in a moment for really doing something that's exemplary. I hope many others in the business community follow this example because you're going to be making a huge impact on the lives of these kids.

Now, we estimate about 65,000 kids will get these free eye exams, and about 20,000 of them will need eyeglasses. And again, they'll get them for free. 20,000 kids will get free eyeglasses. This is a great thing unto itself, but it's also an example of what community schools mean – why community schools change the whole model, why they change the paradigm of education by getting at every part of a child's reality, getting at the whole child, figuring out what a child needs to succeed, and addressing it energetically and forthrightly.

You're going to hear from some of the folks, including the folks from Warby Parker who made this possible. But let me also acknowledge a couple of other folks who are a part of this today, and played an important role, and obviously share our enthusiasm for this effort. I want to thank my senior advisor for public-private partnerships, Gabrielle Fialkoff – there she is. Okay. I want to thank – I know our health commissioner likes for people to be able to have good eyesight. Isn't that right, Dr. Mary Bassett? Thank you. I want to thank the principal of this great school who's already making a wonderful impact on the trajectory of this school, Ester Quinones. Where is Ester? Thank you, Ester.

[Applause]

I want to thank Phoebe Boyer, the CEO of the Children's Aid Society. I have now said very nice things about the Children's Aid Society, which they deserve – and Dr. Randi Herman, the first vice president of the Council of Supervisors and Administrators. Thank you very much, Randi. Thank you to all of you who believe in this effort and understand what a huge impact it is going to have.

You know, I like to offer an analysis of what education means today. I'm going to offer it again. Education today has more impact on economic destiny than at any time in human history – literally, any time in previous human history. And when you think about that, then we owe it to our students to figure out every way they can learn because we're not just talking about their intellectual development or social development, we're talking about their very ability to survive in today's economy and the future economy. That's why our community schools concept is so powerful, because rather than being narrow and saying we're just going to teach kids what's in these books, for example, we're going to think about what will allow this whole child to move forward. Community schools think about physical health, they think about eyesight, they think about mental health, they think about the role of parents in education, and bring all those pieces into the equation. And that's going to be necessary for the future of education because we can't just address one part of a child's reality and expect to succeed. We have to go as far as we can.

Community schools concept – very simple – whole child, whole school, whole community, everyone working towards a common goal of the overall development of a child. And this model is going to be particularly powerful in some of our schools that need the most support. It's going to be one of the reasons why the renewal schools turn around.

Imagine if you're a child who can't see the blackboard. Let me make it very, very simple – you can't see the blackboard and you don't even know that that's what holding you back – because a lot of young kids if they have a vision problem they don't always articulate it, or they think they can make out things and they're really not making it out as well as they could and it's holding them back. Or there's some families who know there's a challenge but they don't know how to address it or they can't afford to address it. Well, we're not going to let that happen. All the kids who get these vision exams are going to get the result they deserve, which is the glasses they need.

So, we're very, very proud of the fact that community schools not only address the whole child, they recognize the reality of parent's lives today. Just like I said, education determines economic destiny as never before – parents are busier than ever before. Too many parents sadly have to work two jobs, in some cases three jobs. Parents have extraordinary responsibilities, and sometimes the things they even want to do for their child they can't get to in a timely fashion. But now they're going to know that their child in any of these community schools is going to get that eye exam done for them. It's one more challenge the hardworking parent doesn't have to add to what is an endless list of needs.

So, this is going to have a great impact on all of these kids. We're going to reach far into our school system with it. And I got to tell you – Warby Parker – they are mindful because there's some cool guys here with the cool company. They've also ensured us that the glasses will be cool so the kids will really want to wear them, and I appreciate that. They understand what our young people need. They want to give back to the community. They want to make sure that what they're doing will have lasting impact. So we want to thank them for their generosity. And it's an example of what businesses can do when they really want to find a way to make a profound impact – the kind of partnership we can create between business and government that will make a lasting impact on so many children's lives.

Quickly in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to first turn to our chancellor. This chancellor knows because she was a teacher, because she was a principal, because she was, and is, a mother and grandmother. She knows how important the health of a child is in their ability to succeed academically. And she knows what an impact this will make on kids across our schools. Joining us to celebrate today, Chancellor Carmen Fariña.

[...]

Mayor: Alright, we're going to take questions on topic – on topic, followed by off topic. On topic – yes?

Question: Are the kids going to be able to pick out their glasses? [Inaudible]

Deputy Mayor Richard Buery, Strategic Policy Initiatives: You should really be answering the question, but yes. And I think it's so great you were talking about having cool glasses, because they're going to have a choice of I think between 10 and 12 pairs that the young people can choose from. They can find something they love and they'll be excited when they get it. It'll be something they chose, and yes it'll be great.

[Mayor passes around eyeglasses]

Mayor: Let's get some product placement here, guys. You can get the all-red version. This is particularly stylish. I knew you'd want that.

[Laughter]

Unknown: [Inaudible]

Mayor: No I didn't say I'd do that much.

[Laughter]

I did say I'd hold them up for you, suggestively though.

[Laughter]

I could do one of these, you know? Alright, on topic. Yes?

Question: So, you've raised the budget for the community schools – renewal schools initiative twice already this year in your executive budget and again in the budget agreement announced the other night. And I'm wondering why did you look at a programs like this and say we're going to need much more to make these programs successful. Did you think that maybe you need more money to pay for the teachers and the extended day? You know, why did you increase the budget so much?

Mayor: Well, I think the bottom line is that both the renewal schools effort and the community schools effort are growing as we speak. We obviously believe they are central elements of our approach to education and we intend for them both to succeed. So, we're building out this effort right now. And between the preliminary budget and the end of the budget process this week, we determined there were additional needs that we wanted to address. It's as simple as that. And you've obviously seen what's been delineated for the adopted budget. So, I think I've made very clear that on something we consider to be transformative, like community schools and like renewal schools, we're going to keep making investments as we see fit – as we see a need. On topic – yes?

Question: Will sunglasses be available as one of the choices?

Mayor: Will sunglasses be available? I don't think sunglasses will be in the offering here. It's going to be considered an optional category – sunglasses.

Unknown: [Inaudible]

Mayor: That's right. That's right. Yes?

Question: [Reporter speaks in Spanish]

Mayor: I'm going to let the chancellor get a shot at that.

[Laughter]

I can't do all of that in Spanish.

[Chancellor Carmen Fariña speaks in Spanish]

Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña: So, the question is how do they – how did you come across that?

Senior Advisor Gabrielle Fialkoff: Well, of course, when we thought about who we would want to work with, in this area – in this arena of manufactured designers, the first thought of everybody was Warby Parker. So, we called you and they were already thinking about it and working on a pilot. And we came together to think about how we could grow a pilot and really offer this service to all of our students at school.

Chancellor Fariña: I'll translate that.

[Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña speaks in Spanish]

They're cool – and I didn't want to translate that into Spanish. They're cool.

[Chancellor Fariña speaks in Spanish].

Mayor: Yeah, they're – they're cool, they're a homegrown company, and they already have shown a great track record for being charitable, so it all came together.

Yes, please, Lindsay.

Question: [inaudible] how many [inaudible] do you think actually need glasses [inaudible]? And [inaudible]?

Deputy Mayor Buery: Well, I – well, I'll let them talk about what it cost the company. The estimate, as they said, we estimate – we estimate about 20 percent of New York City schoolchildren need glasses, so even when we – our expectation, for example, of the 65,000 students who are in public schools, we expect for their four years, it'll mean that 20,000 students over four years will get glasses. Obviously, it could be higher, it could be lower, but it's an estimate. And the way this project works is that all students get a screening and, sort of, the

normal sort of close and far screening – you know, the letter chart – and then based on that screening, we identify which students need an examination. And then based on the examination, we identify who needs glasses, we write prescriptions, we get the prescriptions to Warby Parker, and they manufacture the glasses and get them to us. So it's an estimate, but maybe 20 percent would be – would be a rough estimate.

Mayor: What was the second part of the question?

Question: [inaudible]

Co-CEO David Gilboa, Warby Parker: Sure. So we don't publicly talk about our cost structure, but we expect, over the course of four years, to distribute 20,000 pairs of glasses, and so that is a – a very substantial investment in terms of capital resources that we're making in this partnership. There – there was another question earlier about if we're going to be offering high-quality lenses. We're – we're working with our existing – only our existing suppliers using the same standards for glasses that we sell, and so they're going to be very high-quality materials, and we are making a real investment here.

Mayor: [inaudible]

Co-CEO Neil Blumenthal, Warby Parker: We built Warby Parker with this core to the model. So if you were to talk to any of our employees, they'd – a portion of their time is dedicated to this. So the same teams are working on this, whether it's from the design, from the supply chain, in production perspective, as Dave mentioned from a quality control protocol. And that's why we wanted to sort of design frames that students really want to wear, because it's about dignity. It's – glasses are a core part of one's identity, so those glasses have to properly fit somebody's sense of style and being, and likewise enable them to see, to learn, to be productive members of the community.

Deputy Mayor Buery: [inaudible] but also what a great company this is, because they're not – the Warby Parker brand is not going to be on the glasses. So you can imagine this is an excuse for them to get free and cheap marketing around, but rather than doing that, they want to make sure that it's about the glasses, and so they're – they're actually giving up a lot of free advertising they could be doing and I think it really speaks to what a great institution it is. It's been really blessed and honored to partner with you.

Mayor: On topic. Yes.

Question: [inaudible] – is that going to be part of this? And another question – this is a four-year partnership. Sometimes kids need to get stronger lenses. Is that factored in at all [inaudible]?

David Gilboa: It – we have a couple ways that people can try on glasses before they purchase. So you can walk into one of our stores, try on glasses. We have our home try-on program, where you can select any five frames from our site, we'll send them to you without prescription lenses for free, include a free return shipping label so you can try them on before we actually cut the prescription lenses. And for this program, we will be giving every child a choice, so they'll be able to decide between ten to 12 different styles. So they'll be to try them on, see which ones they like before we actually cut the prescription lenses. And so they'll be going through kind of the same – same process that many of our customers do. And for this program, we're initially focused on getting every child who needs a pair of glasses that first pair so they understand how transformative a pair of glasses can be. And we're still working on opportunities, whether it's a continuation of this partnership or there are other local resources and organizations that we can tap into, to figure out how to ensure that those children continue to get the glasses they need over time.

Question: [inaudible]

Deputy Mayor Buery: No, we don't have an estimate about the impact, but you're right to point to the problem. But oftentimes – we do know that oftentimes – and I forget the percentages, but – there's a high percentage of children who are misdiagnosed as having partial education issues, when really what they have are

vision issues. So we do expect there is a connection, and it'll actually have long-term benefits for the system. I don't have the numbers right now about what that estimate is.

Mayor: Okay, last call – on topic. On topic, going once – oh, yes.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: I think that's not on topic. I'm happy to come to that at off-topic. We're talking about glasses here and community schools, renewal schools. Rich.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: How did this happen? Good question. Who the heck is Warby Parker, right?

Neil Blumenthal: We didn't think Blumenthal Gilboa would perform as well as the consumer brand.

[Laughter]

No, Warby Parker is very much in – has a literary heritage to it and is inspired by writers, which is also one of the reasons why education is so important to us. So Warby Parker is actually two early Jack Kerouac characters. And we discovered these characters, actually, at the Main Branch New York Public Library.

Unknown: [inaudible]

Neil Blumenthal: So Warby Pepper and Zagg Parker were two baseball players. And, you know, Kerouac always had interesting stories in his mind. And again, these were stories that we discovered at the New York Public Library. And it was actually funny, when we did our first fashion presentation, we went back to the main branch public library and that was the first place that we sort of showcased the brand to the world.

Mayor: Who would've known that, if you hadn't asked, Rich?

[Laughter]

Thank you.

Last call. On topic. Going once. Going twice. Off topic. Off topic.

Yes, Emily –

Question: I think you may or may not have [inaudible], but you came out on the short end of things after the [inaudible] in Albany last night. What was your first reaction when you learned [inaudible]?

Mayor: Well, Albany is continuing its session as we speak, so I'll give you a couple of reactions. First of all, I want to thank the New York State Assembly that has been consistently responsive to the city's concerns. They've been serious, they've been resolute, and they've gotten a lot done, particularly on issues like rent regulation. And that issue, as you know, is still being debated as we speak, although we see some very promising signs on rent regulation. 421-a is now very much on the table. There's a real dialogue happening on that right now. So I think we all need to step back and see where this process is leading us, but again, I want to really thank Speaker Heastie and the Assembly for the very constructive role they have been playing. And, you know, we don't know if the session is going to end today, tomorrow, or some other day, but, you know, we're focused right now on what's going on with both the rent issue and the 421-a issue.

Jonathan –

Question: Another piece, though, is the mayoral control of city schools. You, of course, initially asked for permanent control. Then you were willing [inaudible] three years. [inaudible] one. Your thoughts on this?

Mayor: I'll have plenty to say about that when the session is over. Right now, our focus is on rent regulation and 421-a.

Question: Mayor, [inaudible] State Senate. Do you think that, perhaps, it was a mistake to campaign so aggressively against the Republicans last year?

Mayor: No.

Question: Why [inaudible] mistake?

Mayor: I think, as I've said many times, all over this country, it is normal for a member of a political party to support other members of that political party. It's just as simple as that.

Question: Mayor, this morning, though, on what happened in Albany or what's happening in Albany, there were a lot of rent stabilized [inaudible] Governor Cuomo's office. They were calling him a liar [inaudible]. Are they wrong?

Mayor: Again, that issue is still being debated right now. And it does not make sense to speak to the final resolution until we see the final resolution. I think they're seeing some real progress so far in what we're hearing over the rent resolution in Albany, but it ain't over 'til it's over in Albany, so we're going to wait and see what the final product is.

Question: How do you think not changing 421-a would affect the affordable housing? If they just extend it for six months, [inaudible] –

Mayor: Again, there's a real dialogue going on right now on 421-a. Our focus is on greatly intensifying the affordability that can be achieved through 421-a. I've spoken to this issue many times, as to the vision we have for making 421-a a real vehicle for greater affordability for New Yorkers. Some very serious discussions are happening right now and we have to see where that leads us.

Question: [inaudible]?

Mayor: Same category – the discussions are ongoing. We don't have a clear resolution. I've made my position quite clear on that matter. But we – as you know in Albany, lots of things can change, so we're waiting to see where it all leads us.

Question: Yesterday, a member of the NYPD [inaudible] on Staten Island [inaudible] prescription painkiller [inaudible]. So I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that as a problem on Staten Island, and what you think would be the – what you think is [inaudible]?

Mayor: I'll start, and if Commissioner Bassett has anything to add, I welcome it. I've spoken to Commissioner Bratton and the leadership of the NYPD on this on several occasions. We're all keenly aware that there is a crisis right now that has to be addressed in terms of heroin usage, and that it has particularly hit hard on Staten Island. And I think the NYPD is modifying its approaches to address that crisis. As you know, that also includes having, in many cases, the drug available that can help to stop an overdose in progress. So it's very much on our minds. We're very concerned. I know families have suffered tremendous losses, and it's something that we are focused on.

Would you like to add anything?

Commissioner Mary Bassett, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: I – I don't really have anything to add on the – on the drug seizures part of the conversation. But, of course, the health department is very concerned about the rates of opiate death, both related to prescription painkillers and to heroin. And Staten Island, in that regard, is a real success story – and by taking a multi-pronged strategy, we have greatly reduced – seen a great reduction in the number of opiate deaths on Staten Island. And our position is that these deaths can be averted if we put naloxone in the hands of first responders. The NYPD has reversed a number of overdose deaths and saved a life. The next step is that people need to have a clear and simple path to recovery – and we've been promoting access to drug-assisted recovery from opiate addiction, and of course working with the medical care community to ensure that they understand safe and judicious prescribing behavior for prescription painkillers, which for some people is the first step into opiate use.

Question: Just to follow up – [inaudible]

Commissioner Bassett: Well, a key part of this is working with healthcare providers and promoting what we call safe and judicious opiate prescribing. That means that people shouldn't overprescribe these medications, either in primary care or in the emergency department. Also, as you're aware that we have – through RX data, a way of looking at people who are prescription shopping.

Chancellor Fariña: As part of our reorganizations – one of the things we're doing is having borough directors. And we also instructed the borough director in Staten Island to pay particular attention to putting education resources, particularly in the middle schools and high schools. So, we're trying to do it in many different levels – starting – stopping it before it starts, but certainly being aware that education does play an important part in this particular [inaudible].

Mayor: Educating [inaudible]

Chancellor Fariña: Educating [inaudible] and parents. We have already starting talking [inaudible] on Staten Island last week. And this is one of the issues that came up and that was one of the promises to the community. We're going to have it on our radar as a preventive.

Mayor: Thank you.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: You know, again, right now, real work is happening in Albany. And we're very focused on the 421-a issue. We're very focused on the rent issue. As I said – very, very appreciative of the Assembly's efforts and the speaker's efforts. I'll have more to say on other situations later on.

Question: Mr. Mayor [inaudible]

Mayor: I don't think I have more than you have on what happened. I spoke to Commissioner Bratton. We are very confident that this suspect will be back in our hands quite soon.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: I cannot give you an update on the specific conversations on that in Albany. I can tell you that we believe fundamentally in Vision Zero, and the numbers prove already the impact of these policies. Obviously, the lowest number of pedestrian deaths since 1910, last year – the best record in over a century. And it's predicated upon a very consistent approach – a consistent approach to enforcement, to changing the design of intersections, speed limits, speed cameras, etcetera. So, we want to make sure that the consistency of Vision Zero is maintained. I've said also that we respect the fact that there are real issues bus drivers have raised that are different than Vision Zero, but we looked at in terms of route design, in terms of schedules. There's been an allegation that some of the physical design of the buses create a challenge. That needs to be taken seriously and looked at. But the basic law has to apply equally to all drivers – that's foundational to its effectiveness.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Again, I've been very consistent on this point. We, with the City Council, voted on a home rule for a bill that would address the disability needs of our first responders, and do it in a very comprehensive manner, but also in a fiscally responsible manner looking ahead to the future of our city. You know, in my role, I cannot just think of the budget we're about to vote on in a few days. I have to think about what the city is going to be like in five years, 10 years, 20 years. And the legislation passed by the City Council is a fair compromise and that's what we stand by. Thanks, everyone.

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