



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

## Serrano, Advocates, and Parents Urge Mayor to Accept Muslim School Holidays

JOSÉ M. SERRANO July 8, 2009

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Bronx, NY – State Senator José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx), the New Settlement Parent Action Committee (PAC), and the Gambian Society today called upon Mayor Bloomberg to include Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha in the public school holiday calendar. This followed a near-unanimous vote in the City Council last week.

“The 100,000 Muslim students in our public school system deserve the same recognition and respect as their classmates of other faiths,” said Serrano, who has co-sponsored bills in the State Senate since 2007 to mandate such inclusion.

“I am blessed to have vibrant Muslim communities throughout my district, especially the West Bronx,” said Senator Serrano. “We are talking about concerned parents, education advocates and hard-working students. The contributions they make – and their strong and welcome presence in our schools – must be reflected in government policy.”

“I shouldn’t have to choose between my education and my religion,” said Aminata Sillah, a 12-

year-old from MS 218 in the Bronx who has spoken on behalf of PAC at several events.

She continued: "If I miss school because of Eid, I miss what the teacher taught that day. I want to have perfect attendance. I want to hand in all of my homework on time, and do well on tests so I can go to college and be successful in life. My religion should not interfere with that. Also, if the schools recognized our holidays, my classmates might ask me about my culture. That would make me feel excited because I'll be more included in school."

"As a parent I would like my child to have the same rights as all children in New York City," said Bakary Camara, a representative of the Gambian Society of New York and a member of PAC. "As a community member, I think the goal of the city should be to educate all of New York City's children. We want equal rights and equal participation."

"Since Muslim Holidays rotate throughout the year, adding them will have a minimal impact on the actual school calendar while sending a powerful message of inclusion and equal access to education," said Lauren Morse, Education Organizer at PAC. "All children, not just the 1 in 8 public school students who are Muslim, will benefit from this message. The City Council spoke last week when they voted 50 to 1 in favor of adding Muslim school holidays. Now is the time for the Mayor to listen."

PAC, the Gambian Society, as well as United Parents of Highbridge and the NY Council of Malians – also in the Bronx – are members of the Coalition for Muslim School Holidays, a diverse citywide group of more than 80 labor, civil rights, religious and community organizations.

Movement on the Muslim holiday issue comes just as the State Senate is grappling with Mayoral Control of city public schools. Senator Serrano, who supports continuing Mayoral

Control – but with expanded checks and balances – said the two issues are related.

“The Department of Education needs to become more responsive to our families,” said Serrano. “The Muslim holidays are a perfect example of the community/Tweed disconnect. At the same time, I think the issue presents a unique opportunity for reconciliation and mutual understanding.”

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