



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daniel L. Squadron

## Squadron, Silver, Electeds, and Community Leaders Celebrate Passage of Bill to Push Lunar New Year School Holiday

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### **Electeds: Momentum Builds to Recognize Importance of Lunar New Year Holiday**

NEW YORK – Today, State Senator Daniel Squadron, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, elected officials from around the city, and community leaders celebrated the passage of a bill to push the Lunar New Year as a school holiday. The bill (S.6688 Golden/Squadron / A.7756 Kim/Silver) passed the State Senate earlier this week and the Assembly in February and will now go to Governor Cuomo's desk.

Schools in areas that have a high number of Asian American residents, such as Chinatown in Manhattan and Flushing in Queens, report large numbers of absences on Lunar New Year. At P.S. 124, on Division Street in Manhattan, school officials reported absentee rates of up to 60 percent this past Lunar New Year holiday. Next year's Lunar New Year--the Year of the Sheep--is on Thursday, February 19, 2015, when New York City public schools are already closed for winter recess.

“Passage of the bill to push Lunar New Year as a school holiday is an important recognition by the state Legislature of the choice faced by so many families—celebrating the most important day of the year, or missing a day of school. It will also ensure that each year’s 180 school days are as effective as possible,” said **State Senator Daniel Squadron**.

“In our Chinatown community, Lunar New Year is a day of great celebration and a time for families to be together. New York City is proud to be one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world and we must honor and support that diversity, which is why we passed this bill in the State Assembly. Now that the Senate has done so as well, I look forward to seeing it become law. Parents should not have to choose between celebrating their cultural heritage and their children’s learning time. Students, who want to be diligent and have good records, should not have to be marked absent on such an important occasion,” said **Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver**.

“The Lunar New Year is of great cultural significance to our community and it is appropriate that New York City schools honor this holiday. I applaud the passage of this legislation,” said **Congressmember Nydia M. Velázquez**.

"Every year, thousands of Asians and Asian Americans in New York City eagerly await the start of the Lunar New Year. However, taking part in this important celebration of culture and community on a school day often requires families to choose between their children's

heritage and their education. The passage of this bill in the State Legislature means that schools may now close on the Lunar New Year instead of marking entire classrooms absent. As a city we should make every effort to support and honor the diversity that makes New York so exceptional, and this legislation is an important acknowledgment of the vital contributions Asians and Asians Americans have made to the history and cultural fabric of New York City. I thank NYS Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Assembly Member Ron Kim, and State Senator Daniel Squadron for their unwavering advocacy on this issue," said **Councilmember Margaret Chin.**

"I applaud the New York State legislature for passing my old legislation to close New York City's schools on the most important day of the year for Asian-Americans," said **Congressmember Grace Meng.** "The time has come for our school system to recognize this important holiday, just as it rightly does for holidays of other cultures and ethnicities, and I'm extremely pleased that momentum continues to build for it, even after I've moved from the Assembly to Congress. As the issue continues to move through the state l, I will keep up my efforts on the federal level. Many thanks to Senator Squadron, Speaker Silver, Assemblyman Kim, Senator Stavisky and all the lawmakers who helped push this issue."

"I applaud Speaker Silver and Senator Squadron for their leadership on this commonsense issue. Our diverse school system should have the flexibility to allow individual schools to accommodate students and teachers who celebrate Lunar New Year, Diwali and other important holidays. This legislation continues New York State's proud tradition of progressivism and inclusion, and I am proud to support it," said **Congressmember Carolyn B. Maloney.**

"We must work together to ensure that children are not penalized for celebrating their culture in our school system. New York City is the most diverse place on Earth and it is important that we accommodate children and families of Chinese, Japanese, Korean and other heritages that celebrate Lunar New Year," said **Public Advocate Letitia James**.

**Senator Marty Golden** stated, "There is no denying that the Lunar New Year is one of the most significant cultural holidays for Chinese, Koreans, Japanese and other Asian ethnic groups. I know in my district, home to more than 70,000 Asian Americans, that it is a time of great celebration and reunion with friends and family. I am proud that I have worked at both the City and State level to have Lunar New Year officially recognized, and now furthering those efforts through sponsorship of legislation that would allow for public school closings as well."

"The passage of S.6688 is a tremendous step forward for religious and cultural equality in our state. All Americans—whether they are Chinese, Korean, Hindu, or from any other background—deserve the freedom to observe important religious and cultural holidays without fear of harming their children's education," said **Senator Toby Ann Stavisky**, one of the bill's co-sponsors. "I thank my colleagues in the Legislature for passing this important bill and urge the Governor to give all New Yorkers the cultural and religious respect they deserve."

Approximately one in six New York City public school students are Asian American.

Currently, students who celebrate the Lunar New Year holiday receive an “excused” absence, meaning they miss a full day of classes and have the absence marked on their record. This legislation would require that the city Department of Education (DOE) consider closing schools if a holiday is likely to result in “a considerable proportion” of students being absent.