

Lunar New Year now a holiday for NY public schools

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NEW YORK — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul signed legislation on Saturday to declare Asian Lunar New Year a public school holiday across New York state.

The new law would ensure schools are not in session on Lunar New Year.

“By designating Lunar New Year as an official school holiday, we are taking an important step in recognizing the importance of New York’s AAPI community and the rich diversity that makes New York so great,” Hochul said. “It is not just a day off from school—it is an opportunity for our children to learn about and celebrate their own or different cultures and traditions.”



New York is home to the second largest Asian population in the U.S., which is the fastest-growing racial and ethnic group nationwide, with 1.9 million residents, a 2021 report from the Pew Research Center found. Washington state is fifth.

Reaction from New York AAPI lawmakers

Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens): It was an honor to join Governor Hochul as she signed this historic bill and I applaud her for making it the law of the land in our state. When I was in the State Assembly in 2009, I led the bill to establish a New York City school holiday for Lunar New Year, and I remember how people laughed at it. There were so many naysayers who told me that it would never happen. Now, look at how far we have come. I am proud of the work I have done to help get us to this point and I thank all who played a role as well. And in Congress, I am continuing the fight by pushing legislation I authored that would make Lunar New Year a federal holiday.



Assemblymember Grace Lee, and co-chair of the Assembly’s Asian Pacific American (APA) Task Force: It is an honor to have led this historic effort to recognize Lunar New Year as a statewide holiday in New York. As Asian Americans, we have gone unseen and unheard in New York for too long, and this bill is recognition for our contributions to New York history, and validation that our voices and our stories matter. Now, I will be able to join thousands of families across the state in celebrating Lunar New Year at home with my kids. This law will expose new generations to Asian culture, and it will promote diversity and inclusion at a time when Asian New Yorkers are suffering from anti-Asian hate. By making New York the first state in the country to mandate statewide school closures in observance of Lunar New Year, we are setting a valuable example for other states to follow. I thank Governor Kathy Hochul, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and all my colleagues who supported this effort to secure this historic achievement for New York’s AAPI community.



State Sen. John Liu: The Lunar New Year is the most significant time of the year for Asian Americans, and as the fastest growing community in the country, we need to make sure our heritage, culture and traditions are treated with the same respect and reverence as any other American holiday. Declaring Lunar New Year a State holiday is an important step in the recognition and validation of Asian Americans not just here in New York State, but throughout the country. Many thanks to Governor Hochul for making the signing of this legislation a priority.

State Sen. Iwen Chu: Today, New York State will make Lunar New Year a public school holiday, a long fought effort for inclusion for Asian New Yorkers. Now families don’t have to choose between their education and celebrating their cultural heritage. This act recognizes the contributions of the AAPI community in the diverse tapestry of our great state and brings greater awareness, combatting the hate that AAPI New Yorkers face. I’m proud to have given this legislation the support and I thank Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie for making this a priority in this legislative session.

Assemblymember Ron Kim: It took multiple generations of lawmakers to finally make Lunar New Year a recognized statewide holiday and I want to thank Governor Hochul for recognizing Asian Americans in a meaningful way. From former members Jimmy Meng, Ellen Meng, and Grace Meng in new positions like APA Task Force co-chair Lee Meng, this legislation a top priority, I’m grateful for all their contributions. Lastly, I want to thank Speaker Carl Heastie for his leadership and guidance in celebrating Asian Americans in New York State.

Assemblymember Jenifer Rajkumar: As the first South Asian woman ever elected to New York State Office, I thank Governor Kathy Hochul for signing this historic bill recognizing the rich diversity of our State and its AAPI community. Over 1 million New Yorkers across the State celebrate Lunar New Year, and today we say to all of them that we see you and we recognize you. I was proud to help drive this historic bill to passage. Today, we are making our education system work for all the diverse communities in our State. In an era of rising hate against the AAPI community nationwide, New York is a beacon of respect, tolerance, and love for people of every faith and background.

The new legislation comes months after New York City Mayor Eric Adams added Diwali, also known as the festival of lights, to its list of public school holidays.

Earlier this year in Washington, state Rep. My-Linh Thai sponsored a bill which would make Lunar New Year a state holiday. But it didn’t go anywhere.

According to the latest census numbers, there are 662,000 Asians and Asian Americans living in Washington state.

In 2022, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill declaring Lunar New Year to be a state holiday.



Photos credit: Darren McGee / Office of Governor Kathy Hochul