



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daniel L. Squadron

## Squadron, Kim, Meng, Chin, Electeds, Community Urge Mayor to Meet on Adding Lunar New Year as School Holiday in 2015-16

DANIEL L. SQUADRON June 5, 2015

| ISSUE: **FAMILIES, EDUCATION, NEW YORK CITY, CONSTITUENTS CORNER**

*40+ Electeds, Advocates Ask For Results of Promised DOE Study*

*Asian-Americans Comprise 15% of NYC Public School Students, Mayor Pledged Lunar New Year School Holiday*

NEW YORK – State Senator Squadron, Assemblymember Kim, Congressman Meng and Councilmember Chin today urged Mayor de Blasio to add Lunar New Year as a school holiday to the 2015-16 school calendar, with elected officials, community leaders and advocacy groups from across New York City. In a letter from over 40 elected officials and community advocates, the Mayor was asked to meet with the group to discuss the results of a Department of Education (DOE) analysis the Administration promised for completion in May, and ultimately, to keep the pledge he made to include Lunar New Year as a school holiday. The full letter is attached as a PDF.

"You made a pledge, both before your election and after becoming Mayor, to add Lunar New Year to the school calendar as a holiday," the letter reads. "As your policy stands today, children must miss class when celebrating their most important cultural celebration...We look forward to sitting down with your Administration to review the DOE analysis, and to make progress on adding Lunar New Year as a school holiday for the 2015-16 calendar."

In addition to Squadron, Kim, Meng and Chin, the letter was signed by Congressmembers Israel, Maloney, Nadler and Velazquez; Borough Presidents Brewer and Adams; State Senators Golden

and Stavisky; Assemblymembers Braunstein, DenDekker, Moya, Quart, Rozic, Silver and Solages; City Councilmember Koo; advocacy groups and community leaders.

In March, Mayor de Blasio released the 2015-16 school calendar without including Lunar New Year as a school holiday, despite his public pledges to do so. In a meeting later that month, Administration officials promised some of the undersigned elected officials a detailed DOE analysis on including Lunar New Year as a school holiday for completion in May.

Asian-American students comprise approximately 15 percent of all public school students in New York City. Absentee rates in some schools have been reported to be as high as 80 percent on Lunar New Year. In 2014, Kim and Squadron passed legislation requiring DOE to consider closing schools if a holiday is likely to result in “a considerable proportion” of students being absent. Lunar New Year falls on a school day next year on Monday, February 8, 2016, and it is unlikely to do so again until 2018.

"The Administration should not wait another year to keep its promises on Lunar New Year," said **State Senator Daniel Squadron**. "In addition to the Mayor's pledge to implement a Lunar New Year school holiday, the administration said it would engage in May -- now it's June. We've advocated and passed laws on this. The City should acknowledge this important holiday, and no longer force those who celebrate it to choose between class and their most important cultural holiday."

**Assemblymember Ron Kim** said, "I join my colleagues at all levels of government to encourage the Mayor to keep his word in recognizing Lunar New Year as an American holiday in our schools. For far too long, Asian American kids, including myself, grew up in this city feeling marginalized and 'un-American' for celebrating their culture. It is really amazing that schools will be recognizing these important Muslim holidays so that our Muslim students won't have to feel the way many of our Asian students do. I hope that the Mayor will also recognize the importance of Lunar New Year to a huge percentage of our students and their families. Acknowledging some cultures but not others, the Mayor is playing a dangerous game by invalidating and further marginalizing ethnic communities. Let's use this chance to celebrate our diversity, not fuel deeper divides in our city."

"We applauded the decision to close NYC schools on Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha," said **Congresswoman Grace Meng**. "But a school holiday must be created for Lunar New Year as well, just as the Mayor promised. The Mayor has told me that he remains committed to adding Lunar New Year to the school holiday calendar. However, it needs to happen as soon as possible so that students and their families are not forced to wait even longer."

"The fact is that many within our city's Asian-American community feel slighted by Mayor de Blasio's apparent decision not to include Lunar New Year as a holiday on the 2015-2016 public school calendar," said **Councilmember Margaret Chin**. "The solution is simple — Mayor de Blasio must follow through on his pledge to create a Lunar New Year public school holiday, and he must do it now."

"I applaud Mayor DeBlasio for adding Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha as official school holidays and encourage him to fulfill his promise to add the Lunar New Year to the school calendar. The rich cultural diversity that makes up the fabric of New York is what makes it such a wonderful place to live and our schools should honor that diversity," said **Rep. Steve Israel**.

**Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney** said: "Lunar New Year is important to the Asian-American community, and many children miss school when it falls during the week as it will in 2016. I am pleased to join Congresswoman Meng, Assemblyman Kim and State Senator Squadron in asking Mayor de Blasio and DOE Chancellor Farina to add it to the school holiday calendar so that the 15 percent of students who are Asian American do not have to choose between their education and their culture."

"The Asian Lunar New Year is the most important holiday of the year for the Asian-American community, it's time and appropriate for the Department of Education to recognize this and close the schools on this important holiday and allow families to celebrate the Lunar New Year together," said **Congressman Jerrold Nadler**.

**Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez** said, "For many Asian families, the Lunar New Year is the most important holiday of the year. Adding this holiday to the 2015-2016 school calendar would honor the heritage of the many Asian Americans living in New York. "

**Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams** said, "Our students who observe Lunar New Year should not have to choose between their cultural and educational obligations. I stand with my elected colleagues and advocates who are working to make this important observance a school holiday."

"Asian American students make up more than 12 percent of Manhattan's public school population and nearly a quarter of Community School Districts 1 and 2, and these students should be allowed to celebrate this major holiday with their families," said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. "Moving forward, the Department of Education should institute flexible days off, so we can ensure students of all backgrounds can celebrate important holidays with their families, without lengthening the school year or eliminating total class days."

**State Senator Marty Golden** stated, "I join with my colleagues in urging the Mayor to authorize a public school holiday in New York City recognizing Lunar New Year. Our City is rich with much Asian culture and heritage, and it is only fair that we recognize fully the special meaning of this holiday. It should no longer be necessary for our school children and teachers, to miss a day of school and work respectively, to celebrate Lunar New Year. New York State law has been changed giving the City the power to authorize such a school closing, and I hope that the 2015-2016 school year calendar will reflect that."

I am joining my colleagues in government to once again ask Mayor de Blasio to present a plan to make the Lunar New Year an official school holiday," said **Senator Toby Ann Stavisky** (D-Flushing). "The Mayor alone has the power to allow thousands of New York City school children to celebrate their most important cultural holiday without missing a school day. We hope the Mayor will meet with us to discuss possible solutions, including removing Brooklyn-Queens Day from the calendar as we have proposed. No child should have to choose between success in school and an important cultural observance."

**Assemblymember Edward C. Braunstein** said, "In light of the large and growing Asian American population in New York City's schools, I hope that Mayor de Blasio and the Department of Education will reconsider making Lunar New Year a holiday. Students and their families should not be forced to choose between celebrating an important holiday or having an absence marked

on their record.”

“Out of respect for our Asian-American students and families, it is vital that we add the Lunar New Year as a school holiday for the 2015-2016 school year,” said **Assemblymember Michael DenDekker**. “Students should not be forced to choose between attending class and observing their most important cultural celebration.”

“In a city as diverse as ours, it’s important that we allow time and space for each ethnic and religious group to observe holidays that are significant to them,” said **Assemblyman Francisco Moya** (D-Jackson Heights). “For years, many of our Asian-American students had to choose between missing a holiday with family or missing a day of school. That is why we passed legislation allowing school districts to give students off for the Lunar New Year. Implementation must not be delayed. It is critical that we recognize the Lunar New Year as a school holiday for the 2015-16 school year.”

“The Mayor said he is committed to designating Lunar New Year as a school holiday and we are committed to keeping that pledge,” said **Assemblywoman Nily Rozic** (D,WF-Fresh Meadows). “We have been waiting a long time now to make good on this promise and will take every opportunity to remind the Mayor of that.”

**Assemblymember Sheldon Silver** said, “Parents of my Lower Manhattan community should not have to choose between celebrating their cultural heritage and their children’s valuable classroom time. With some schools seeing 80 percent absentee rates on Lunar New Year it only makes sense to make it a holiday so that all children can celebrate the great diversity of this city.”

“Approximately 15% of public school families identify as Asian American, and these families should not have to choose between celebrating an important cultural holiday and sending their child to school,” said **Councilmember Peter Koo**. “The mayor promised our community that he would work to make this occasion a school holiday, and we look forward to working with him to see that promise fulfilled.”

**Asian Americans for Equality Executive Director Chris Kui** said, “Lunar New Year is a cherished holiday

for the Asian community: A time for loved ones to come together, and a time to celebrate our cultural heritage. It is, without doubt, our most important holiday of the year, so we feel that it's important that it is recognized as a school holiday. Asian Americans for Equality hopes that, in the future, families across New York City will be able to spend this sacred day together."

**Better Chinatown USA Executive Director Steven Tin** said, "Better Chinatown USA is the organizer of the Lunar New Year celebration, Firecracker and Parade Festival, attracting over 500,000 New Yorkers from all sectors as well as international tourists over the last 15 years. It's the biggest holiday in Asia. Every year we see it celebrated increasingly by Asian-Americans 2nd and 3rd generation families, and non-Asian families as well. We urge the Mayor to declare the Lunar New Year as a public holiday to let all New Yorkers celebrate this holiday together and show equal respect for the Asian-American families and tradition."

**Wellington Z. Chen, Executive Director of Chinatown Partnership** said, "The neighborhoods of Chinatown, the Lower East Side, Little Italy are home to at least 10 public schools of which their students bodies are mainly composed of children and teenagers with Chinese heritage, and who celebrate the Asian Lunar New Year with their families. It would be unfair and unjust to prevent these students from celebrating their cultural heritage and mark them absent from school by doing so."

**Janice Lee Won, Interim President & CEO of Chinese-American Planning Council** said, "Chinese-American Planning Council believes it is vital to recognize Lunar New Year as a NYC public school holiday given the diversity of the children and families we serve in the public schools and community-at-large."

**Karlin Chan, Senior Director of the Chinese Freemasons** said, "The lunar new year is the singularly most important holiday in the Asian culture which is celebrated not only by Chinese, but Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese to name a few. This is not only about a school holiday but about official recognition for the many contributions Asians have made to NYC and the United States."

**Sheelah A. Feinberg, Executive Director of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families** said, "The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF) applauds Mayor De Blasio's inclusion of Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha this year in the Department of Education's school holiday

calendar. We would also like to see Lunar New included in the DOE's holiday calendar, as it is celebrated among many diverse communities in the pan-Asian community. Recognizing this holiday will give our communities' children an opportunity to celebrate with their families without fear of falling behind in school, and will further the recognition of diversity in our schools."

"The Mayor may need more time before he can make Lunar New Year an official holiday, and we would like to give him that understanding and time. But I ask this, how can we, as community leaders, face our community, who keep on asking us why he hasn't responded?" said **Peter Tu, Executive Director of the Flushing Chinese Business Association.**

**Linda Lee, Executive Director of the Korean American Community Services of Metropolitan NY (KCS)** said, "We are urging the Mayor's office to ensure that the Lunar New Year holiday is included in the school calendar so that our children be given the opportunity to celebrate with their families. It is essential that our students learn and understand the importance of their roots and family backgrounds as they shape their own identities as Asian Americans."

**Nancy Yao Maasbach, President of the Museum of Chinese in America** said, "I hope you will consider adding the Lunar New Year to the 2015-2016 school calendar. Your decision to recognize this important annual family holiday exemplifies your commitment and desire to celebrate the cultural mosaic of the best city in the world."

**June Jee, Executive Director of OCA-NY** said, "OCA-NY feels strongly that Mayor de Blasio needs to designate Lunar New Year as a public school holiday in NYC both to show respect for APAs, the fastest growing population in NYC, and to highlight the importance of, and to facilitate, the building of mutual respect and dialogue between communities of color and among all New Yorkers."

**Dong Rong Yu, President of the Yee Fong Toy Association** said, "Mr. Mayor, please reconsider adding Lunar New Year as a school holiday as you pledge you will do, Asian students need not miss a day of school to celebrate this important cultural holiday."