



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daniel L. Squadron

## Squadron, Stavisky, Kim, Meng Urge Lunar New Year School Holiday

DANIEL L. SQUADRON January 31, 2013

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION, CONSTITUENTS CORNER**



### **State Legislation Would Create Holiday in Cities With Large Asian American Populations**

FLUSHING -- Today, at a press conference outside P.S. 20 in Flushing, State Senators Daniel Squadron (D-Chinatown) and Toby Ann Stavisky (D-Flushing), Assemblymember Ron Kim (D-Flushing), and Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-Queens) urged the City to make the Asian Lunar New Year a school holiday so that New York City's growing number of Asian American students can celebrate with their families without missing class.

NYC public schools have seen a growing number of Asian American students in recent years. Last year, the NYC Department of Education reported that 15.42 percent of the children in the public school system are Asian American.

Currently, students who celebrate the holiday receive an “excused” absence, meaning they miss a full day of classes and have the absence marked on their record. A number of schools around the city typically report extremely high absence rates on the first day of the Lunar New Year. Last year, P.S. 130 in Manhattan reported an absence rate of approximately 80 percent, compared to a typical rate of under two percent.

Legislation (S160/A276) sponsored by Senator Squadron and Assemblyman Kim, and co-sponsored by Senator Stavisky, would establish the day of the Asian Lunar New Year as a school holiday in municipalities with significant Asian American populations of at least 7.5 percent.

For years, now-Congresswoman Meng carried the legislation in the Assembly, along with Squadron in the Senate.

In addition to pushing their legislation, the elected officials also urged the NYC Department of Education to create the school holiday itself, or to swap the professional development day currently held on what was formally Brooklyn Queens Day for the first day of the Lunar New Year so that students do not lose a day of class.

"We pride ourselves on being one of the most diverse and welcoming cities in the world," said **State Senator Daniel Squadron**. "It's time for our school calendar to reflect the huge number of kids whose families observe Lunar New Year. One of every six New York City public school students is Asian American -- and they're forced to choose between spending their most important holiday with their family or going to school. From Chinatown to Flushing and throughout our city, a school holiday would allow students to celebrate Lunar New Year without missing class."

"New York's Asian-American community deserves the same respect and consideration as others," said **State Senator Toby Ann Stavisky**. "Lunar New Year is a time when families, from near and far, come together to celebrate. A holiday for schools with large Asian-American student bodies, like many schools in Flushing and other areas of New York City, would show deference and appreciation for the Lunar New Year. In some parts around the country, the weeks of Lunar New Year are celebrated by local governments and municipalities with real private-public partnerships, like free train and bus rides to Chinatown. But in New York City, where there are over one million Asian Americans (13%), there continues to be a lack of institutional support for this very important holiday."

"New York is known throughout the world for its vast diversity and some of the biggest cultural celebrations in the nation," said **Assemblyman Ron Kim**. "For example, in Flushing, the Lunar New Year parade is broadcast all around the world, yet, year after year, the Flushing elected officials continue to fight for uninterrupted subway service during the weekends leading up to the Lunar New Year. This has tremendous negative impact on our families, communities, and community small businesses. Establishing the Asian Lunar New Year Day as a school holiday for all city and school districts with high Asian populations would help to establish an understanding and appreciation for our many different cultures as well as this very important holiday."

"When I served in the state legislature, I led the effort to make the Lunar New Year a public school holiday, and worked with Speaker Sheldon Silver to pass the bill in the Assembly," said **U.S. Rep. Grace Meng** (D-Queens). "I am glad that my successor Ron Kim will now be taking up the cause. Making the Lunar New Year a school holiday would recognize the important customs and culture of Asian Americans, and it would highlight the vital role that the Asian American community plays in our city. I am happy to continue my support for this important measure."

**Councilman Peter Koo** stated "Our great nation understands the importance of recognizing and paying tribute to citizens of different origins. In America, we celebrate the uniqueness, accomplishments and contributions of many ethnic groups. I take extraordinary pride as an Asian American, and I believe it is important to recognize and celebrate the Asian culture by making the Lunar New Year an official school holiday. My sentiment and request is shared not only by Asian Americans, but also by residents of all ethnic background throughout this State and City. As Americans we believe strongly that this appeal is not unreasonable and should be honored. "

"Designating the Asian Lunar New Year as an official school holiday is long overdue," said **Council Member Margaret Chin**. "This year, all across New York City, Asian children and families will celebrate the Year of the Snake. It is important to ensure that students who choose to spend this important holiday with their families are not penalized for doing so. I want to thank Senator Squadron for leading the charge on this issue, and Senator Toby Stavisky and Assembly member Ron Kim for their support."

"The CCBA and the Chinese Community in New York strongly support Senator Squadron's bill to make Lunar New Year as a school holiday," said **Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association President Paul Ng**. "Lunar New Year is the most important festival for many in the Asian culture, and it is celebrated by hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. If it becomes a school holiday, children can celebrate this very important festival the whole day with their family, and learn about the Lunar New Year culture. It is a common wish among many Asian

ethnic groups in New York to make Lunar New Year a school holiday.”

"Lunar New Year is a time of coming together and renewal for the nearly 1 million Asian New Yorkers of different ethnicities who celebrate the holiday," said **Chris Kui, Executive Director of Asian Americans for Equality**. "It is not the same if someone cannot be home to celebrate with the family and the community. Children whose families celebrate Lunar New Year should not have to miss a day of school, and passing this legislation brings an opportunity to raise cultural awareness about Asian heritage and traditions within the school system."

"The Lunar New Year is a tradition that goes back several thousand years. I am glad we are teaching our children to appreciate this cultural tradition," said **Wellington Chen, Executive Director of the Chinatown Partnership**. "It is important that we cross this threshold together and pass this legislation."

"Let's celebrate the Lunar New Year with one third of the world's population," said **Dian Yu, Executive Director of the Downtown Flushing Transit Hub Business Improvement District**.

###