

**TESTIMONY OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Good Afternoon Chair Treyger and members of the Committee on Education. I am Amy Peterson, Director of the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development. I am joined here today by Robert Zweig, Superintendent for the NYC Department of Education District 79 Alternative Schools and Programs; Rong Zhang, Assistant Commissioner for Literacy at the Department of Youth and Community Development; and Stacie Evans, University Director for Language and Literacy Programs at The City University of New York. Thank you Chair Treyger for the opportunity to speak today about adult education, and for your leadership on this issue and the innovation and focus that you have brought to workforce and adult education programs in Coney Island.

The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development is focused on providing New Yorkers with resources and opportunities to develop new skills, enter the workforce, and earn wages that allow them to achieve economic stability, regardless of their starting skill level or educational attainment. We are working across City agencies and in partnership with the workforce development and adult education community to expand access to good jobs for all New Yorkers.

Today I would like to speak to the vital importance of adult education services in workforce development and in preparing New Yorkers for jobs and careers:

- English proficiency is needed in most jobs, making English for Speakers of Other Languages a vital workforce preparation service.
- Adult Basic Education helps people develop their reading and math skills, also critical to a skilled workforce.
- Finally, High School Equivalency instruction helps people earn a credential that is required for roughly 80 percent of jobs with advancement potential and is a prerequisite for many training programs.

In New York City, these adult education and literacy services are available through the Department of Education, the many community-based programs that receive contracts from the Department of Youth and Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the City University of New York, and the three public library systems. Funding to support these programs comes from city, state, and federal streams as well as private foundations. Adult education and literacy services are also integrated into our workforce programs.

The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development is focused on two primary opportunities related to adult education: 1) maximizing the availability of services across communities and within varying education levels and needs; and 2) connecting adult education with workforce programs and other wrap-around services.

The City provides adult education through its key programs at DOE, DYCD, CUNY, and our library system, but we are also integrating adult education into our workforce programs to address both the quantity and connectedness of adult education services. Examples of our programs and integration include:

- The NYC Department of Education (DOE) consolidated District 79 Alternative Schools & Programs with the Office of Adult and Continuing Education about a year ago under the leadership of Executive Superintendent Tim Lisante and Superintendent Robert Zweig. Since then, DOE has significantly increased its focus on helping more New Yorkers earn their High School Equivalency. Additionally, DOE has focused on increasing the number of its High School Equivalency instructors who are embedded in community-based workforce programs. District 79 has long engaged in this practice for programs serving young adults, and now DOE hopes to replicate this successful practice in adult-serving programs.
- The NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, in coordination with the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, recently awarded contracts for its Advance and Earn program which will combine adult literacy, work experience, and skill training to prepare young adults for careers.
- In addition to the English language classes offered by DYCD and DOE, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs oversees a free English language learning program focused on conversation called We Speak NYC. We Speak NYC has created materials and resources, available digitally, that help New Yorkers learn English, including by watching episodes of an Emmy Award-winning TV show featuring everyday stories of immigrants learning to interact with and access City services. Those videos, alongside workbooks, short stories, and more, were developed in conjunction with CUNY, and are meant to help educators and learners looking to improve their language skills. MOIA also oversees community classes that are led by trained volunteers who use We Speak NYC videos and materials to facilitate seven- to ten-week classes all across the five boroughs.
- SBS and DOE have partnered to integrate HS Equivalency Prep and workforce development services for young adults (18-24). Our center in the West Farms neighborhood in the Bronx is a combination D79 referral center and Workforce1 Career Center. Young adults that are served at this site receive educational placement services to determine which path is best for them to attain the HSE or HSD, tailored candidate services (resume writing, interview skills, etc.), direct matching to jobs and HSE prep class. In addition, SBS/DOE have developed a series of workshops that provide an in-depth introduction and set of fundamental skills for three occupational tracks - in food service (line-cooks), healthcare (medical assistant), tech (web development). An additional track in transportation (diesel tech) is under development. These workshops serve as pre-trainings for young adults that can subsequently enter SBS trainings in these occupations.
- SBS also offers the following bridge trainings tailored to meet the needs of foreign-born New Yorkers. These programs are designed to equip foreign-born New Yorkers with all of the prerequisites necessary to enter occupational trainings that lead to quality living wage jobs including contextualized English for the specific occupation, methods of

capitalizing on previous experience and education in the American workplace and connections to networks necessary to advance in their career.

- Foreign trained nurses – prep for NCLEX;
- Bilingual medical assistant;
- Web development; and
- Commercial driving.
- NYCHA operates a pre-apprenticeship construction training program under the NYCHA Resident Training Academy which embeds contextualized math and reading in its curriculum and connects cohort graduates to union apprenticeship opportunities. In 2017, in partnership with NYC Small Business Services, NYCHA piloted two academic preparation cohorts to prepare NRTA graduates for the competitive IBEW Local 3 Electrician Apprenticeship program. To date over 30 NYCHA residents have passed the rigorous IBEW Local 3 exam.
- CUNY and the Young Men’s Initiative are integrating adult education, workforce services, and parenting services through the CUNY Fatherhood Academy. The CUNY Fatherhood Academy serves young adult custodial, noncustodial, and expectant fathers, and combines parenting workshops, high school equivalency preparations courses, college exploration and enrollment support services, and job readiness services.
- CUNY, SUNY, and the Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity are partnering on HSE Connect to provide a streamlined pathway from High School Equivalency preparation and diploma attainment to postsecondary education for adults with legal-system involvement.
- HRA allows Cash Assistance recipients under age 25 to participate full-time in adult literacy programs and they are excused from additional work activities. For recipients who self-enroll into adult literacy programs, the Education Services team at HRA manages a list of 245 registered High School Equivalency, Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs, including some Department of Education District 79 programs. In 2019, a total of 2,004 Cash Assistance recipients were enrolled.
- The Parks Department offers High School Equivalency preparation and testing through two programs, the Green Applied Projects at Parks (GAPP) and the Parks Opportunity Program (POP).

The above are just a few examples of where we are integrating adult education into our other programs. To increase coordination and access to adult education, the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development is working with our partner agencies to integrate State funded DOE adult education teachers into HRA workforce programs and SBS Workforce1 Career Centers to broaden the reach of the DOE programs and tie adult education directly to career readiness.

A key priority of the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development is to increase awareness and access for all New Yorkers to the workforce and adult education programs offered through City agencies. We will do this by:

- Engaging on-the-ground with communities through outreach including local resource fairs and community partnerships;

- Reaching all New Yorkers through a WorkingNYC Communications Campaign; and
- Creating a map and on-line portal with access to the City's workforce programs and adult education services.

In 2016 and 2017, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development and DYCD worked with the Literacy Assistance Center and the adult literacy community leading to the 2017 report by the Literacy Assistance Center, *Investing in Quality: A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders*. The report outlines 14 Building Blocks for a quality adult literacy program. As we work to expand access to adult education and integrate adult education into our other programs, we are doing our work with those Building Blocks as a framework. Through our efforts, we are looking to increase access to student support services (Building Block 5) "including counseling and case management, that respond to the complexity of adult students' lives and support their persistence and success."

Our office will continue to partner with DOE, DYCD, MOIA, CUNY, and the public libraries to capitalize on existing successful models and explore new innovative solutions to help more New Yorkers improve their English, develop their literacy skills, and earn a high school equivalency diploma, which will position them for better jobs, advanced training, and economic security and mobility. We will also connect adult education with the broader workforce system, through employers, apprenticeships, industry partnerships, subsidized jobs, and other training programs, so New Yorkers can access a range of career opportunities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions after my colleagues have finished their testimony.



**Department of
Youth & Community
Development**

TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

HEARING ON

ADULT LITERACY

PRESENTED BY

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RONG ZHANG

FEBRUARY 26, 2020

Good afternoon Chair Treyger and members of the Education Committee. I am Assistant Commissioner Rong Zhang for Literacy at the Department of Youth & Community Development. On behalf of Commissioner Bill Chong, thank you for the opportunity to comment on DYCD's Adult Literacy Services.

The ability to read and write is fundamental to a person's capacity to succeed in life. English proficiency is associated with the ability to find and keep employment that pays a living wage and provides opportunities for upward advancement, helps parents fully support and participate in their child's education and to actively engage in civic life. The most recent census data for NYC show that there are 1.76 million or 22.4 percent of the individuals aged 5 years and over who "speak English less than very well" and 544,714 or 9.1% of persons aged 25 years and over who have less than a 9th grade education. These data point toward a high need for ESOL instruction and adult basic education classes. In neighborhoods with large, low-income immigrant populations the need is particularly high. For example, Queens Community Districts 3 and 7 (Jackson Heights and Flushing) and Brooklyn Community District 11 (Bensonhurst) have the highest populations of persons who "speak English less than very well" and Manhattan Community District 12 (Washington Heights/Inwood), Queens 3 (Jackson Heights), and Brooklyn 7 (Sunset Park) have the highest populations of persons who have less than a 9th grade education.

These findings are supported by DYCD's comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Survey, a survey that collected information from residents who were asked, among other questions, to identify the service gaps in their community. In NYC overall, survey respondents ranked "English classes" as the number two service gap from a listing of 28 items. In ten communities, residents ranked "English classes" as their number one service gap. Six communities ranked "Adult Education/Literacy" instruction as among their top five service gaps.

We thank the Council for its strong, long-standing partnership on Adult Literacy programs. It has been critical to funding programs across the City. DYCD commits \$16.6 million to support Adult Literacy Programs from a mix of Federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding and City tax levy funding. This work is complimented by other literacy programs supported by the Department of Education, the City University of New York and the public library systems.

DYCD's adult literacy programs include a variety of courses to meet the various needs of participants. For example, these adult literacy programs offer Adult Basic Education (ABE) that teaches both native and non-native English speakers reading, writing and math. We offer HSE prep classes to prepare students for the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC), ESOL/Civics classes, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) that teach listening, speaking, reading and writing to individuals whose primary language is not English.

In Fiscal 2019, our adult literacy programs enrolled 17,466 participants. Students not only benefit academically by participating in our literacy programs, they also receive other much needed assistance such as referral to employment training, college assistance and individual support.

To assist in career and college exploration with participants, DYCD has partnered with CUNY to train our instructors, counselors/case managers on their CareerKits curriculum. The participants learn how to meet literacy goals while simultaneously teaching about careers, incorporating career content into reading, writing, math and research activities, learn about CUNY admission procedures, college prep programs, financial aid, and practice techniques.

To further promote the use of technology in the classrooms, our technical assistance provider, the Literacy Assistance Center offered training on Google's Applied Digital Skills curriculum. This online site with ready-to-use video lessons teach digital skills that have immediate, real-life application. CBO staff learned the basics of Google Drive, focusing on why it is so useful for adult education and explored the Google's Applied Digital Skills lessons.

We have partnered with MOIA's Office to discuss ways to promote *We Speak NYC*, a video series produced by MOIA and CUNY to help English language learners improve their language skills while learning about City services and their rights. MOIA staff presented *WE Speak NYC* to literacy providers. A joint professional training session on best practices around integration of the video into English language classes has been offered to providers.

Once again, thank you for holding this hearing today. We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council on promoting Adult Literacy.

**Testimony of the New York City Department of Education
on Adult and Continuing Education**

Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

February 26, 2020

Introduction

Good afternoon Chair Treyger and Members of the City Council Committee on Education. My name is Robert Zweig, and I am the Superintendent of District 79 (D79) Alternative Schools and Programs at the New York City Department of Education (DOE). I am pleased to be here today to discuss our work to provide high-quality adult educational programming to New York City residents. I thank the City Council for your work to support adult education.

I come to this work having spent most of my career in alternative and adult education in New York City as a former teacher, assistant principal, and principal within D79. Doing this work for the past 30 years has given me an essential grounding and insight into the challenges of teaching and learning in Adult Education, as well as the barriers that some students face.

Our students represent the rich diversity of the City. Last year, we served students representing more than 182 countries. The average age of an Adult and Continuing Education student is 39 years old. Sixty-five percent of our students are women and over 10,000 of our students are parents. Almost 80 percent are low income.

The majority of students we serve, 68 percent, are seeking English as a Second Language (ESOL) support, and many enter our program performing at the lowest English proficiency levels. ESOL instruction teaches students basic language skills and the academic skills they will need to successfully complete higher education or job training programs, while Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) classes prepare students for the high school equivalency test. Our adult learners can participate in classes at any of our sites regardless of borough of residence.

As part of the City's Equity and Excellence for All agenda, the DOE is committed to empowering New York City's adults in their pursuit of knowledge and helping students earn gateway credentials toward career opportunities. Over the past two years, we have implemented a number of reforms to strengthen Adult Education programming and supports.

Adult Education is now a part of D79 under Executive Superintendent Tim Lisante. This change allows us to use established partnerships and programming in D79 to enhance our Adult Education programs and provide more cohesive professional development and support for our teachers. Since this change was made, we have performed a comprehensive review of the

program and have already implemented, a number of initiatives to improve instruction and better support students.

These improvements are showing results: we have seen a sizable increase in High School Equivalency attainment and measurable skill gain in the 2018-2019 school year. This positive trend appears on track to continue and steadily improve this year. In 2017-2018, Adult and Continuing Education had 253 graduates. In 2018-2019, we began implementing changes to realign our curriculum, enhance our professional development for teachers, and provide more support staff for students. That number has now risen to 989 graduates, an almost 300 percent increase. We are pleased we are making progress, but know that we have more work to do.

Adult Education also has a robust and expanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) program serving almost 2,000 students at seven sites across the City. Our CTE program is specifically focused on workforce development: students who complete our classes gain industry knowledge and State certifications, in addition to earning their diploma, allowing them to pursue meaningful employment and/or post-secondary education. Our course offerings range from basic computer literacy to certified nursing assistant, automotive, and construction programs. More recently, we have expanded our offerings to include additional certifications focused on preparing students for participation in the 21st century economy: communications media, computer graphics technology, fashion apparel and design engineering, and much more.

New and Expanded Initiatives

Professional Development

All Adult Education classes are taught by certified teachers and over the past year, we have made curriculum and professional development for our teachers a priority. More recently, we have re-committed to ensuring our programs are providing curricula strictly aligned to the standards and skills students need for their High School Equivalency exams. We are also working to provide our teachers with constructive feedback and coaching to build their capacity to effectively prepare our students to obtain their diplomas. Additionally, we now employ an Adult Education Professional Development committee in partnership with the UFT to further support our teachers. In fact, we had our second meeting this morning.

Support Staff

We recognize that students progressing through our programs face many challenges – from work schedules to childcare, as well as the grade level proficiency at which they may be entering the program. We are now deploying two different sets of support staff to better meet our students' needs.

As of the 2018-19 school year, we have eight Assessment Coordinators who work with and advise our students, tracking their progress and readiness. These coordinators ensure that our

students are on track for taking the TASC exam in order to earn their High School Equivalency Diploma and monitor the results to provide follow up support for students.

To further support our students, we deploy our 29 case managers across all boroughs as community resources. These support staff conduct informational workshops for students on relevant issues and help refer and connect students to local agencies and service providers. In cases where students could not attend school due to childcare issues, case managers have assisted by connecting them to the LYFE program, which under D79 offers high quality early childhood education services for the children of student parents, ages 6 weeks to 3 years. With this obstacle to attendance removed, these students are free to attend class regularly and improve their futures and those of their children.

Case managers can help get experienced students back on track, identifying students who possess engineering degrees from their home country and enrolling them in programs designed to put them on a path to rebuild their careers here in New York City. When our students have struggled with health issues or food scarcity, our case managers have referred them to essential health care treatment and food pantry programs to ensure their basic needs are met. These are just a few examples of the essential work our case managers are doing to support students, and the impact that work can have in bettering the lives of our fellow New Yorkers. It's clear how vital these services are in supporting our students' paths to success, and we continue to explore ways to enhance that impact and expand our number of case managers in Adult Education.

In fall of last year, we began the Adult Education Student Advisory committee, which meets with the Superintendent team to discuss and offer suggestions on student resources, curriculum, climate and culture, and more. This committee offers invaluable insight into the needs and aspirations of our students, directly from their perspective.

Our four Literacy Zones in our Adult Education Learning Centers in Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn provide support in social services, financial literacy, legal services, and many other needs in addition to hosting job and health fairs.

In our efforts to further emphasize workforce development, we are looking at new ways to leverage partnerships with community-based organizations. We've done this successfully with St. Nick Alliance in Bushwick, combining their workforce training and wraparound services with our academic instruction, which allows both parties to maximize resources and prepare students for the 21st century workforce. We hope to expand programs similar to this model going forward.

To ensure that New Yorkers are aware of the services and opportunities available to them via Adult Education, we deploy eight full-time community liaisons. Their primary responsibility is to engage with community leaders and other City agencies, as well as attend events throughout the city to advertise class availability. In addition, Adult and Continuing Education partners with

other divisions within the DOE in conducting outreach. We have also begun to streamline our messaging to students through an outreach team that more intentionally communicates our focus on helping students earn their High School Equivalency diplomas.

The majority of Adult and Continuing Education programs are funded by a prescriptive New York State Employment Preparation Education (EPE) grant from the New York State Education Department (NYSED). This grant provides more than \$30 million in annual funding.

Federal funding for Adult and Continuing Education includes a five-year Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) grant and others for a total of approximately \$5 million. We also received almost \$14 million in City funding this year to support adult education services.

We are committed to ensuring that NYC residents have access to high-quality education. The trajectory of our programs over the past year and a half have demonstrated immense progress and we are confident that these trends are continuing in the right direction. We greatly appreciate the partnership with Chair Treyger in thinking and working holistically on this issue in order to enhance Adult Education in his district and citywide. We know we have more work to do, and we look forward to our continued partnership with the City Council in these efforts.



**New York City Council, Committee on Education
Wednesday, February 26th, 2020**

**Testimony of Hallie Yee, Policy Coordinator
The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)**

Thank you, Chair Treyger and the Committee on Education for convening this hearing. My name is Hallie Yee, Policy Coordinator of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF). We are here today on behalf of the Asian Pacific American immigrant community of New York City.

CACF is building a community too powerful to ignore. Since 1986, we have been the nation's only pan-Asian children and families' advocacy organization that leads the fight for improved and equitable policies, systems, funding, and services to support marginalized Asian Pacific American (APA) children and families. Currently, Asian Americans are by percentage the fastest growing community in New York. Of the 1.6 million Asian New Yorkers in the State, approximately 80% live in the New York City metropolitan area, nearly doubling every decade since 1970. They make up 15% of the City's and 10% of the State's population. In fact, New York City has the largest Asian American population of any U.S. city. Yet, the needs of the APA community are often overlooked, misunderstood, and uncared for. We are constantly fighting the harmful impacts of the model minority myth, which prevents the community's needs from being acknowledged and understood. This means our communities, as well as the organizations that serve the community, often lack the resources to provide critical services for those in need. We work with almost 50 member organizations to identify and speak out on common challenges and needs across the APA community.

APAs hail from South, Southeast, East, and Central Asian countries, as well as from the Pacific Islands. In NYC, we represent over 40 ethnicities, tens of languages and religions, and a multitude of cultures and immigration experiences.

On behalf of the almost 50 Asian-led and Asian-serving community and social service organizations that comprise our membership, we respectfully request the City Council to support:

- **Resolution No. 146**, which would establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students.

Currently, there are over 200,000 New Yorkers of South Asian descent, many of whom celebrate Diwali, the most important festival on the Hindu calendar, and this number is only increasing with the growing APA population. Despite the growing number of South Asians who observe Diwali, it is still not recognized as a school holiday in the New York City public school system. Although students of all faiths and ethnicities are allowed to request excused absences for religious or



cultural holidays, many parents are still reluctant to do so. This is because when it comes to applying to middle and high schools, attendance is a huge part of the equation that counts toward whether a child gets accepted at his or her first-choice institution. Many students who celebrate Diwali are still at a disadvantage by having to choose between celebrating an important holiday or being absent from school. This can result in students falling behind their peers, missing lessons and tests, and having a lower attendance record. Furthermore, the NYC Department of Education offers a resource for teachers called "Learning about Diwali", which includes sample lessons, activities, websites, and books, so that teachers can inform students about the holiday. This is significant as it creates a space in which all students can learn about the cultural and religious importance of Diwali to our communities and would help promote inclusivity and understanding within the classrooms and amongst peers. What we would like to emphasize, however, support of this resolution comes with a request that resources like "Learning about Diwali" are actually used in classrooms, that the students not celebrating this holy day understand its cultural and religious significance to their classmates and neighbors. In the same way they understand the history of Columbus or the importance of Yom Kippur, they should be taught to understand Diwali. The establishment of this resource also indicates that the City already recognizes and has begun to understand the extent to which Diwali is significant, but the City can take it a step further by establishing Diwali as an official public school holiday. Is there any logical reason not to respect all holy days? No widely celebrated religious or cultural holiday holds moral superiority over another. There shouldn't be a magic number of participating students before this festival is seen as a significant holiday for Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

New York City is an increasingly diverse city, and incorporating Diwali as a public school holiday would not only highlight the diversity within the city but also demonstrate the city's commitment to inclusivity, acceptance, and tolerance. Please stand with CACF and those we represent by supporting the passage of this piece of legislation, and please listen to constituents and community members who observe the holiday as they speak on how important it is to establish Diwali as a public school holiday.

I would like to thank Chair Treyger and the entire Committee on Education for your leadership, and we look forward to working with you all closely moving forward.

Diana Ramsamooj
President of Arya Spiritual Center Inc.
d.bacchus@gmail.com
718-216-0194
Diwali Hearing

Namaste and Good Afternoon. Thank you council member Treyger and council member Dromm and all the council members for providing this opportunity so that the voices of our Hindu community could be heard. I am honored to represent my fellow Hindu Brothers and Sisters.

My name is Diana Ramsamooj. I have worked for the Department of Education (DOE) & Non-Profit Organizations for over 17 years. As an Indo-Caribbean leader in my community, I teach and manage at East Indian Music Academy where we strive to promote Indian culture & spiritual awareness through music. I am also the President of Arya Spiritual Center, one of the 1st Hindu temples that promote Hinduism in the N.Y. Tristate.

I speak to you today as a fellow educator and community leader.

New York City values diversity as portrayed in the school calendar. How is it that one of the world's oldest and 3rd leading religions in the world is not being recognized? New York city itself has the highest Indian American population of any individual city in North America. According to data from 2015 American Community Survey, out of 249,000 people, Staten Island has 4% of Hindus, Bronx 8%, Brooklyn 13%, Manhattan 14% and my borough of Queens has 62%. Those numbers alone speak for itself. By 2030 the Indian American population will increase. This number does not include the Indo-Caribbean community which is the 2nd largest immigrant group and has over 140,000 people and it continues to grow. (People Reporting Ancestry, 2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, United States Census Bureau).

What message is our education system sending to our Hindu youths? Are we not of value? Are we not part of the community? Families are challenged between promoting and preserving their culture vs. sending their children to school for an education. Isn't cultural education just as important? Indians have been coming to America since the 19th century (Richard T. Schaefer (March 20, 2008). "Indian Americans". *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*. SAGE Publications. p. 801. ISBN 978-1-4129-2694-2.) (

Nirvikar Singh, coauthor of *The Other One Percent: Indians in America.*) We have been invisible for far too long.

Since 2005, New Jersey has recognized Diwali as a holiday on their school calendar. How is it that New York City only has suspended alternate side parking?

As an educator, we need to show our Hindu children that they are valued and celebrated. New York City should celebrate all major faiths equally.

Thank you. Namaste.

<http://aafederation.org/cic/briefs/2019in.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1NOK4twRjiPdfOnjNA50K-GEOZpf0Ksf76Uh7nUULWO2nunoUT0CZaDoY>

https://news.ucsc.edu/2017/06/singh-book.html?fbclid=IwAR2hm0Mu7aoBYa8rsP5r9SbYpHvRaQQawiT7JnGb39_GbrCmPulqxS76w



**The Arab American
Association of
New York**

Testimony of the Arab American Association of New York

New York City Council Committee on Education

Hearing on Experiences of New Yorkers Enrolled in Adult Education & Adult Literacy Programs

February 26, 2020

Chairman Treyger, members of the Committee on Education, thank you for having us and our partner organizations here today. My name is Mary Hetteix, and I am the Adult Education Program Coordinator for the Arab American Association of New York.

For nearly 20 years, adult ESL education has been a cornerstone of AAANY's mission to serve New York's Arab American community, and every year hundreds of new Americans join us at our English for speakers of other languages classes. While every student comes to us for a different reason, they all want the same thing: the freedom, opportunity, and dignity that speaking English affords them. We work hard to ensure that our program can welcome everyone who wants to learn, but state funding cuts have made this increasingly difficult. Without an additional investment from the city of between 75 and 100 thousand dollars, we risk being unable to fulfil the demand in our community for high quality ESL instruction. Increased support from the city would allow us to continue and to enrich the services we offer, changing the lives of hundreds across the city.

Every year hundreds of students attend our classes, but our current level of designated ESL funding only provides enough support to educate about half of the students we serve. We have been able to make up the difference by reallocating funds from other projects, but this is obviously unsustainable. Without the city's help hundreds of students are at risk of losing their access to free ESL education. We serve a uniquely vulnerable community which includes refugees and adults with limited education. The English language skills they gain through our



**The Arab American
Association of
New York**

classes open up immeasurable opportunities - to work as they please, to study as they like, and to participate in society in a way they never could before.

This impact is arguably most profoundly felt by the women we serve. The majority of our students are women who may not have had the chance to work or go to school in their home countries. AAANY's ESL programs open the door to a level of independence which may have previously been denied to them on account of their gender. Our programs equip them with English language skills in a way which is convenient for them, responsive to their culture, and respectful of their family obligations. These classes don't just teach them - they empower our students to become active, independent, and productive in ways they never could before, and our current level of funding risks this empowerment being taken from them.

AAANY's prerogative is always to expand the reach and impact of our programming, and increased investment from the city would allow us to do just that. Expanded funding would allow us to hire more teachers, decrease class sizes, and expand our class offerings to include night courses, giving hundreds more new Americans the chance to learn.

It is a disservice to tens of thousands of immigrants that the state chose to cut funding for programs like these which do so much. We need the City Council to step up and support adult ESL programs like ours to make sure that every New Yorker has the chance to learn English and to fully participate in their new community, city, and country.



Written Testimony of Teresa Baik
Director of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS)
Before the
New York City Council Committee of Education
Regarding
Oversight-Experience of New Yorkers enrolled in adult education and adult literacy programs
February 26, 2020

Good afternoon Chairman Treyger and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Teresa Baik and I am the Director of Education for Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). I am pleased to be testifying today about what the experiences have been like for my students enrolled in our adult education program within KCS.

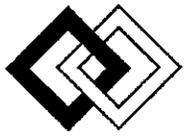
Founded in 1973 and incorporated in 1974 as the first Korean community-based social service agency in the Northeast, KCS focused on delivering social services to address the various needs of the Korean community, but has since expanded to serve the wider Asian American community. KCS serves over 1,300 individuals daily from six different locations with culturally competent programs focusing on aging, immigration, senior employment, education, mental health, and public health and research.

Our adult literacy program at KCS has been around for more than 20 years. Over the course of time, we have been able to expand our ESOL classes from four to fourteen, which proves that our community members have a growing interest in learning English. Our classes run from Monday to Saturday, with flexible class times in the morning, afternoon, and evening to best accommodate our students and their busy schedules. Our classes are currently at maximum capacity with approximately 20 students enrolled in each class. For this fiscal year, we currently have about 200 students registered, the most that we have ever had at KCS. Our students are passionate and eager to learn English and for many of them, learning English has been able to sustain them in their everyday lives and has given them an opportunity to actively communicate with their children, grandchildren, as well as teachers at their children's school.

I am going to share with you a client story that highlights the importance of ESOL classes and how it goes beyond just learning a language. As I was helping a client fill out her intake form so that she could officially enroll for one of our ESOL classes, she began to tell me her personal story as to what drove her to learn English. She told me that a life-long goal of hers has been to learn English, so when she first started attending elementary school back in her native country she was extremely excited to finally learn how to speak English herself. However, her dreams were cut short when her family no longer had the financial resources to support her. As a result, she always felt ashamed of her education level and her inability to study English, until that moment when she filled out her intake form with me. This was a golden opportunity for her to finally fulfill her childhood dream. There are many similar stories at KCS and other social-service organizations.

During these past 20 years, we have been able to expand our ESOL classes due to the generous funding that we have received from New York City's Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) as well as the New York State Office of New Americans (ONA). However, since May 2019, we have had to decrease the number of our ESOL classes due to the budget cut that specifically

Table with 6 columns: KCS Main Office Adult Daycare | Immigration | ESOL, Corona Senior Center, Flushing Senior Center, Public Health and Research Center | Workforce Development, Brooklyn Project, Mental Health Clinic. Includes addresses and contact information for each location.



KCS
WWW.KCSNY.ORG

THE KOREAN COMMUNITY
SERVICES OF METROPOLITAN
NEW YORK, INC.

뉴욕한인봉사센터
Since 1973

happened at the state level. This has hurt us tremendously, as we have been forced to cut the number of ESOL classes that we provide, as well as the staffing allocated to that grant.

We at KCS hope that the Committee understands the importance of the adult literacy programs especially to the Asian American immigration population and hope that more of an investment will be given specifically to this area.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

KCS Main Office
Adult Daycare |
Immigration | ESOL

203-05 32nd Avenue
Bayside, NY 11361
Tel: (718) 939-6137
Fax: (718) 886-6126

**Corona Senior
Center**

37-06 111th Street
Corona, NY 11368
Tel: (718) 651-9220
Fax: (718) 478-6055

**Flushing Senior
Center**

42-15 166th Street
Flushing, NY 11358
Tel: (718) 886-8203
Fax: (718) 886-8205

**Public Health and
Research Center |
Workforce Development**

325 W 38th Street, Ste. 1210
New York, NY 10018
Tel: (212) 463-9685
Fax: (212) 463-8347

Brooklyn Project

8710 5th Ave. 1FL
Bay Ridge, NY 11209
Tel: (718) 630-0001
Fax: (718) 630-0002

Mental Health Clinic

42-16 162nd Street, 2FL
Flushing, NY 11358
Tel: (718) 366-9540
Fax: (718) 534-4149

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Christina. I come from China, and I have been here in New York for 6 months. I was a business manager in China. I was confident in everything I did.

I had a very difficult time when I first came here. I didn't have a job. I couldn't speak English and I didn't understand what others said. My husband had to accompany me when I wanted to go somewhere. I felt like a baby. I was sad because I couldn't do anything. I felt like everything was saying no to me.

One month later, I came to the Chinese-American Planning Council to study English. My teacher is very nice. When I have a question, she always answers me very patiently. Although I made many mistakes, she kept encouraging me. She says, "I like mistakes, mistakes are good," "I am so proud of you," "You can always do everything well". I studied hard, and now I can speak English a little bit. In my class, we learned vocabulary about jobs and job responsibilities, and we practiced talking about our work experience. We learned grammar and vocabulary, so that I can express more complex ideas about many topics.

I'm working in a clothing company as an office assistant. I need to work in the morning from 9 to 12. I like my job. My boss is very friendly. He encouraged me to study English. My co-workers are almost all English speakers. I can have short conversations with them, and I feel everything is beginning to get better. In the future, I hope to get a promotion at my job.

I still come to CPC to learn English. English is very important to me. I can speak English when I'm working. In the future, I want to use English to communicate with my child's teacher. English will appear in every corner of my life. I will learn it for my whole life, and I believe

anyone who has a will can do it.

I am very grateful to the government for supporting us to learn English for free. Teaching someone how to fish is more important than giving someone a fish. I really like fishing. Thank you.

TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

**New York City Council
Committee on Education**

**Oversight: Experience of New Yorkers enrolled in adult education and adult literacy
programs**

Submitted by:

Ariel Savransky

UJA-Federation of New York

February 26, 2020

Good afternoon Chairperson Treyger and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Ariel Savransky and I am an Advocacy and Policy Advisor at UJA-Federation of New York. Established 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to the mission is to care for those in need. UJA identifies and meets the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA connects people to their communities and respond to crises in New York, Israel and around the world. UJA supports a network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services. On behalf of UJA, the network of nonprofit partners and those served, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the adult literacy system in New York City.

UJA greatly appreciates the commitment of the New York City Council and the Administration to investing in adult literacy programs in New York City, notably for the continued investment of \$12 million in educational opportunities for immigrant New Yorkers, a commitment which was renewed for Fiscal Year 2020. For the 2.2 million adults in New York City – one-third of the adult population – who lack English Language Proficiency, basic literacy skills, or a high school diploma, these programs are necessary tools in teaching these individuals how to read, write, obtain an equivalency diploma, and enter job training or post-secondary education programs. In this uncertain political climate, these services are more important than ever in ensuring that immigrant families understand their rights and know what resources are available to them, as well as in ensuring they understand how to navigate the healthcare system and the school system. By continuing the \$12 million investment, more immigrants will be able to access higher education programs as well as jobs and careers that will allow them to take care of themselves and their families.

According to the Community Needs Assessment conducted by DYCD in 2016, which collects input from New York City residents and institutional leaders regarding service needs and gaps in their communities, education, primarily adult education/literacy classes, was one of the greatest needs and service gaps reported.¹ This finding was consistent throughout the city. This need is echoed by the 2016 survey conducted by the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) of adult literacy providers, with 54 responding organizations, which found that these organizations' collective waitlist for classes exceeded 15,000 individuals.² However, this number represents an undercount on need, as not all programs were surveyed or were able to provide data regarding waitlists. Furthermore, the City's ability to offer adult literacy programs is fairly constrained. Considering all local, state, and federal investments, the City's Office of Workforce Development reports just 61,000 individuals are served annually in "basic education" programs.³

¹ The City of New York Department of Youth and Community Development. *Community Needs Assessment Report 2017*. http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/2017_CNA_FINAL.pdf

² NYCCAL survey data

³ <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/careerpathways/downloads/pdf/Career-Pathways-Progress-Update.pdf>

When it comes to funding for adult literacy, there are really three issues. The first is the paucity of the funding itself, which shuts the doors to over 95% of those adults in need. The second is the unreliable nature of the current funding streams, which poses a continuous threat to program stability, staff continuity, and the ability to fully achieve program and policy goals. The third is the inadequacy of the funding formulas and rates, which undermine programs' ability to provide the full array and depth of services that students need.

In December of 2017, the Literacy Assistance Center released a report entitled "Investing in Quality: A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders." Funded by DYCD, the report details 14 "Building Blocks" of a comprehensive, community-based adult literacy program, identifies the resources needed to fully implement the Building Blocks, and includes a cost model. According to the cost model, community-based adult literacy programs would need to have their current funding rates increased by at least *four times* in order to fully implement the components and services outlined in the report. At the current funding rates, many of the critical program components that were identified in the report – such as full-time teachers, counseling, student support services, workforce transition services, professional development and planning time for staff, and integrated technology - are often compromised.

We urge the City Council and the Administration to take two crucial steps:

- 1) Restore and baseline the \$12 million for DYCD-funded adult literacy services and combine these funds with the existing \$3.5 million in baselined DYCD funding.
- 2) Invest an additional \$2 million a year over the next two years in a pilot project that would enable the field to demonstrate that funding programs at or closer to the true cost of providing high quality, comprehensive adult literacy classes will lead to greater student gains and a wider range of benefits for families and communities than current levels of funding enable programs and students to achieve. A \$2 million investment would enable the city to quadruple funding for at least six targeted community-based adult literacy programs so that these programs would be able to fully implement all 14 Building Blocks called for in the Literacy Assistance Center report. It would provide the Council, the Administration, DYCD, private funders and other stakeholders with data that would show the correlation between select program enhancements and student specific outcomes, and it would ultimately demonstrate the broader civic, social and economic impacts of adult literacy education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the importance of adult literacy programs in New York City. If you have any questions, please contact Ariel Savransky at savranskya@ujafedny.org.



**New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**Oversight Hearing on Adult Education
February 26, 2020**

**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition
Presented by Liza Schwartzwald, Manager of Education Policy**

Good afternoon and thank you Chair Treyger and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify. My name is Liza Schwartzwald and I am a Manager of Education Policy at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization of around 200 groups serving immigrants and refugees across New York State. The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) has a distinguished track record of improving Multilingual Language Learners' and immigrant students' access to resources, working with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to address barriers immigrants face, as well as supporting adult literacy programs across the city. Our member organizations specifically serve the needs of marginalized immigrant communities - including newly-arrived immigrants, low-income families, and youth and adults with limited English proficiency.



The NYIC wishes to thank you, Hon. Council Member Treyger, and we wish to express our deep appreciation to the City Council and the Mayor for the \$12 million investment in adult literacy funding and services over these past four years.

As part of the NYIC's expansive approach to education, many of our members run adult literacy programs essential to ensuring the success of immigrant families. Currently, there are approximately 2.2 million adults in New York City who lack English language proficiency, a high school diploma or both, of which over 75% are immigrants. Yet public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that only 3% of these 2.2 million adults are able to access basic education, high school equivalency, or English language classes in any given year. Many of these adults are also parents of young children; statewide, there are over 411,000 parents of young children who are limited English proficient, many of those here in NYC.

Adult literacy classes provide the basis for our immigrant community to navigate every aspect of life in a new country. This is especially important for immigrant parents of young children who are limited English proficient. Parents of young children are their child's most important resource in accessing education services, healthcare, and other necessary services. Adult literacy classes provide parents with the opportunity to acquire these necessary skills and also support their children throughout their own education. In a city committed to immigrant rights, justice, and opportunity, for our increasingly diverse community, failing to adequately support city-funded English language and literacy classes would be an abandonment of the thousands of adults who benefit from them.



In addition, we'd also like to stress the effect that increased adult literacy has on two current federal concerns. First, with the rollout of the new federal Public Charge policy this past Monday, adult literacy services have become even more critical, as English language ability can count as a positive factor in the overall public charge determination for families that are applying for green cards. Second, adequately funding adult literacy across the city makes initiatives like the Census outreach currently being undertaken throughout the city more effective. The Census offers an opportunity for each and every person living in the United States, including our immigrant populations, to influence their future and the future of this city, and to support further representation and funding for our diverse population. A full Census count affects the overall welfare of all New Yorkers.

In December of 2017, the Literacy Assistance Center released a report entitled Investing in Quality: A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders. Funded by DYCD, the report details 14 "Building Blocks" of a comprehensive, community-based adult literacy program, identifies the resources needed to fully implement the Building Blocks, and includes a first-of-its-kind cost model. It found that community-based adult literacy programs would need to have their current funding rates increased by at least four times in order to fully implement the components and services outlined in the report.

In support of adult learners, we call on the City Council and the Mayor to support these two critical steps:

- 1) Baseline the \$12 million for DYCD-funded adult literacy services and combine these funds with the existing \$3.5 million in previously baselined funding.



2) Invest an additional \$2 million a year over the next two years to fund a pilot program. This pilot would demonstrate that funding programs at or closer to the level called for in the Investing in Quality report written by the Literacy Assistance Center will lead to greater student gains and a wider range of benefits for families and communities. A \$2 million investment each year for the next two years would enable the city to quadruple funding for at least six targeted community-based adult literacy programs. Doing so would allow these programs to fully implement all 14 of the Building Blocks called for in the Investing in Quality report and achieve a broader range of goals.

The Mayor and City Council have shown a principled commitment to the children of New York City and have rightfully made meaningful investments in our early childhood and K-12 systems. However, we must do more for the one in three New Yorkers in need of adult literacy education. The NYIC and NYCCAL believe that being able to read and write, speak and understand English, obtain a high school or equivalency diploma, and successfully enter job training or post-secondary education are the rights of every New Yorker. We urge the Mayor and City Council to baseline adult literacy funding and ensure that every adult in need is able to gain access to high-quality adult literacy services.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

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New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy

**New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

Oversight Hearing on Adult Education and Adult Literacy Programs

February 26, 2020

Testimony of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy Presented by Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center

Good day. Thank you Chairperson Treyger and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center, a 37-year-old not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system and to advancing adult literacy as a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. Today I will be testifying on behalf of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy, or NYCCAL, a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

Today in New York City, there are approximately 2.2 million adults who lack English language proficiency, a high school diploma, or both. The majority of these adults are immigrants. Others were born in the United States but underserved by the public school system. Many of these adults are unemployed or live in poverty. Most are people of color. Many are parents. Limited skills impact almost every aspect of their lives, making it difficult for them to secure living-wage jobs, support their children in school, advocate for their rights as workers, access quality health care, and fully participate in the political process. Yet public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that only 3% of these 2.2 million adults are able to access

publicly funded basic education, high school equivalency, or English language classes in any given year.

NYCCAL is grateful to the City Council for championing the cause of these adults and for securing a \$12 million expansion of adult literacy funding and services for each of the past four years. Unfortunately, this funding and these services are just the tip of the iceberg.

When it comes to funding for adult literacy, there are really three issues. The first is the paucity of the funding itself, which shuts the doors to over 95% of those adults in need. The second is the unreliable nature of the current funding streams, which poses a continuous threat to program stability, staff continuity, and the ability to fully achieve program and policy goals. The third is the inadequacy of the funding formulas and rates, which undermine programs' ability to provide the full array and depth of services that students need.

In December of 2017, my organization, the Literacy Assistance Center, released a report entitled *Investing in Quality: A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders*. Funded by DYCD, the report details 14 "Building Blocks" of a comprehensive, community-based adult literacy program, identifies the resources needed to fully implement the Building Blocks, and includes a first-of-its-kind cost model. Based on our cost model, we found that community-based adult literacy programs would need to have their current funding rates increased by at least *four times* in order to fully implement the components and services outlined in the report. While this might sound like a big leap, we know that at the current funding rates, many of the critical program components that we identify – such as full-time teachers, counseling, student support services, workforce transition services, professional development and planning time for staff, and integrated technology - are often compromised.

NYCCAL is calling on the city council and the mayor to take two steps in FY21 that we believe will ultimately lead to the stabilization and expansion of these vital services:

1) Baseline the \$12 million for DYCD-funded adult literacy services and combine these funds with the existing \$3.5 million in previously baselined funding.

2) Invest an additional \$2 million a year over the next two years in a pilot project that would enable the field to demonstrate that funding programs at or closer to the level called for in the *Investing in Quality* report will lead to greater student gains and a wider range of benefits for families and communities than current levels of funding enable programs and students to achieve. A \$2 million investment each year for the next two years would enable the city to quadruple funding for at least six targeted community-based adult literacy programs so that these programs would be able to fully implement all 14 of the Building Blocks called for in the report and achieve a broader range of goals. It would provide the council, the administration, DYCD, private funders and other stakeholders with data that would show the correlation between select program enhancements and specific student outcomes, and it would ultimately demonstrate the broader civic, social, and economic impacts of adult literacy education.

NYCCAL believes that being able to read and write, speak and understand English, obtain an equivalency diploma, and successfully enter job training or post-secondary education are the rights of every New Yorker, and that every adult in need should be able to access high quality adult literacy services. If we are truly a city committed to equal opportunity and social justice, we should expect no less.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

Ira Yankwitt, Executive Director
Literacy Assistance Center
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Sumeshwar Singh - York College

“Let's Make Diwali A National Holiday”

Diwali should be recognized as a national holiday due to the fact that there has been a significant change recognized in our nation; different religions have been gaining acceptance and many religions such as Catholicism, Judaism, and Christianity have gained the support of religious national holidays which includes: Christmas, Yom Kippur, Good Friday, Easter, etc. However, Hinduism has not had any religious holidays recognized by the nation. Student population is not just limited to the most common religions and due to demographic changes our nations a large portion of the population includes Hindus, Muslims, Buddhist, and many others. Unfortunately, the majority of these religions do not have their needed holidays recognized by the nation. Therefore; I believe this needs to be changed. To many indians Diwali is what christmas is to christinas, commemorates the victory of the forces of light over the forces of darkness

Deepavali is a very famous and one of the most important festivals celebrated in India, the motherland, and across the world. Diwali comes from the word Deepavali in Sanskrit which means avali means rows and Deepa means light or lamp so it is the festival of lights where people light rows of lamps in front of their house. They put lights everywhere, their offices, and in all the rooms decorated beautifully and it is celebrated in the darkest time of the year during october/ november during the new moon day according to the hindu calendar. When it gets dark we light all the lamps in our house and also outside the house and it is said that this is the time when we welcome mother Lakshmi into our sanctuary (home) in abundance and prosperity so to prepare a few days before we start cleaning and then prepare everything to welcome her into our home. Which can be very time consuming, if you are spiritually connected to your beliefs like myself and family we do a puja as we celebrate. It is said that mother Lakshmi is very fickle, she easily goes away again, so she will only stay in the homes where individuals are pure, sincere, hard work determination and gratefulness also where someone demonstrates gratitude. So apart from cleaning the home one day of the year and getting everything ready ,it is important that after this very auspicious day it is reminded that if you wanted abundance to stay in life, if you wanted real prosperity to be there throughout the year we have to be sincere, we have to be devoted and we have to feel grateful. In addition, we believe that it is not only the lamps outside that we light (material stuff) also cleaning the body and the mind so during this time one can do fasting ,spiritual practices which cleans the body and mind so that we can light the lamp of knowledge / the lamp of consciousness within. This requires the utmost concentration and devotion. So a day off from school will give us the opportunity to practice what we believe in . I can personally say that I know students who took the day off from school to celebrate with friends and family, and attendance plays a role in a students academic life. It is the light of knowledge that brings true prosperity through abundance in life which dispels the darkness of ignorance of negativity and of stress within. Another practice is to light sparklets and diyas to remove all evil because your mind comes to the present moment, removing all negativity all the past impressions from the past. Apart from my tradition at dawn my family

lights a lamp which should be burning throughout the night to protect us from evil and untimely death in honor of the lord of death. On the day of Diwali instead of focusing on the sweets and firecrackers it is also a time to reflect , go within and light the lamp of knowledge to dispel ignorance, light the lamp of compassion. In hopes of destroying the indifference towards others and be a light for yourself and others and the society that you're apart of. I know that Hindus have many holidays according to the hindu calendar but i am sincerely asking for us to start by **Making Diwali A National Holiday?**

To the City Council Education Committee on Oversight of Adult Education Programs

This letter represents ***the voice of our active Adult Ed Chapter members*** who risk retaliation for speaking out, as well as those veteran teachers who are retired, discontinued or facing wrongful charges. It should serve as an update on the dire situation in the NYC DOE Adult Education program that we previously reported to the City Council Education Committee in the Fall of 2017.

At that time, 14 retired and discontinued OACE teachers testified as to the destructive effects of former Supt. Rosemarie Mills' ***mismanagement campaign***. They focused on the ***agenda*** carried out by her ***cohort*** of new principals. These principals readily followed Mills' dictates. They targeted senior teachers, meted out massive numbers of U-ratings, and created a hostile presence in the classroom. Any dedicated, experienced Adult Ed administrator who continued to act with integrity by refusing to follow Mills' directives, was forced out.

OACE's Supt. Mills was finally "re-assigned" in 2019 after a number of court cases and discrimination complaints brought by teachers and former administrators, and a barrage of unfavorable press. Unfortunately, her hired cohort of principals with no prior experience in adult education were suddenly designated as "educational leaders" and continue to carry out her agenda in their individual schools.

These so-called leaders have forced teachers to sit through many hours of ***irrelevant professional development sessions*** while still targeting the ever-decreasing number of veteran teachers. They have filed charges against veteran teachers and leaders of our chapter in an attempt to get rid of any active and vocal members. This has added to the pervasive climate of fear in our program. A stressful work environment hurts our students as well as our teachers.

In addition to the loss of supportive teaching and learning environments, we also ***lost community-based sites and back-to-back full-time teaching jobs*** for certified Adult Ed instructors. The stable, supportive and respected community of

experienced full-time teachers who were there before Mills' takeover, are still under assault. Administrators whose **recruitment efforts** were severely lacking or virtually non-existent, abdicated their responsibilities by telling teachers to go out and find new students themselves. Our **teacher turnover rate** has soared due to these extremely stressful working conditions, unjustified discontinuances and wrongful U-ratings. Many of our teachers returned to jobs they had left in the K-12 world or chose early retirement.

The targeting of experienced teachers with U-ratings based on "gotcha" reports has had a negative effect on our student population. Students are constantly subjected to scenes where their teachers are under attack. They often voice their shock at the principals' disrespect for their teachers. Teachers are still working in an environment of fear as they see more and more senior teachers mistreated and forced out of the program. **Students benefit** from a stable, experienced teachers corps that is dedicated to their education.

We need educational leaders with character above all and not trained writers of negative observation reports calculated to remove senior teachers or those who dare to question and assert their rights. We need administrators who give teachers and students the respect we all deserve. They must be dedicated to the education of students above all, rather than using their positions to continue an anti-teacher agenda put in motion by Supt. Mills.

It is our hope that the DOE's Adult Education Program will once again become a joyful place where students can excel and take every opportunity to learn and reach their goals and dreams. Adult education teachers have always contributed so much to our city and the well-being of our communities. Parents become more involved in their children's education, immigrants help their children with their homework, express their medical complaints, assert their needs, etc. By taking our classes with dedicated teachers who work tirelessly without the benefit of any prep periods, many enter job training programs, find new jobs, attain their High School Equivalency Diplomas and start college. Our students can make new lives for

themselves and contribute to the well-being of our city. Our hope is that the teachers and support staff will be allowed to work freely without fear of punitive "gotcha" visits and reprisals from administrators. We look forward to working in a professional environment that fosters trust and self-worth and restores the supportive family atmosphere to our program.

New York City Council Committee on Education

Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair

Oversight Hearing on Adult Education and Adult Literacy Programs

February 26, 2020

Testimony from Anthony Tassi of Literacy Partners

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairperson Treyger and members of the Committee. My name is Anthony Tassi. I am the CEO of Literacy Partners and I am pleased to have this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you about adult literacy based on the experience of my organization and the 1,800 adults and children we reach each year.

Literacy Partners

Literacy Partners operates in all five boroughs of the City of New York with the singular goal of enabling low-income and immigrant families to achieve their fullest potential. Our unique role in the City's education system is to focus on parents of young children. We partner with Head Start programs, UPK and 3-K programs, elementary schools, and other community-based organizations to offer educational programs that meet the needs of low-income and immigrant parents and caregivers of young children. We also have a growing program of parent education for Latinx parents and caregivers created with Univision and based on a popular telenovela.

Our free classes, community workshops, and educational media programs help parents develop the skills they need to achieve success for themselves and a bright future for their families. Our programs support community development, help break the cycle of poverty, improve job prospects, and close the achievement gap among children before they even begin school.

Need for Adult Literacy Services

Others have testified today to the extraordinary unmet need for adult literacy services in our City: there are approximately 2.2 million adult New Yorkers who lack English language proficiency, a high school degree, or both. However, the collective resources of the City and State devoted to adult literacy classes provide seats for less than 5 percent of the eligible population.

The 2 + million adults shut out of educational opportunity are mostly immigrants who have come to New York in search of a better life. Others were born and raised in the U.S., but were dramatically let down by the very systems supposed to ensure healthy development and a sound basic education.

Having such a large population of adults with limited English proficiency and/or low literacy creates a barrier to progress on two of the Council's most important priorities:

1. a public education system that graduates all its students and whose graduates are college- or career-ready; and
2. a workforce development system that meets the needs of employers, organized labor, and fuels the economic growth and vitality of the City.

As the leader of an organization devoted to serving parents of young children, I will focus my remarks on this first point:

- **providing adult literacy classes specifically tailored to the needs and strengths of parents of young children is one of the most effective strategies to improve K-12 results.**

Any New York City DOE teacher can tell you, the students with parents involved in their education are more likely to succeed. Indeed, a recent survey of elementary school teachers across the country conducted by First Book (a national non-profit organization) found that the number one suggestion that teachers had to improve academic results for their students was not more resources for the classroom, but more help for the parents. And these front-line observations are backed by years of research.

Parents' Literacy Levels Drive Children's Education Results: Pre-K to High School Graduation

While it may be cliché to point out that parents are responsible for the future of the City, it also happens to be true. Whether prepared or not, parents are by definition children's first and primary teacher and the most significant influence on their early cognitive development. Indicators of cognitive development and early literacy skills – as young as 18 months – are strongly predictive of later academic achievement, including grade-level reading (which, in turn predicts high school graduation).

National education statistics confirm that the most reliable predictor of early academic achievement among children is the educational attainment and literacy levels of their parents. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Low Parental Education is Driving Educational Disparities Among Children

	Parents with no HS Degree	Parents with BA Degree
Early Literacy -- % of 2-Year Olds Demonstrating Skills		
Expressive vocabulary	50.5%	71.1%
Listening comprehension	25.4%	42.6%
Emergent Literacy -- Avg Test Scores of 4-Year Olds		
Early reading	18.7	28.8
Math	23.6	33.2
Kindergarten Entrance Exams -- Avg Test Scores		
Reading	26.3	38.4
Math	21.0	33.1
Activities at Home		
Read to by family member >3x/week	56%	90%

National Center for Educational Statistics (USDOE), Digest of Education Statistics 2010; 2012.

In fact, the achievement gap among children is greater when measured by their parents’ educational attainment than when measured by

Figure 2: Achievement Gap is Bigger When Measured By Parents’ Education Rather Than Race or Income

	Parental Education	Race	Family Income
Early Literacy – Gap in % of 2-Year Olds Demonstrating Skills			
Expressive vocabulary	29%	21%	18%
Listening comprehension	40%	29%	25%
Emergent Literacy – Gap in Avg Test Scores of 4-Year Olds			
Early reading	35%	16%	24%
Math	29%	15%	21%
Kindergarten Entrance Exams – Gap in Avg Test Scores			
Reading	31%	10%	23%
Math	37%	19%	28%
Activities at Home – Gap in Frequency of Activity			
Read to by family member >3x/week	41%	14%	18%

National Center for Educational Statistics (USDOE), Digest of Education Statistics 2010; 2012. Parental Education is BA Degree vs. No HS; Race is White vs Black; Family Income is > poverty vs < poverty; or > 2x poverty vs < poverty.

race or family income.

See Figure 2.

The national data also confirms that with each additional increment of education that parents achieve, their children fare better and better in school. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Achievement Gap Shrinks with Each Increment in Parental Education

	No HS	HS Degree	Some College	BA Degree
Early Literacy -- % of 2-Year Olds Demonstrating Skills				
Expressive vocabulary	50.5%	58.7%	64.0%	71.1%
Listening comprehension	25.4%	31.8%	36.6%	42.6%
Emergent Literacy -- Avg Test Scores of 4-Year Olds				
Early reading	18.7	21.6	24.3	28.8
Math	23.6	25.9	28.9	33.2
Kindergarten Entrance Exams -- Avg Test Scores				
Reading	26.3	29.9	33.7	38.4
Math	21.0	24.7	28.4	33.1
Activities at Home				
Read to by family member >3x/week	56%	74%	84%	90%

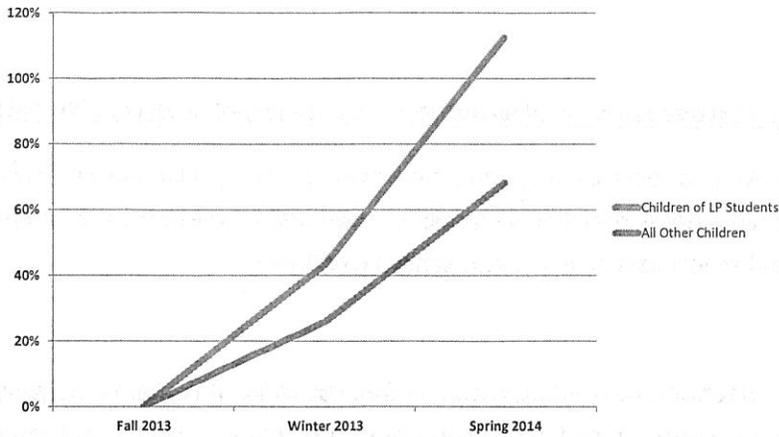
National Center for Educational Statistics (USDOE), Digest of Education Statistics 2010; 2012. Parental Education is BA Degree vs. No HS; Race is White vs. Black; Family Income is > poverty vs < poverty; or > 2x poverty vs < poverty.

Parent Education at Literacy Partners Helps Close the Achievement Gap Among Children

In response to these tremendous inequities plaguing our education system, Literacy Partners created educational programs for parents that we offer in partnership with Head Start programs, Pre-K and 3-K sites, elementary schools and other community-based organizations. “Dual-generation” programming like ours is designed to not only meet the educational needs of the adult participant, but also to help them in concrete ways to promote the early literacy, social-emotional growth, and ultimately, school readiness of their children.

Data gathered from the Literacy Partners “English for Parents” class in the South Bronx several years ago confirms the immediate benefit to the children of parents enrolled: they demonstrate more growth on periodic assessments of child development (using Teaching Strategies Gold) than children at the same Head Start program whose parents were not enrolled in classes. See figure 4.

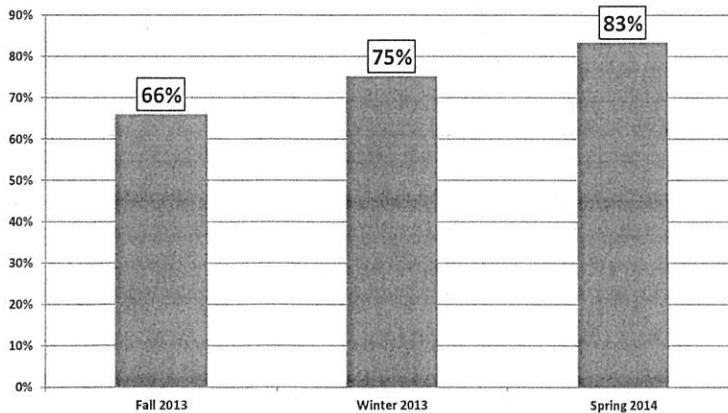
Figure 4: Head Start Assessment Scores Increased More for Children of LP Students Than for Other Head Start Children



8

The sad reality is that by the time children begin Head Start at age three, an achievement gap already exists among children that can be measured by Teaching Strategies Gold assessments. In one sample, the children of our “English for Parents” students scored at just 66 percent of the average score on the initial assessments of children conducted by their Head Start program in September. By the end of the year, our work with parents had closed half that gap as the children of our students scored on average 83 percent of the average. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Assessment Scores of Children of LP Students Increased from 66% of the Average for all Head Start Students to 83%



9

Replicating the Literacy Partners model of adult literacy classes specifically focused on the needs of parents across the City could have profound impact on kindergarten readiness of low-income and immigrant children, leading to higher rates of reading proficiency and ultimately, higher rates of high school graduation.

Parent Education Improves Early Childhood Development by Supporting Parents

In addition to providing a robust adult education experience, the Literacy Partners program for parents and caregivers helps them build the skills they need to promote their children's early literacy skills, social emotional growth, and school readiness.

We pay particular attention to reading with children, because it remains the gold standard in terms of language exposure, narrative development, pre-reading skills, and parent-child bonding. The bonding of parents and children is the root of all healthy development of children and we start from this premise in all our classes and workshops. Each of our students receives a home library of up to 15 age- and culturally-appropriate books for each of their children and we devote hours of classroom time to coaching and supporting parents and caregivers to make family reading a part of their daily routine. We survey our students throughout the year on their reading habits and our teachers follow up in the classroom.

The Literacy Partners model of supportive family reading promotion has impressive results, as our students demonstrate huge increases in frequency and duration of reading with children. See Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Figure 6: After One Semester in Literacy Partners English for Parents Classes, Immigrant Parents Reported Reading to Their Children 65% More Often

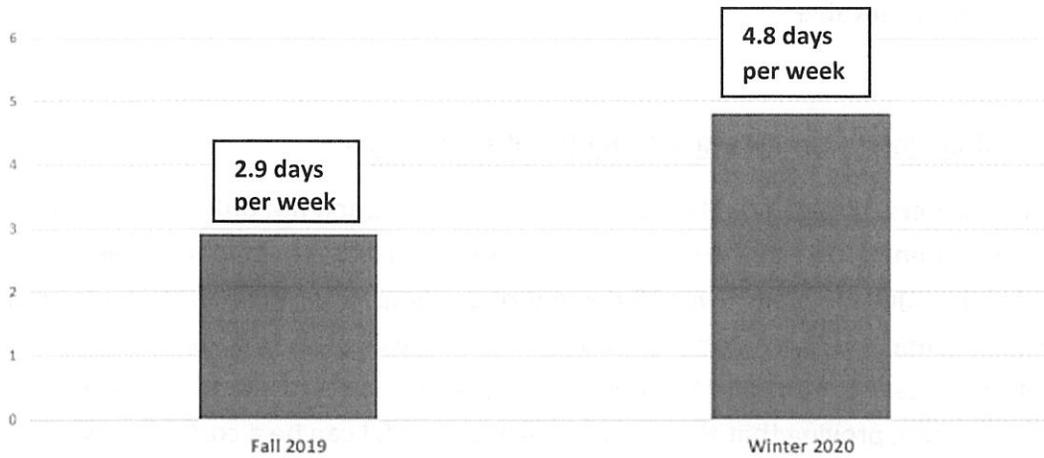
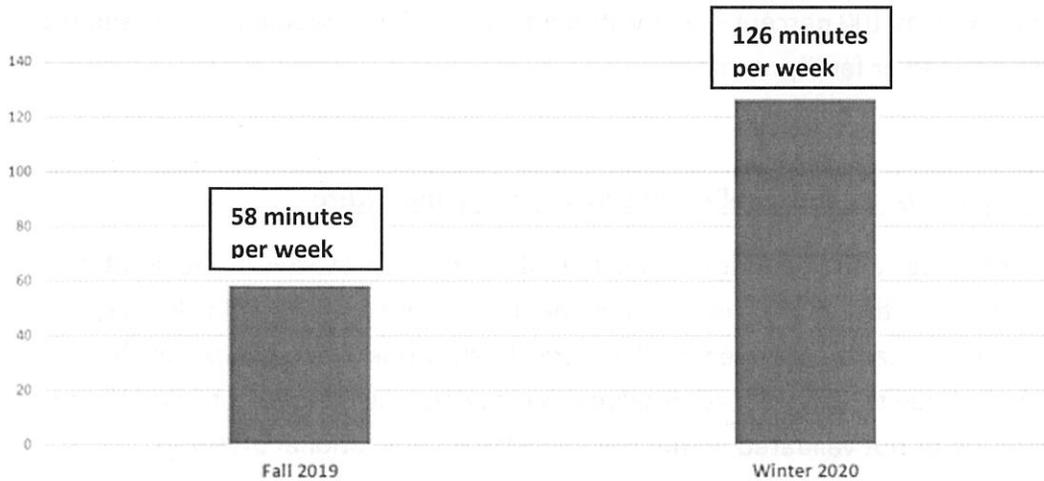


Figure 7: After One Semester in Literacy Partners English for Parents Classes, Immigrant Parents Reported Reading to Their Children For Twice As Long Each Week



What would teachers say if they knew there is a program that results in low-income and immigrant students being read to by a family member nearly 4 days a week for more than two hours total? What would happen to the City's abysmal ELA test scores if the Literacy Partners model were scaled next year so that the average pre-K student were read to by a family member twice as often each week? If the amount of home reading doubled in next year's class?

The Literacy Partners model yields potentially game-changing results in the adult literacy and early childhood education sectors – results that can be scaled to a meaningful level at a cost that is absolutely achievable.

Dual-Generation Classes Can Produce Great Results for Adults

The Literacy Partners model of dual generation literacy education not only equips parents with better skills that benefit their children’s development but produces outstanding educational outcomes for the adults as well. Over 75 percent of our English for Parents students graduate to the next academic level based on pre- and post-testing using the State-mandated BEST + instrument. This result is equivalent to the benchmark for the very best adult literacy programs in the City and State, proving that the Literacy Partners model can be a cost-effective way of achieving top-flight results for adults and delivering a powerful boost to their children’s school readiness and academic performance.

Over 90 percent of our English students reported that the class helped them reduce their stress, a key variable in boosting their confidence to use their literacy and language skills to solve a host of everyday problems and achieve their immediate goals. With results like these, it is not surprising that 100 percent – every student we enrolled – would recommend the program to a friend or family member.

Parent Education for Latinx Families: In-Language and In-Culture

Many have testified to the need for flexibility in the funding protocols in the adult education system. Nowhere is that more evident in the need to create and expand culturally relevant models of adult education. For years, US-centric, English-dominant, academically-oriented programs have been the norm in adult education leaving many students to find their culture not represented or not validated within the mainstream educational offerings.

Literacy Partners, working in conjunction with Univision, has developed a unique program to address this inequity: *La Fuerza de Creer* parent education workshops. *La Fuerza de Creer* is a 5-episode mini-series about a community center threatened by real estate development. The families who rely on the center for child care must rally together with the staff to save the center. Woven into the narrative arc of the story are scenes of parents interacting with their children in ways that are known to promote early learning and social-emotional development.

The miniseries was broadcast nationally on Univision in 2019 with an average daily viewership of 1.4 million Hispanic viewers, including 284,000 average daily viewers in the New York metro area.

Literacy Partners has taken the Univision content and created a workshop series for parents and caregivers that can be hosted by Head Start programs, Pre-K and 3-K sites, elementary schools and other community-based organizations. Parents gather to watch an episode and discuss what they have seen and how it relates to their family. A trained facilitator keeps the discussion on track and helps parents to develop their own insights about how the lessons of the show might apply to their family. We provide parents with bilingual books to take home after each workshop session to activate their good intentions with their children. Participants get the support and coaching they need to more actively promote their children's early learning and social-emotional growth, ultimately increasing their school readiness. These shifts in the home environment – more conversation, more storytelling, more books, etc. – create a culture of literacy that flourishes well beyond the eight weeks of our workshops.

These Spanish-language workshops resonate very powerfully with Latinx families because they begin on the cultural terrain of the families with the telenovela and stay there with the Story-Voice-Action model of learning that focuses not on expert advice, but on peer support to make tangible changes to daily parenting routines. Immigrants with low literacy levels are not intimidated by our approach nor do they feel disrespected by the level of conversation. Instead, they are valued for their prior knowledge and experience and thrive in our telenovela workshop setting with its familiar cultural content.

Flexibility in adult literacy funding could enable Literacy Partners and our many community allies to expand *La Fuerza de Creer* to tens of thousands of Latinx parents, providing a cost-effective boost to their children's school readiness and meeting the number one goal of many parents and caregivers when they seek out adult literacy classes: help with their children's education.

Boosting Parents' Skills Increases the Quality of the City's Workforce Now and in the Future

We have heard a lot about the need for bridge programs – adult literacy programs focused on the literacy and language skills adults need to gain access to the workforce development system. I want to mention another kind of bridge program that addresses the training and

development needs of today's workers while preparing the future workforce in ways we have never systematically contemplated.

If you ask any employer in the City whether they would rather hire workers who scored at the higher or lower end of the spectrum in school, the answer will be the same everywhere. Given that parents' education levels are – on average – the most important driving factor in school achievement, it becomes clear that education of the parents of today's children is vitally important to the quality of tomorrow's workforce. And, as families gain economic stability from parents' increased literacy and work-related skills, there is an immediate pay-off for today's workforce.

In addition, every employer would rather hire workers who can think critically, take responsibility, work well in teams, are free from addictions, etc. These are the key soft skills and personality attributes that every employer wants. These soft skills are also known as “non-cognitive” skills and are directly and highly correlated to parenting practices. They stem from the same parent-child bonding that we promote so successfully in our adult literacy classes for parents.

Children who grow up in families with supportive parents who are emotionally available and responsive develop these skills as adults to a much greater extent than children who don't. In fact, adults who lack these skills often lack them precisely because they did not experience effective parenting. Sadly, they have great difficulty in making up for this deprivation later in life as adults and job seekers. However, like the process of acquiring any other job skills, parents can develop parenting techniques to promote these specific non-cognitive skills in their children.

It is clear that the quality of parenting, together with the literacy and language skill levels of the parent, are key variables in determining the long-term quality of the workforce.

The Dual Generation Approach: Every Parent is an Agent of Workforce Development

The City's workforce development system has a vested interest in the capacities of today's parents both as workers and as agents of education and development of the next generation.

As the single most important influence on the skills development of future workers, the role of parents should be a high priority for the City's workforce development system.

The City's investments in a restructured workforce development system will rightly focus on meeting today's needs. But, a portion of the \$500 million spent each year must focus on the long-term needs of the system. There is growing recognition that with Dual Generation strategies, these two priorities are not mutually exclusive. Approaches that focus on the whole family can be the most cost-effective use of precious public sector dollars due to their high, long-term multiplier effect.

Conclusion: A Unique Opportunity

I want to thank Chairperson Treyger and the members of this Committee for convening this important and informative hearing. It is clear from your remarks and the testimony of all those who appeared today that this Committee has a unique opportunity to redress the systemic failures of our education system in the past and strike a blow for a brighter, more equitable future.

I respectfully urge the Committee to ensure:

- 1. all current funding for adult literacy is baselined in the City Budget;**
- 2. additional funds to be allocated to address the large unmet need among immigrant and low-income New Yorkers in every district of the City; and**
- 3. parent-focused adult literacy classes become a funded priority.**



**New York City Council Committee on Education
February 26th at 1:00 pm**

Testimony of Caroline Iosso, Director of Community and Government Affairs
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow (OBT)

Good morning. My name is Caroline Iosso and I am the Director of Community and Government Affairs at Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow (OBT). Thank you to the members of the Council for the opportunity to speak today. I am here to discuss the importance of wraparound support services in the implementation of adult literacy education.

Founded in 1983, OBT is one of New York City's largest providers of workforce development and education services for opportunity youth, ages 17-24, and adults who are disconnected from education and/or employment. OBT serves over 4,000 youth and adults annually across sites in Brooklyn and Queens. We exist to break the cycle of poverty and inequity through education, job training, and employment. OBT's programs serve as a bridge to economic opportunity for youth, individuals, and families in underserved communities. We emphasize the principles of accountability, confidence, and professionalism to prepare participants for the workforce while developing personal and professional skills.

OBT's programs meet an individual "where they are" in their career trajectory, work with them to discern what their next step is, and provide them with the tools, training, and education to get them there. Our programs have an 87% completion rate. 72% of participants earn employer-recognized credentials during their time with us and 70% are placed in jobs after graduating from our programs.

For adult learners, we offer English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, Adult Basic Education, High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation, and Computer Literacy classes. All our classes are free and offered at various times during the day to accommodate students' work schedules. We are pleased to be members of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), who advocates for funding and support for these important programs.

The Importance of Adult Education

We are proud to offer opportunities for New York City's adult population to earn their HSEs, advance their English language skills, and build their digital literacy. 2.2 million adults in this city lack a high school diploma, English literacy, or both. These skills are important for many reasons -- helping New Yorkers find meaningful jobs with family-sustaining wages, making sure that everyone in our communities can participate civically and feel safe, giving parents the

opportunity to engage with their children's education, and more. Currently, New York City only has capacity to serve 3% of the population that would benefit from these services.

Each year, 400 students participate in our ESOL classes. More than 150 adults participate in our HSE classes, and 15 to 25 of them earn their HSEs each year. However, the adults that complete our programs gain more than language skills or their High School diploma; they leave with confidence and a greater appreciation for lifelong learning.

Challenges that Our Students Face

It can be challenging to meet the need of adult learners-- in contrast to the youth that attend our programming, adults are more likely to have been out of a school environment for a longer period of time, have more competing responsibilities of work and childcare, and have less time and fewer resources to dedicate to learning. It is critical to make engaging in the classroom as convenient as possible.

At OBT, we track reasons for attrition for our adult education classes. The most common reasons that students stop coming to class are difficulties with transportation, food insufficiency, and childcare complications. Components of Adult Education and ESOL classes that support students as they learn are:

- Transportation → Metrocard stipends makes coming to class is less costly
- Food → Meals during, before, or after classes can make coming to class and concentrating easier
- Childcare → Referrals to reputable childcare providers removes one more barrier from an adult participating in our classes

Coney Island HSE Program as a Model

OBT is extremely grateful for the support of Council Member Treyger in the development of an Adult High School Equivalency class on Coney Island. This program began in 2017 as residents whose livelihoods had been impacted by Hurricane Sandy sought jobs, but were rejected due to a lack of a high school diploma. The Council Member recognized a need to bring high school equivalency education down to his district.

To date, we have assisted 5 Coney Island residents to gain their HSEs and 6 residents have passed one to four of the subject tests on their way to getting their HSEs. The number of students passing their TASC increased from 0 in FY18 to 5 in FY19 and we don't know how many will have passed this fiscal year yet, but we are sending 13 to take the test, which is the most that we've sent in the life of the program.

The number of participants in our Coney Island class has increased from 21 in FY2018, to 36 in FY2019, to about 40 in FY2020. In terms of contact hours/attendance for the program, in FY18, we had 7 students who were regularly attending class; in FY19, we had 26 students regularly attending classes.

These increases in participation, HSE attainment, and attendance are due to the wraparound services such as food, case management, and referrals to childcare providers that Council Member Treyger has supported. The class is also held in a closeby location, on Coney Island, ensuring that students do not need to travel far to attend class. Each day, our students are provided a meal. In addition to support from their teacher, they meet with a counselor who

assists them with familial, economic, and social challenges they may face. Participants also have access to a student nurse, who visits and does basic health checks. Finally, we also provide transportation to the TASC exam and escort our students on their first days of testing. With this strong and consistent support, our students are able to come to class ready to learn and persist in their studies. Overall, this class sees higher retention and persistence than our other Adult HSE classes.

Conclusion

Adult literacy classes, including ESOL and HSE, level the playing field for all New Yorkers and ensure that more adults can reap the benefits of job growth in their communities. To make these classes work for more of the 2.2 million adults who could benefit from them, funding should be allocated to support wraparound services for students, such as metrocards, food, and case management.

Thank you very much for your attention and consideration. With any questions, I can be reached at 718-369-0303 or ciosso@obtjobs.org.

City Council Committee on Education
Adult Education
CUNY Adult Literacy Program Testimony
February 26, 2020

Good afternoon, Council Member Treyger and members of the Committee. I am Stacie Evans, University Director for Language and Literacy Programs at CUNY. I oversee CUNY's adult literacy and language immersion programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Prior to joining the Central Office team at CUNY, I was an adult literacy instructor and program director and then the adult literacy advisor in the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development. Adult literacy has been my entire career, and I thank the Council for its ongoing focus on this issue.

Ninety percent of middle-skill jobs in key industry sectors require a high school credential and at least a 9th or 10th grade reading level, yet a large share of New Yorkers lack basic literacy, numeracy, and/or English language skills. These adults are locked out of higher education and training programs as well as the majority of jobs with advancement potential. For many adults, then, adult literacy programming is a critical first step toward college and career attainment and long-term employment success and economic stability. The City University of New York has collaborated with the City and State for decades to offer high-quality programming specifically designed to respond to the needs of adults with limited educational attainment.

The CUNY Adult Literacy/High School Equivalency/English Language program launched in 1984 and has been a cornerstone of CUNY's Continuing Education and Workforce Programs (CEWP) division. Over 36 years, it has helped tens of thousands of adults and older youth develop the foundational academic and language skills critical to achieving their education, employment, and career goals. CUNY Adult Literacy programming is supported by City, State, and federal WIOA funding. The combined program budget is \$11.4 million, with \$3.5 million from City sources.

CUNY operates Adult Literacy programs at colleges across the five boroughs – seven senior colleges and seven community colleges. CUNY Adult Literacy offers 15 programs in English for Speakers of Other Languages, 13 Basic Education programs for students functioning below a ninth grade level, and 11 High School Equivalency programs. These programs help New Yorkers learn English, increase their facility with reading, writing and math, and prepare for the Test Assessing Secondary Completion – the TASC exam, which has replaced the GED in New York State. Learners who pass the TASC earn a high school equivalency diploma. Classes are offered days, evenings, and weekends to accommodate students' work and family obligations, and citywide, nearly 200 classes are offered each year, serving close to 7,000 students. Forty percent of students in Basic Education programs have reading and math skills below the 8th grade level, with nearly 2,000 assessed below the 6th grade level.

Campus programs are supported by a team of professional developers at CUNY Central that has expertise in each of the foundation skills. Professional developers train and coach instructors, write curricula, and ensure instructional quality.

CUNY Central convenes campus program directors monthly to discuss and address common issues and share best practices. Each campus-based program also maintains connections to local community providers, leveraging those partnerships to refer students to the programs that best fit their needs. Community-based organizations are integral to the adult literacy community. These relationships strengthen the field and ensure that more New Yorkers can access the services they need.

Program persistence – maintaining a level of attendance high enough and concentrated enough to achieve academic and training goals and complete programs – is a challenge for many adult literacy students. Adult learners require different kinds of support services than traditional-aged students in HSE programs or students interested in matriculating in college, and these supports go beyond instruction to strengthen students' ability to navigate obstacles and attend classes regularly.¹ The difference between a student who persists and a student who stops out usually boils down to the supports available. Financial instability, for example, is a common issue for our students. While CUNY's Adult Literacy classes are free to participants, there are myriad other costs that, when compounded, make regular attendance challenging. In addition, there are a range of issues that impact persistence. Barriers include: unstable housing, food insecurity, intimate partner violence, immigration challenges, health and mental health concerns, and access to quality, affordable childcare.

CUNY's Adult Literacy Programs include case management staff. Counselors provide crisis intervention, short-term support for a range of issues, and referrals to additional campus-based supports. CUNY strives to offer students a "one stop" service model in which their varied needs can be met in one location, increasing the likelihood that they will access those services and stay enrolled. When learners' needs fall outside the capacity of the program or campus, case managers refer students to external providers. Staff support students through these external referrals to ensure that students connect with the destination program and that the transition between services is smooth.

While the City's ongoing support for adult education has enabled many programs, including CUNY's, to provide free classes to thousands of adults, federal funding to maintain such services has not followed suit. In 1965, the federal budget for adult education was roughly \$489 per student served. In 2016 it was roughly \$364 per student. Although the number of students and total funds allocated has increased over this time, funding per student has decreased.² Increased funding and more finely-tuned funding formulas would enable CUNY to enroll more

¹ Perin, Dolores (Ed.). (2019) *The Wiley Handbook of Adult Education*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

² Jacobson, Erik (2017) *The Workforce Investment Opportunity Act: New Policy Developments and Persistent Issues. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2017 (155) 19-27.*

of the millions of New Yorkers who need services and allow for the development of innovative models to better serve historically marginalized learners.³

In addition to funding levels remaining largely flat, the funding formula is still determined by an annual cost per program slot that hasn't been adjusted to account for economic increases over time. That low, fixed cost limits options for innovation in programming. A higher cost per slot would allow providers to strengthen existing services and offer a greater range of services. Providers would be able to hire more full-time staff in general and more case management staff specifically, including licensed social workers; pay more competitive salaries; offer staff enhanced and ongoing professional development, and incorporate more instructional and technological tools into their programming. Flexibility in program slot cost would allow programs to incorporate service delivery models such as team teaching and bridge programming that have proven successful but which carry a higher price tag.⁴

In addition to providing more funds for adult literacy programs in general, a critical needs area is enhanced wraparound supports delivered by staff who are trained and knowledgeable in next-step planning for college and careers. With increased, targeted funding, CUNY could address this need with sustained professional development in career pathway advising, creating a network of peer-mentors, establishing centrally located CUNY Navigators, and creating and maintaining a database of current career and job-training resources for case managers to access.

In lieu of more funds for wraparound services, programs partner strategically to ensure that learners have access to the services and supports they need. The Adult Literacy Program works with CUNY's Black Male Initiative to bring peer mentors and tutors into classrooms and partners with schools of social work to bring in interns to expand case management support. And Adult Literacy Program directors work regularly in borough-specific strategy groups, creating opportunities for joint problem solving and resource sharing.

The New York City Regional Adult Education Network, part of a statewide network created and funded by the New York State Education Department, hosts regular meetings for program directors and provides limited professional development workshops for any program that receives funding from State Ed. These meetings and workshops are opportunities for adult literacy staff from a variety of provider types to meet and work together. The Department of Youth and Community Development hosts meetings and workshops for providers who receive funding as part of its Adult Literacy and Immigrant Services portfolio. The Literacy Assistance Center, the New York City Employment and Training Coalition, the Workforce Professionals Training Institute, United Neighborhood Houses, New York Immigration Coalition, the New York

³ Belzer, Alisa (2017) Focusing or Narrowing: Trade-offs in the Development of Adult Basic Education, 1991 - 2015. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2017 (155) 11-18.

⁴ Cormier, M. and Bickerstaff, S. (2019) Research on Developmental Education Instruction for Adult Learners, in Perin (Ed.) *The Wiley Handbook of Adult Literacy* (pps. 541-562) John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

City ABE Conference and others also provide workshops and trainings for staff from provider agencies and organizations.

CUNY's Central Office team leads the state's Teacher Leader Institutes to provide training for teacher leaders across the State. CUNY is also fortunate to be able to have our professional development team provide additional support to instructors and case managers across the CUNY programs. The professional development team also created the CUNY CareerKits, a set of comprehensive career preparation resources that address ten industry sectors and integrate reading, writing, research, and math skills. The CareerKits are a free resource available online.

We are grateful for the City's support and the Council's support of adult literacy over the years and the commitment to helping low-income adult learners enter the labor force and advance. We need to stress, however, that demand for programming greatly exceeds supply. Were the resources available, CUNY could easily double enrollment across the system. CUNY is proud to be an essential partner in the network of adult literacy providers, and we look forward to continuing this partnership.

Natalia Wislocka
Student Testimony
NYC College of Technology/CUNY
NYC Council Hearing on Adult Literacy

Good morning!

My name is Natalia Wislocka. I'm from Poland. Now I live in Bushwick, Brooklyn. I've started my free English class program at The New York City College of Technology this January. I want to share my story, to explain, how is it important for an immigrant, like me, to have access to this kind of education.

This is my second year in the United States. I came here with my husband. I graduated from a university in Poland, where I've studied urban studies and Ukrainian philology. Back in my country I worked in the fields of my interest: culture and education. I don't speak English well so my experience and education means nothing here. After 14 months of being stuck in my Polish and Ukrainian speaking communities I started my free English program at The New York City College of Technology.

This is one of the best things that happened to me since coming to the United States. Now, I feel what that diversity of NYC really means. I meet people from all over the world and I learn how to speak, write and think in English. For me this program is not only about language, it helps me to integrate into, to be happy in, and feel at home in NYC.

I feel that I'm very lucky that I came here by choice. I have mates in my class who were forced from their homelands. In search for new life they left behind corrupted states, conflicts and inequality.

Taking a free English class and practicing regularly with class mates and a committed teacher brings back confidence and allows me to dream about normal life in NYC. What I hear from other people's experience, speaking good English means: finding a better job and graduating from college or university. It also gives the community renewed promise of the future for our children.

Starting a life in a new country is difficult. And if you don't speak the language it's even harder. Simple things like going shopping, talking to a landlord, visiting a doctor, commuting on public transportation are not simple anymore!

But it is not only about us newcomers. We, non-English speaking people, work for America and American citizens. We serve food in restaurants, we take care of kids, we fix electricity, we do renovations, we sell products, we clean houses. We do jobs which

are important, and it's in our common interest to help we immigrant work on our English, because it opens up possibilities to become professionals.

I hope that all newcomers to NYC can take a class like mine. It's not only about our student's future, but also about a better future for our families and communities. That's why I want to ask you for your support and funding for Adult Literacy Education programs.

Thank you!

February 26th, 2020

To the Council of the City of New York and the New York City Department of Education,

The mission of the Diwali Coalition of Valley Stream is as follows:

We think it is imperative that Diwali, a Hindu holiday, is added as an official holiday, firstly to the school calendars of the Valley Stream Central High School District, then to the calendars of New York State. Although there is already a legislative bill in the process of being passed, the certainty of this bill being passed is unknown. This is why we must act now and make this matter publicly known.

Not only will we eventually get to add Diwali as an official holiday on Valley Stream school calendars, but by achieving this goal, we are sending a compelling message to the Generation Z kids that we, the minorities, value our culture and religious aspects. This is the bigger intention of the Diwali Coalition; to empower other individuals who have the capability to achieve greater goals, but do not realize their potential.

More specifically, we believe that Hindu students should not be put at an unnecessary disadvantage for missing exams, homework assignments, class work, and projects. Holidays of all major religions should be honored, there are approximately 15% of people in the world that practice Hinduism. Overall, penalizing Hindu students for practicing their religion is unjust.

The Coalition is backed by the Diwali Movement, focusing mainly on Long Island. The Diwali Movement has proven that there are at least ten school districts on Long Island that passed Diwali as an official school holiday, including: East Williston, East Meadow, Half Hollow Hills, Herricks, Hicksville, Syosset, Jericho, Mineola, and other considerable school districts. Of the first six districts mentioned, the defining marker is the percentage of the Asian population. According to data.NYSED.gov, the Asian population of Half Hollow Hills when they passed Diwali as an official school holiday in 2017 was 15%. The Asian population, which includes a large number of students that celebrate Diwali, of Valley Stream in 2017 was 20%. I, along with the Diwali Coalition of Valley Stream, began our mission in 2016 and it baffled us as to why our school district could not adopt the same equality as Half Hollow Hills. Not only was the percentage of the Asian population lower in Half Hollow Hills than Valley Stream, but also the Asian percentage increased in Valley Stream school districts as years went by. As of 2018, which is the most recent year of enrollment data the website has collected, the percentage of Asian students attending the Valley Stream Central High School District is 21%.

Aside from statistics, there are clearer reasons for this resolution. The reason that students often do not miss school on the day of Diwali is because these students, including myself, value education. It is not a matter of fearing the amount of schoolwork missed, rather it is more notable to realize the level of difficulty with which to make up that schoolwork. Such schoolwork assignments include homework, exams, projects, presentations, notes, and more. With this amount of work completed in one school day, sometimes all of the above, students find it necessary to put forth their school before their religious obligations, which is unjust and unconstitutional. The Bill of Rights very clearly mentions the freedom of religion; each citizen in America is promised this right and it is our job as the youths of this generation to uphold the truths of our forefathers.

Indeed, other cultures and religions have the blessed opportunity to recognize their holidays, some of which are Eid, Christmas, Easter, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Kwanzaa. However, the inequality lies in the lack of recognition of Diwali for the Hindus. It is significant to note that the Hindu religion is the most ancient religion in the world. According to Wikipedia for statistics, Hinduism has attracted 1.2 billion followers, making it the third largest religion worldwide. Certainly, with all this popularity and diversity in our country of freedom we can continue to make changes that will benefit the People.

Signed officially,



Devi Arjune

Founder of the Diwali Coalition



United Madrassi Association, Inc.

A Progressive Volunteer-Based Humanitarian Non-profit

150-74 116th Avenue, Jamaica NY 11434 917-207-4655 madrassi.us@gmail.com www.madrassi.org

Wednesday, February 26th 2020

Support For Resolution: 0146-2018 – Establish Diwali as an official holiday for NYC public school students.

Good afternoon Members of the Education Committee of the New York City Council. My name is Vijah Ramjattan, Founder and President of the United Madrassi Association and President of the New York City, District 28 Community Education Council. I am the great-grandson of Indentured Slaves, who was brought to the Islands of Trinidad and Tobago to work on Sugar Plantations. My family then migrated to the United States of America over 24 years ago and established residence in New York City. I am delivering my comments on behalf of the United Madrassi Association, Inc.

I want to thank the Education Committee for seriously considering to establish Diwali, a celebration of the triumph of good over evil, of truth over untruth and of light over darkness, as a NYC public school holiday. Customs, values and traditions are some of the core anchors to keep a community alive and vibrant--after all, it is what's grounds us. My ancestors brought with them their values and traditions and I, a member of the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora brought it with me to my new home, the United States of America-A land where I have, and will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with my brothers and sisters and say with conviction that, "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all".

As the father of three wonderful children who attends PS 121, in Queens NY, I ask you to consider Resolution 0146-2018 as an opportunity for you to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and to know that your actions will have the power to make a direct life-altering difference in their lives. Each child deserves to know their cultural background and understand the real significance behind their customs and traditions. Against their wishes, I have had to force my children to attend school on Diwali and be present in class because they have not been afforded the same opportunities as others in their classroom—that is, to be home and observe the most important religious day in the year, Diwali, with their family.

Respected Education Committee, I am a vibrant advocate for strong academic education and I believe in diversity and tolerance, but I also believe in a well-balanced foundation- a foundation that is built with strong civic values, integrity and inclusion. For the past 8 years, my children all had to go to school for the whole day fasting, without food or water, with empty stomachs and sit amongst their classmates and function as best as they can. My family custom is to keep 'fast' on Diwali as it is the most important festival on the Hindu calendar marking the start of the New Year for us all. It is customary for my family to wake up early in the morning of Diwali

and after taking a ritual bath, we pray together, join in cooking special foods and delicacies, prepare Deeyas, sit for sacred universal prayer and then enjoy each other company together with friends and fellow community members.

I know you all understand and value, family and traditions, as you have displayed this to us via previously passed resolutions in recent years, and we admire that. As a law abiding citizen, I also want to continue to have mine and all other children know, lean, love and respect their culture and traditions. When our children must go to school and not be home with us, as the years have passed by, so too, our culture is dying.

We the Indo-Caribbean parents and students of New York City are asking you to establish Diwali as an official Public Schools holiday. Diwali, a very spiritual occasion is observed by Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and many others. For us, preserving our culture is something that is crucial to keep our values enshrined in our children and future generations. Our values are peaceful, community-based and universally caring.

Honorable, Education Committee, please make a change that will have a lasting impact on the current and future generations of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and others who observe the festival of lights, Diwali.

I thank you, the members of the Education Committee in advance for your unwavering dedication in serving the citizens of New York City and listening to our needs and concerns.

Sincerely,

Vijah Ramjattan



Founder & President, United Madrassi Association, Inc.
President, District 28 -Community Education Council.

Testimony for the Committee on Education Oversight Hearing 2/26/2020

Ivan Guzman

Student at the University Settlement Adult Literacy Program

Good afternoon everyone. First of all, thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak with you today. We really appreciate it. My name is Ivan Guzman. I'm from Madrid, Spain. I'm a Network Engineer and Project Manager, but I'm also a student at University Settlement. I've been living in New York for almost 6 months. I had studied English in my country for many years so I thought the language wouldn't be a problem for me here. Obviously, I was wrong. Since the moment I arrived, I realized that my English wasn't as good as I thought.

This situation made me feel insecure, worried and overwhelmed. But after a few days handling this feeling, I found information on the internet about free English classes at University Settlement. Then everything changed. University Settlement gave me the opportunity to attend their College and Career Readiness class, where I can learn and practice English in an international environment with a great teacher and staff who are always willing to help us as much as possible. Ever since, I continue improving my English skills every day and I feel more confident speaking the language. Thanks to this, I was recently accepted into the Cooper Union Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers.

The bottom line is that these classes help students like me to apply for better jobs with good salaries, pay more taxes, be more productive in the community and be able to communicate better with every citizen in this wonderful city. Learning English is synonymous with improving our lives and our communities, and this is possible thanks to the funds the city invests in Adult Education.

Thank you very much.

New York City Council Committee on Education,
Honorable Mark Treyger Chair

Oversight Hearing on Adult Education and Adult Literacy Programs

February 26th, 2020

Testimony of Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, Jhordana Jimenez



My name is Jhordana Jimenez and I am a student at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation. Adult education is important because it benefits us greatly and we need it for a better future. I was born in the Dominican Republic and left when I was 15. It was hard for me when I was in high school because I didn't speak English well. That made it very difficult to finish. In my adult education classes I have teachers who understand that, and I feel welcome, supported, and understood. That's why I believe it is vital to have free education.

When I found out about NMIC, I felt relieved because I don't have to worry about paying for education. It is difficult for us to pay on top of all our other responsibilities. This gives many people opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have.

A lot of us have children. It is important that my son sees me get my education. I can be a role model for him and give him the motivation to finish his education. Now, I can help my son with his homework.

Beyond education, NMIC has helped me in many other ways. I receive free counseling and assistance with receiving Medicaid. We have tutors that help us individually. All of these extra services help me to be successful in class.

Adult education also means more opportunities for jobs. I have improved my English and have an easier time communicating with other people. NMIC gave me the opportunity to open more doors and the opportunity to go to college one day. That's why I believe Adult Education is one of the best programs we can have in this city.

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Testimony for the Committee on Education Oversight Hearing 2/26/2020

Mayra Mantilla

Counselor at the University Settlement Adult Literacy Program

I'm Mayra Mantilla, Counselor at the Adult Literacy Program of University Settlement. I'm from Quito, Ecuador and I have been living in New York for almost 5 years.

When I moved here, I thought my level of English was good enough to find a good job but the reality was different; after having some interviews I realized that I wasn't able to express my ideas or adequately talk about my work experience. I was disappointed that I had to take jobs where only basic English was required. I wanted to do more and show my real potential.

I was lucky to find this wonderful English class at University Settlement that gave me the opportunity to build up my confidence, speak English fluently, and get a job that I truly enjoy.

Now in my role as Counselor, I'm able to help students who are in the same situation that I was a few years ago. It's very rewarding to see how students improve their English and now they are able to achieve higher levels of education, get well paid jobs, enroll in training programs, start small businesses or even accomplish small things such as being able to communicate with their kids' teachers or go to the doctor without having to bring someone to help them to translate.

Coming from a country where learning English is considered a luxury that not everybody can afford and knowing from firsthand how important it is to learn English in order to establish the path to success, I hope New York City keeps funding free English classes and give more immigrants the opportunity to accomplish their goals. Thank you!

Testimony for the Committee on Education Oversight Hearing 2/26/2020

Jieling Huang

Student at the University Settlement Adult Literacy Program

My name is Jieling Huang. I am from Guangdong, China. I have lived in the United States for 4 years. I am a student at University Settlement, I am so happy about learning English at this school.

I remember when I got my first job in the US and I only spoke few words in English. Speaking limited English, sometimes got me in trouble because people misunderstood what I was trying to say. It was so embarrassing, and I felt very insecure. When I had trouble at work, I could not explain it because of my limited English and not always had someone to help me with the translation. That's how I realized the importance and necessity of learning English.

Since I've been learning English at University Settlement, I have noticed the difference in my life. I can easily talk with customers at work and deal with difficult situations all the time. I enjoy communicating with people politely. Speaking English properly helps me to be more confident, express my feelings better, and get a higher salary. Now when I think about the future, if I have children, I will be able to communicate with them and be fully involved in their daily lives without having a barrier because of the language. Learning English is the key in achieving a better life, and there are thousands of people who need English classes in the New York City. I hope more people can keep learning English and have a better life like me. Thank you!

LITERACY PARTNERS

**New York City Council Committee on Education Hearing
February 26, 2020**

Testimony: Judy Garcia
Student and Facilitator for Literacy Partners

Hello, my name is Judy. I'm from Bogotá, Colombia, I have a beautiful family: my husband Andres, and my two boys. Samuel is 10 years old and Ian is 3 years old. We live on Staten Island.

I learned about Literacy Partners at the Richmond Pre-K Center where my child goes to school. I joined the *La Fuerza de Creer* program in October 2019. The program was for 8 days for two hours. I remember the time went by fast! Very fast! When I heard about this program, I did not know what to expect. I thought it was going to be similar to the other ones. But I was wrong. The workshop was in Spanish. I met about 10-15 mothers and we all sat together to share our experiences and challenges. I learned that a lot of parents have different issues. Sometimes they have the same issues I have at home. I learned many of us have different ways to raise our children and they are all good ways. We all gave each other tips, tricks, and advice for parenting.

The *La Fuerza* class was really dynamic. I loved it because I could express myself and my concerns with people that were in a similar situation. We all care about each other. In other workshops, you sit and hear what the teacher says and that's it, but this class is really dynamic because you can say different experiences you have at home, and the facilitator just hears and that's great because we need to just breathe or just express yourself to make you feel great.

With this class, I learned that my husband and I have to speak to our children differently. We cannot speak to the older one the same way we speak to the little one because everybody learns differently and their brains work differently at different ages..

I am very happy to be a part of this program. I have the opportunity to be one of the facilitators for this workshop near my neighborhood. I think this kind of program is really important for all the parents because the program is in Spanish. Sometimes there are not too many programs for those who do not speak English.

For more information, please contact Gohar Chichian at goharc@literacypartners.org.

Testimony for the Committee on Education Oversight Hearing 2/26/2020

Lifen (Stephanie) Wu

Student at the University Settlement Adult Literacy Program

My name is Lifen (Stephanie) Wu. It's my pleasure to share my story with all of you here. I am a student at University Settlement right now. I come from Guangdong, China. I have been living in New York for almost two and a half years.

I love this city and this country a lot. Looking back to two years ago, I still remember that I didn't even speak a single word of English when I came to the USA, whereas now I can speak much better after taking English classes.

First of all, I really thank University Settlement for giving us the opportunity to learn English. All the teachers and counselors there are very friendly and responsible. They also give us referrals to other opportunities and job interviews.

In addition, I also feel more confident and more independent since taking the English classes. For example, now I can talk to my children's teachers about their behavior and discuss their progress. What also makes me feel independent is I can deal with some little issues in my daily life, such as making an appointment with doctors for my family.

And this Monday I am going to take the TASC test to get my high school equivalency diploma. After I get my HSE, I want to work for the government and serve the community.

In a nutshell, what I am trying to say is English is the basic communication tool to fit into the US society. Not speaking English is the most difficult barrier to overcome, so we need the government to give us the support to fit into U.S society. To have English programs and adult education are really helpful for us to improve our lives and help our families.

English is the key to our future for a better job, to help our children and to be part of our community. English is the key to our success as well! Thank you!

February 26, 2020

New York City Council
Committee on Education

Public hearing on Resolution 0146-2018

To establish Diwali as an official holiday for NYC public school students

Thank you Chairperson Mark Treyger and members of the Committee on Education for convening today's hearing on Reso 0146 calling on the Mayor and the NYC Chancellor to establish Diwali as a public school holiday. I am also grateful for the work of Council Member Daniel Dromm and his staff for introducing Reso 0146.

My name is Richard David. I am an adjunct Professor at York College CUNY and a co-founder of the Indo-Caribbean Alliance. I am also a District Leader in Assembly District 31. Ironically, I was born on Diwali and I am proud to be the lead organizer working with the Council to achieve a super majority status for Reso 0146 which has 36 co-sponsors as of today.

Communities across New York City have demanded Diwali as a public school holiday for decades. As you may know, Diwali is observed by hundreds of thousands of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain families across the five boroughs. With the election of Mayor de Blasio in 2014, these hopes for Diwali to be added to the School calendar were renewed. For the first time in my lifetime, we had a Mayor who was open to the having new school holidays that reflect the diversity of our City. These hopes were dashed in 2015 when the Mayor declined to establish Diwali as a school holiday without articulating any reason, and without establishing a framework or threshold for which request for public school holidays would be evaluated.

Based on the 2013 Newest New Yorker Report by the NYC Planning Commission, the population of individuals from countries where Diwali is a public holiday is rapidly growing and is already among the largest immigrant groups in the City. In that Report, three of the top 10 countries from which foreign-born New Yorkers trace their birth recognize Diwali as a national holiday: Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and India. We should not limit our perception that Diwali as a South Asian holiday; it's celebrated widely in the Caribbean too.

This growth has fueled the legitimate demand for Diwali to be a school holiday. A public school holiday would increase cultural understanding, foster tolerance among students, teachers and all New Yorkers at a time when there's increasing bullying and hate crimes and it would not force families to choose between their faith and homework.

Good morning councilmen and councilwomen. My name is Sandhya Prashad and we Hindus stand before you on this seemingly casual day, speaking about an issue that is anything but casual to our community. We come before you to speak about one of the holiest days of the year for the Hindu community: Diwali. It is a beautiful holiday where we celebrate the coming of the new year according to the Hindu calendar. We hail from countries where Diwali celebrations are the largest of the year. For reference, it is the Hindu equivalent of Christmas.

Yet it has so little significance in the country we have made our new home. We are offered suspended alternate side parking for the most important holiday of our religion. We are offered little recognition by the larger community. We are not taught much about it in school. And our youths are not afforded any days off from school. For the most important holiday of our religion.

We go to school and we see our Christian classmates get the chance to celebrate Christmas and Easter with their families without having to miss out on any of their valuable education. We see our Jewish classmates get Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur off without having to miss out on any of their valuable education. But should any of the Hindu students want to celebrate any of their holidays with their families, they are forced to miss school. They are effectively being asked to choose between coming to school and foregoing the celebration of this most auspicious holiday or celebrating this holiday and missing out on an entire day's worth of education. I ask you, how can this be equality?

How can it be fair that we should see our classmates get to celebrate their religious holidays without having to sacrifice their education, while we cannot do the same. We are made to feel lesser for being Hindu in America. Cases like *Obergefell v. Hodges* (which come down from the highest court of our country), although contemplating issues distinct from what is at issue here, are concerned with how children are affected by the decisions the government makes: "children [of same-sex couples who aren't allowed to marry] suffer the stigma of knowing their families are somehow lesser". By having kids see their classmates' religious holidays recognized as school holidays while theirs are afforded lesser importance, Hindu students face the same stigma that cases like *Obergefell* were worried about. They are left out and they *are* made to feel that their families are lesser somehow for being Hindu in America.

Some may argue that giving students more time off prevents them from getting a quality education, but that could not be further from the truth. The community is talking about one day a year. A day that many Hindu students were going to take off anyway to celebrate this auspicious holiday. They've got to choose either to come to school and miss out on this time to celebrate their beliefs or stay home and miss an entire day's worth of work at school. Their Christian counterparts and their Jewish counterparts do not have to face that dilemma. A little time off from school occasionally also helps students refresh their brains and it opens up creativity. A day off from school is not decreasing the quality of their education. By affording a day off for Diwali, many would argue that we are feeding diversity and therefore further educating the youth on other belief systems.

Making Diwali a recognized school holiday validates the Hindu community in ways that the Christian and Jewish communities have been validated for years, but the "minority" religions have never been. It would be especially wonderful to see, in the current presidential administration and in the currently divided state of our country, politicians and leaders seeking to afford everyone the same importance and validity, and bring harmony for us all.

**Diwali School Holiday:
Equal Protection vs Separation of Church & State
Testimony In Support of New York City Council Res. No.146
(Previously, in 2016, in support of Res. 568)
by
Ravi Batra, Esq.,
Chair, National Advisory Council for South Asian Affairs
February 26, 2020**

Thank you, Chairman Mark Treyger,

I am delighted to have been invited to testify again, as I am happy to see so many friends serving as distinguished members of the NYC Council - great public servants all.

New Yorkers are always happier when our “Better Angels” guide us. Res. No. 146 - is in the finest tradition of American Values that made our nation a beacon in human existence - so that even Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist school kids no longer have to choose:

whether to go to school and ignore their faith, or
stay at home to observe their faith and miss school.

This is a Hobson’s Choice forced upon our families. It is also an unconstitutional.

For purposes of brevity, I incorporate the Testimony of my dear and dedicated wife, Ranju Batra, now-chair of the Diwali Foundation USA, who as Chair of Diwali Stamp Project made noble and peaceful American history in 2016 by getting the USPS to issue the Forever Diwali Stamp supported by numerous members of congress lead by Carolyn Maloney, and aided by Eliot Engel, Greg Meeks, Grace Meng to name just a few. Ranju’s success in getting the

USPS Diwali Forever Stamp - was history felt across the world, such that even P.M. Modi's Diwali Message had a video clip of the Diwali Stamp being unveiled in New York by Ranju Batra, now-Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, and others, including, yours truly.

Diwali, as you know, is universally acknowledged and celebrated. Ranju and I have attended Diwali Celebrations at the White House, Congress and among others, right here in NYC Council Chamber from Speaker Peter Vallone days - to some of the annual events led by Council Members John Liu, David Weprin, and oft late, Rory Lancman, and by Controller Scott Stringer. Indeed, Mayor de Blasio celebrates Diwali at Gracie Mansion.

As New Yorkers, we love everybody - which is why we are the Greatest City in the World. We celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Eid. We are happy to be in St. Patty, any Shul, Mosque, Gurudwara, or a Hindu Center or Hindu Temple. This is why America is the "Shining City on the Hill," as we are stronger together.

"We The People" are *E Pluribus Unum*.

But, New York City Board of Education - which came under Mayoral control during Mike Bloomberg's campaign for his second term as I intervened and convinced then-NYS Senate Leader to drop their objection so as to enhance our schools' accountability. Now, after you pass your Resolution, I ask Mayor de Blasio to sign it into law. I remind all - that for our Department of Education - to celebrate some religious holidays, and not others, is unconstitutional. Let me explain.

The Constitution has two competing clauses: *Equal Protection of the Law* and *Separation of Church & State* (Hat Tip to Thomas Becket in 1163A.D.).

New York City has two options mandated by our cherished Constitution, either:

1. Enact the Diwali School Holiday with all speed, or
2. Eliminate all religious school holidays.

Since “In God We Trust,” and we love our Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza and Eid, the better option is to honor the Equal Protection Clause, rather than face harsh mandate of the Separation of Church & State.

I urge you to pass Res. 146 now, with support of the Speaker Corey Johnson, so Mayor de Blasio can sign it into law and Diwali 2020 is a legal school holiday for 1.1 million kids, as Diwali Parking Holiday helps 8 million New Yorkers get added sleep and - after 9/11 - we all must have our Diwali: victory of Good over Evil.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and may God continue to bless these United States of America.

Respectfully,

/s/

Ravi Batra, Esq.

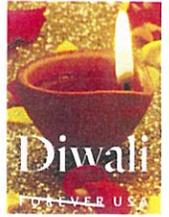
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Director

**In Support of Res. No.146 -
Testimony by Ranju Batra
Chair, Diwali Foundation USA, Inc.
February 26, 2020**

Thank you, Chairman Treyger,

I am happy to have been invited to testify again. I acknowledge each Council Member present today - many who are our friends, and all are friends of New Yorkers who call the city home.

Diwali, as you know, is “Light over Darkness” or victory of “Good over Evil.” In New York City, especially after 9/11, we need Good to win forever.

Let me start by acknowledging how grateful I am that New York City Council’s Education Committee has taken up Res. No. 146, as in 2016 it took up Res. 568 - so that Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist school kids no longer have to choose whether to go to school and ignore their faith, or stay at home to observe their faith and miss school. This is an improper and unfair choice forced upon our families. Diwali, as you know, is universally acknowledged and celebrated. We have attended Diwali Celebrations at the White House, Congress and among others, right here in NYC Council Chamber from Speaker Peter Vallone days - to events led by Council Members John Liu, David Weprin, and more recently, Rory Lancman - who I thank and his co-organizers - for the Citation presented to me for getting the Diwali Stamp

issued by the United States Postal Service in 2016.

While my kids were in school, we celebrated Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Eid. But there was no school holiday for Diwali. So, I made the choice to send my kids to school at the cost of celebrating our most important religious holiday. This is wrong, even if another family made the opposite choice. Having to choose between learning and religion is an unfair and harmful choice, as other faiths' most important holidays are observed in school. A benefit of observing Diwali as a School Holiday is that all other students will learn and appreciate what Pope Francis has suggested to the world: treat every religion with respect. In a world full of much too much hate, respect for another human being's faith - especially when they are kids - is an important lesson to be learned in school with the benefit of such tolerance flowing to society forever in reduced hate crimes and a more civil society. Recent spate of anti-Semitism ought energize this Body to pass a Bill that our friend, Mayor de Blasio can sign into law.

I can share with you - that we had personally supported the NYC Diwali Parking Holiday - led by then-Transportation Chairman John Liu and then-Finance Chairman David Weprin. Today, I thank you, Mr. Chairman, as well as the Finance Chairman, our dear friend Danny Dromm.

As then-chair of the Diwali Stamp Project, in 2010 I embarked on my journey to our Diwali Stamp - which succeeded after almost seven years with USPS unveiling the Diwali Stamp on October 5, 2016 at the Indian Consulate with an official and elaborate ceremony. In that effort, I got tens of thousands of paper petitions - one at a time - in support of the Diwali Stamp, while celebrating that other religions had their own stamps. I partnered with Congresswoman Maloney, and helped get support from other members of Congress including, Eliot Engel, Greg Meeks, Yvette Clarke, Jerry Nadler, Nita Lowey and Civil Rights giant John Lewis for House Res. 47 in the 113th Congress and then House Res. 32 in the 114th Congress - each calling for the Diwali Stamp.

My journey to our Diwali Stamp is successfully completed thanks to Post

Master General Megan Brennan. Now, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists have an American stamp to call their own. While my journey may have taken seven years, our Diwali Stamp is Forever and a matter of pride for generations to come. With support of Air India, I personally sold over 170,000 Diwali Stamps for Day One and made our Diwali Stamp enjoy the biggest First Day sales in USPS' history of over 200 years. As a result, our Diwali Stamp is now USPS' #1 Bestseller ever.

I happily share with you that there was a celebration of the Diwali Stamp and my journey at the United Nations on December 5, 2016 by 24 nations, an event led by the Permanent Representative Andrei Dapkiunas of Belarus, along with Amb. Kaha Imnadze of Georgia and Amb. Syed Akbaruddin of India. The other member states were: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, France, Germany, Honduras, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Moldova, Morocco, Nepal, Panama, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Viet Nam, and Palestine.

There are over 4 million Indian-Americans in the United States and close to 500,000 Asian Indians, and many, many more from the Carribean countries in the West Indies.

The time has come for NYC Department of Education to make Diwali a school holiday, show respect of all faiths, and let families enjoy the blessings of education and their faith.

I thank you Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to share with you my views of why Diwali School Holiday must become a reality now!

Respectfully,
/s/
Ranju Batra
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Twitter: @ranjubatra

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen my name is Devrani Brahmanand, and this is Nusaiba Hossain, and we are seniors at Forest Hills High School. My team is competing in a social science research competition called W!SE. The Quality of Life Issue that we are focusing on is trying to convince the New York City Department of Education to implement Diwali into the public school calendar of days off. We think this is equitable and fair because there are Jewish holidays on the calendar, such as Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, and Passover. Christians are given off on Easter, Good Friday and Christmas. Eid has also been added to the calendar for Muslims, as well Lunar New Year for those who observe. There is not a single holiday on the public school calendar that acknowledges Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains, which is disappointing considering the Pew Research Center estimates more than 250,000 people in NYC observe this holiday. New York City is known for its incredible diversity, its array of cultures, and the vast opportunities that it offers to all people. It is not equitable that those who celebrate Diwali are not given the same respect as the other religions followed by New Yorkers.

To explore this inequity we surveyed 675 teachers, students and New York City residents. We found overwhelming support for adding Diwali to the many religious holidays given off by the DOE. For example 100 percent of participants of all religions agreed that major holidays of different religions should be equally recognized by the New York City Department of Education. Moreover, 92% of participants believe that the NYC DOE should add Diwali onto the school calendar as a day off for all students and employees. Our research confirmed the importance of this Issue, and the need for change. We have contacted the Mayor's office and the Department of Education and were told nothing more could be done towards this concern. However, as NYC students we have learned never to quit when faced with adversity, but rather to keep moving forward, and that is why we are here today. We believe this inequity should be resolved, and therefore, Diwali should be recognized as a day off for NYC students. This city council has the power to address this. Please help us fix this and make NYC public schools more fair and welcoming for all of us. Thank You.

Honorable NYC Council Speaker
Corey Johnson,

I am Dr. Neeta Jain, Founder and President of International Ahimsa Foundation, Senior VP/ Trustee of Hindu Center and Ex VP of Jain Center of America, We are gathered here in Solidarity as one Community South Asian community and One Voice.

We have a Super majority signatures from 36 council members on this bill calls R 0146.

We have hearing today in Council Chamber to approve this Bill and we are very positive that it's going to happen. So we would like to thank all council members for their support on this very important bill. Special thanks to our Speaker Corey Johnson for celebrating Diwali in City Hall for last 6 years.

Diwali is celebrated by Hindu, Jain, Sikh and Buddhist community around the world, although for each faith it symbolize different historical events and stories, but overall the festival represents the same symbolic victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil.

More than 8 counties celebrate Diwali and 5 of them have Federal Holiday on Our children deserve to have this day off in schools as their other friends get on Eid, Lunar New Year, Hanukah, Christmas and so on.

I am submitting 25 years of Diwali Calendar with this, in which 40 % of times Diwali is falling over the weekends.

I am also submitting Data from 8 different countries number os students go to our NYC schools. Altogether about 70,000 students from these countries are in schools.

I am also submitting a School year Calendar from Long Island, which has Diwali holiday in it. These schools also come under NYS Education Department. If they can have it why not our children?

May Goddess Lakshmi bless every one with Wealth and Lord Ganesh bless everyone with Health, Wealth, Prosperity, wisdom, Harmony and Peace!!

It is time to give them the same respect as their peers get without any discrimination, without hurting their self respect.

Sincerely


Dr. Neeta Jain

Founder and President, International Ahimsa Foundation Inc.

Senior Vice President, Hindu Center Inc,

Ex Vice President, Jain Center of America

Democratic District Leader, AD 25 Part B, Queens

President, Daniel Patrick Moynihan Democratic Club

Dated: February 26, 2020

DIWALI DATES FOR 2017 - 2040

MONTH	DATE	YEAR	DAY
OCTOBER	19TH	2017	THURSDAY
NOVEMBER	7TH	2018	WEDNESDAY
OCTOBER	27TH	2019	SUNDAY
NOVEMBER	14TH	2020	SATURDAY
NOVEMBER	4TH	2021	THURSDAY
OCTOBER	24TH	2022	MONDAY
NOVEMBER	12TH	2023	SUNDAY
NOVEMBER	1ST	2024	FRIDAY
OCTOBER	21ST	2025	TUESDAY
NOVEMBER	8TH	2026	SUNDAY
OCTOBER	29TH	2027	FRIDAY
OCTOBER	17TH	2028	TUESDAY
NOVEMBER	5TH	2029	MONDAY
OCTOBER	26TH	2030	SATURDAY
NOVEMBER	14TH	2031	FRIDAY
NOVEMBER	2ND	2032	TUESDAY
OCTOBER	22ND	2033	SATURDAY
NOVEMBER	10TH	2034	FRIDAY
OCTOBER	30TH	2035	TUESDAY
OCTOBER	19TH	2036	SUNDAY
NOVEMBER	7TH	2037	SATURDAY
OCTOBER	27TH	2038	WEDNESDAY
OCTOBER	17TH	2039	MONDAY
NOVEMBER	4TH	2040	SUNDAY

by ...

Herricks Public Schools

2017 - 2018 School Calendar

July					August					September				
					2 +2 staff days					17				
M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F
						1	2	3	4					1
3	4	5	6	7	7	8	9	10	11	4	5	6	7	8
10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16	17	18	11	12	13	14	15
17	18	19	20	21	21	22	23	24	25	18	19	20	21	22
24	25	26	27	28	28	29	30	31		25	26	27	28	29
31														

October					November					December				
					18 +1 staff day					16				
M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F
2	3	4	5	6			1	2	3					1
9	10	11	12	13	6	7	8	9	10	4	5	6	7	8
16	17	18	19	20	13	14	15	16	17	11	12	13	14	15
23	24	25	26	27	20	21	22	23	24	18	19	20	21	22
30	31				27	28	29	30		25	26	27	28	29

January					February					March				
					14					20				
M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F
1	2	3	4	5				1	2				1	2
8	9	10	11	12	5	6	7	8	9	5	6	7	8	9
15	16	17	18	19	12	13	14	15	16	12	13	14	15	16
22	23	24	25	26	19	20	21	22	23	19	20	21	22	23
29	30	31			26	27	28			26	27	28	29	30

April					May					June				
					22					15 +1 staff day				
M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F
2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4					1
9	10	11	12	13	7	8	9	10	11	4	5	6	7	8
16	17	18	19	20	14	15	16	17	18	11	12	13	14	15
23	24	25	26	27	21	22	23	24	25	18	19	20	21	22
30					28	29	30	31		25	26	27	28	29

August	28-29	Staff Day
August	30	First Day of School
September	1	Eid-al Adha
September	4	Labor Day
September	21-22	Rosh Hashanah
October	9	Columbus Day
October	19	Diwali
November	7	Election Day/Staff Day
November	10	Veteran's Day
November	23-24	Thanksgiving
December	25-29	Winter Recess
January	1	New Year
January	15	Martin Luther King Day
February	16	Lunar New Year
February	19-23	Presidents' Week
March	29-30	Spring Break
April	2 to 6	Spring Break
May	28	Memorial Day
June	15	Eid al-Fitr/Staff Day
June	22	Last Day of School

181 Instructional Days/ 4 Staff Days

Contingency Days - the first five days will not be re-scheduled.

2017-2018 Calendar is subject to revisions pending the NYS test schedule for grades 3 through 8 and NYS Regents Schedule.

	Staff Day
	First day of school/Last day of school
	School Closed

Adopted by Board of Education 1/19/17

From: Latif, Aliya alatif@comptroller.nyc.gov
 Subject: RE: Data request
 Date: Feb 10, 2020 at 4:44:47 PM
 To: Neeta Jain neeta.jain@att.net

Here is the updated data:

Born in Select Country	
	NYC Children, 5-18
30040: Guyana/British Guiana	6,408
52110: Bangladesh	10,748
52400: Nepal	1,044
52100: India	3,896
52150: Sri Lanka (Ceylon)	114
51200: Indonesia	92
51400: Malaysia	408
51700: Thailand	357
TOTAL	23,067

Ancestry (but not born) in Select Country	
	NYC Children, 5-18
3700: Guyanese/British Guiana	17,363
6031: Bangladeshi	14,101
6090: Nepali	1,302
6151: India	16,265
6900: Sri Lankan	442
7301: Indonesian	812
7701: Malaysian	807
7760: Thai	578
TOTAL	51,670

Source: Comptroller's Office analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2013-2017 5-year estimates.

+ 51,737
 74,737

From: Latif, Aliya
 Sent: Monday, February 10, 2020 3:21 PM
 To: 'Neeta Jain' <neeta.jain@att.net>

Notes on Attendance Data – Diwali 2012 and 2014

Average daily attendance

2012-13 YTD	11/13/2012 ADA	2014-15 YTD	10/23/2014 ADA
90.1%	91.8%	90.4%	92.6%

2012-13 School Year

172 of 1,584 schools in operation had overall decline in attendance on Diwali compared with average year to date attendance.

1412 schools saw an increase.

2014-15 School Year

131 of 1,630 schools in operation had overall decline in attendance on Diwali compared with average year to date attendance

1499 school saw an increase

Staff attendance data

Staff absence data by school on October 23, 2014 and November 13, 2012							
Date	DBN	Location	Title	Description	Absence	Religious Observance day	Total
11/13/2012 Total					2619	15	2634
10/23/2014 Total					2525	20	2545
Grand Total					5144	35	5179

Attendance Data – Diwali 2012 and 2014

Source: New York City Department of Education

Average daily student attendance

Average Daily Attendance on Diwali Compared with End-of-Year Attendance

2012-13 EOY	11/13/2012 ADA	2014-15 EOY	10/23/2014 ADA
90.1%	91.8%	90.4%	92.6%

Data from DOE
 increased 2-15.17 15.8
 Asian Population
 from 2012-13
 15.3%

2012-13 School Year

172 of 1,584 schools in operation had overall decline in attendance on Diwali compared with average year to date attendance.

1412 schools saw an increase.

2014-15 School Year

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11/13/2012			2619	15	2634
Total					
10/23/2014			2525	20	2545
Total					
Grand Total			5144	35	5179

November 13, 2012 - 15 teachers at 14 schools were absent due to religious observance at the following schools:

DBNs

- 03M084
- 10X279
- 18K276
- 20K227
- 24Q600
- 25Q425
- 25Q670
- 26Q430
- 27Q090
- 28Q440
- 29Q131
- 96IRBK
- 97Q023
- 97Q993

14 Schools
 Teachers were
 absent -

October 23, 2014 - 20 teachers at 18 schools were absent due to religious observance at the following schools:

DBNs:

02M198
03M402
03M485
08X282
18K276
24Q264
24Q877
25Q425
27Q475
27Q480
28Q350
29Q283
30Q230
79Q344
96IRQU
97Q023
97Q256
97Q993



Asian American Federation

Testimony for New York City Council Oversight Hearing on the Experience of New Yorkers Enrolled in Adult Education and Adult Literacy Programs

Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Education
February 26, 2020

Thank you, Chair Mark Treyger and members of the Committee on Education for convening this hearing.

I am Shivani Damera, Program Assistant at the Asian American Federation (AAF). AAF's mission is to raise the influence and well-being of the pan-Asian American community through research, policy advocacy, public awareness, and organizational development. We represent a network of nearly 70 member and partner agencies that support our community through their work in health & human services, education, economic development, civic participation, and social justice.

As the City Council works towards a FY 2021 budget, we urge you on behalf of our member and partner agencies to consider funding the following:

- **Community-based adult literacy programming** to address the gap between community needs and education opportunities for all immigrants with a baseline \$12 million investment for Adult Literacy Education programs

With limited English literacy skills, Asian immigrants face significant challenges when it comes to finding employment, securing affordable housing, navigating the immigration system, seeking healthcare, and obtaining quality education for themselves and their families. Particularly in this age of anti-immigrant policies and practices at the federal level, we look forward to the Council's leadership in ensuring that New York City is a place where all New Yorkers can thrive.

Background

The Asian community is in great need of adequate funding for adult literacy programs and ESOL classes. As state funding for robust ESOL programming was significantly reduced in 2019, city funding is needed more than ever to bridge the gap. With limited funding, community-based organizations (CBOs) are less equipped to meet the soaring demand for adult literacy classes, particularly during a time when vulnerable Asian New Yorkers are seeking to resource themselves with English skills to navigate the many challenges being wrought by the federal administration.

Manhattan:
120 Wall Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10005

Flushing:
37-17 Union Street, 2nd Floor
Flushing, NY 11354

The need for these services in the pan-Asian American community is irrefutable: **Asians are the fastest-growing group among all racial and ethnic groups in New York**, comprising over 16 percent of New York City's population, **and also have the highest levels of poverty** – with one in four Asians living in poverty. According to our report on Asian American poverty, **70 percent of Asian Americans living in poverty have limited English proficiency (LEP)**. For these individuals, adult literacy classes are essential to finding employment, accessing services, and obtaining citizenship.

Clients of our member and partner CBOs have few resources outside of these organizations, particularly as the Asian languages that our CBOs serve in are not readily available elsewhere. Oftentimes, the children of LEP parents are forced to carry the burden of translating for their parents and in matters that are difficult for children to understand - a burden that no child should have to bear. Therefore, the City must provide adequate adult literacy resources to help parents pursue employment opportunities, navigate their children's education system, and be fully equipped to navigate the various housing, health care, and transportation systems to support their families.

In the past, investment that New York State made in immigrant integration programs was critical to helping Asian-led, Asian-serving organizations with deep community roots build the capacity to provide ESOL classes, immigration legal services, and community education workshops to set immigrants on the path to citizenship and socioeconomic stability. Through our partnership with the Council of Peoples Organization (COPO), one of our member organizations in Brooklyn, we were able to serve approximately 5,000 new Americans and their families through these state-funded services. The ESOL classes became an essential gateway to disseminate information about the ever-changing immigration policy landscape to the community, as well as to check the pulse of what was happening in the community, such as receiving information about bullying in schools or domestic violence that was occurring within homes. Since the funding ended, we have not been able to sustain the ESOL programming at COPO, meaning that the gateway to true immigrant integration has been effectively cut off.

We are living in unprecedented times when immigrant rights and public benefits are under attack. Adult literacy programs are needed now more than ever to protect immigrants and their families by giving them access to ESOL instruction to set them on a more certain path toward becoming Americans.

Recommendation

We urge the City Council to prioritize the funding of adult literacy programs by:

- **Funding community-based adult literacy programming with a baseline investment of \$12 million**
- **Allowing for Asian-led, Asian-serving community-based organizations to compete for multi-year ESOL funding by designing contracts that recognize their language and cultural competency through a point system**

We look forward to working with the City to address the burgeoning immigrant integration needs of Asian New Yorkers.



**Testimony of Annetta Seecharran
Diwali as a Public School Holiday
February 26th, 2020**

Good afternoon, my name is Annetta Seecharran, I am the Executive Director of Chhaya Community Development Corporation, and the former Executive Director of South Asian Youth Action, and my most important title of all, Mom, to a six-year-old. Therefore, Diwali as a public-school holiday is of personal and professional importance to me.

I want to thank Chair Treyger for holding this hearing today, and my council member, Daniel Dromm, for his visionary and steadfast leadership to get us to this historic day-one that many in my community have long waited for. I also want to thank all of the other council members who have supported this resolution thus far.

I believe your support suggests that you recognize the presence of the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities in New York City, and that we are integral part of the civic, economic and the cultural life of this City.

As a Hindu, I have personally felt the sting of invisibility, when everything is business as usual on the day that is the most sacred for me.

As mother and a New Yorker who has spent the last two decades serving my community, I envision a different experience for my daughter, and for the hundreds of thousands other Hindu children in our City. I envision that they get to grow up in an educational system where they do not suffer from that invisibility, where they can proudly celebrate their culture, and where their parents never have to choose between their education and their religion. No parent wants to be put in that position.

Every day immigrants and young people of color encounter messages that tell them they do not matter – excluding Diwali in the public-school holiday calendar is yet another one of these messages.

I believe recognizing Diwali as a public-school holiday would allow a significant portion of our student body to be fully who they are, and strengthen their sense of self, which is the very foundation of academic excellence. I also believe this excellence would have an infectious nature, benefiting the entire school system. The ultimate measure of our school system's success is whether our students are prepared to function in a global economy. Every child having the opportunity to learn about Diwali only benefits that child, and betters prepares them for life in the modern world.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts.



Golden Age Community Inc.

12 Vineland Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10312

(718) 967-3981

goldenagecommunityinc@gmail.com

February 26, 2020

Hon. Council Member Daniel Dromm & all Respected Council Members.

Good Afternoon,

My name is Kishor Bhuta, living in Staten Island for the last 39 years and living in New York City for last 50 years. I am the President of Golden Age Community Inc. of Staten Island, a Not-for-Profit Organization for senior citizens incorporated in New York State since July 6, 2006.

As of today, we have more than 260 members. For the last fourteen years, we have organized several educational, social, cultural, and community events such as Diwali celebration, Medical & Financial Seminars, entertained Seniors at Nursing Homes, volunteered at soup kitchens and also organized Ping-Pong & Bridge tournaments with the members of other communities.

Almost all children in our community attended New York City Public schools and now our grandchildren are doing the same. Diwali is a very significant and most popular Indian festival because of its family values and cultural importance, and it is celebrated worldwide. We feel it is important for us, our children and our grandchildren to share and celebrate Diwali with our family members and friends not only from Indian ethnicity but also from other ethnic background. Celebrating Diwali with children, grand Children and parents of other ethnic and cultural groups will enhance the knowledge and understanding of each other's culture and festivals, and in turn, will help children assimilate better and learn to respect different cultures which will create a friendly environment.

With this vision, Golden Age Community of Staten Island strongly supports Resolution No. 0146-2018 to establish Diwali as an official holiday for NYC public school students.

Thanks.

Kishor Jt Bhuta

Kishor Bhuta,

President, Golden Age Community Inc., Staten Island, NY

718-967-3981 (Home), 347-838-0070 (Cell)

kbhuta7@gmail.com, kbhuta7@verizon.net

New York State (F060616000296)

Federal June 17,2008 (EIN # 22-3937155)



SOUTH ASIAN & INDO-CARIBBEAN BAR ASSOCIATION OF QUEENS

Hon. Karen Gopee, President
Sagar Chadha, General Secretary
Ali Najmi, VP External Affairs
Manmeet Singh, VP Inclusion
Andrea S. Ogle, VP Small Firm & Solo Practice

Hon. Ushir Pandit-Durant, Past President/Board Member
Ajay Chheda, Executive Vice President
Amish R. Doshi, Treasurer
Sharon Khunkhun, VP International Practice

February 24, 2020

TO: Chancellor Richard A. Carranza
NYC Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

CC: Mayor Bill de Blasio
Office of the Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

The New York City Council
Committee on Education
250 Broadway, Committee Rm, 14th floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: **Res 0146-2018: Establish Diwali as an official holiday for NYC public school students**

Dear Chancellor Carranza,

The South Asian & Indo-Caribbean Bar Association of Queens (SAICBA-Q) respectfully submits this letter in support of Resolution 0146-2018 to establish the holiday of Diwali as an official holiday for NYC public school students.

There are over 550,000 South Asian & Indo-Caribbean residents of New York City, with ancestry originating from the nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan and several other nations with significant heritage originating from the Indian subcontinent.

The majority of these South Asian & Indo-Caribbean residents live in the borough of Queens. Diwali is the most holy of all Hindu holidays known throughout the world as the "Festival of

Lights”. It is celebrated not just by the Hindu community, but by South Asians & Indo-Caribbeans of all religions and backgrounds, including but not limited to followers of Sikhism, Buddhism & Jainism.

Celebrating Diwali requires daytime and late night prayers, accompanied by gatherings and celebrations of family and friends, which impact our children’s ability to attend school and function properly while in school.

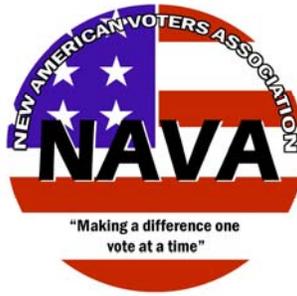
For our children and our community, recognition of Diwali as an official holiday for NYC public school students will represent acceptance of our faith and culture.

We most respectfully call upon Chancellor Carranza and Mayor de Blasio to establish Diwali as an official holiday for NYC public school students. The passage of Resolution 0146-2018 will only further promote and celebrate the diversity of New York City – a City whose central values have always been tolerance and acceptance.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sagar Chadha', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sagar Chadha, Esq.
General Secretary
South Asian & Indo-Caribbean Bar Association of Queens
SAICBA-Q



February 26, 2020

NYC Council Members
Committee on Education Oversight
250 Broadway, 14th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Council Members, please find the below testimony in support of NYC Council **Res. 146**.

As you are fully aware NYC is the most diverse city in the world, we speak over 190 languages from 179 different countries. Each community brings its own culture and heritage, which makes a vibrant tapestry of this city. We celebrate many holidays and for some of those holidays our children get to stay home and celebrate with their family. Recently, mayor de Blasio included three more holidays to the school calendar (Eid, Eid ul fitr and Lunar New Year) which is commendable. By way of this letter we would like to bring to your attention that we have large number of South Asian and Indo Caribbean lives in NYC and many of them celebrate Diwali as one of their most important holiday.

Diwali is a holiday that is observed by people of Hindu, Jain and Sikh faiths. According to the most recent census, there are nearly 300,000 New York City residents of whom celebrate Diwali. Millions of people around the world keep Diwali by lighting lamps to symbolize righteousness and light overcoming and dispelling ignorance and darkness. It is a five-day festival that begins on the 13th day of the Hindu month of Kartik and observers of the holiday spend time with their loved ones and priests performing prayers.

In 2018, Diwali was observed on Wednesday, November 7th and community members voiced support for giving students who observe the holiday a day off from the school. In 2007, the House of Representatives passed a resolution recognizing the religious and historical significance of the Diwali. The U.S. Postal Service also issued a Diwali commemorative stamp.

It should be noted that, in New York City, Diwali is a recognized holiday and every year alternate-side parking rules are suspended. In the New York City Council, Councilman Dromm introduced a resolution on July 24th, 2016 urging the Department of Education to approve the proposal to make Diwali an official school holiday. Similarly, NYS Senator Leroy Comrie introduced a similar bill in the State and Assembly member David Weprin co-sponsored the

same bill in the NYS Assembly.

I would also like to quote the following elected officials who has been outspoken in support of the Diwali School Holiday

Senator Leroy Comrie (Jamaica), "It is hard to overstate the many ways by which the Hindu, Jain, and Sikh communities contribute to our state," said Senator Comrie. "I am proud to sponsor S.2401, which would fully declare Diwali a public holiday in New York State, a designation which is wholly deserved by our fellow New Yorkers who observe the holiday. I am fully committed to pushing for speedy passage of this bill in the coming legislative session.

Assembly Member David I. Weprin (Hollis), "I'm happy to be a co-prime sponsor of the legislation to recognize Diwali as a public-school holiday in the assembly, said Assemblyman David Weprin. I'm going to continue to fight to get the NYC Department of Education to recognize Diwali so no student will have to choose between celebrating with their family or their school obligations.##

#

Council Member Costa Constantinides, (Astoria), I fully support making Diwali a New York City school holiday to ensure all children who celebrate the festival of lights do not have to choose between their religious observance and missing a day of school

Council Member Paul Vallone (Bayside), Diwali as one of the most widely celebrated holidays in the city's Hindu, Jain and Sikh communities, I will fight to have the City give the holiday its proper recognition by establishing it as an official school holiday

Council Member Barry Grodenchik (Bellerose), "It is long past time that Diwali be recognized as an official New York City public school holiday. The 300,000 New Yorkers who celebrate Diwali should be able to celebrate it with their entire families without being forced to forgo sending their children to school."

While the political process is taking its course to going through the process of approving Diwali as a school holiday. We are asking for your support by freeing up a day from the school calendars so that Diwali can be adapted as school holiday. We are also requesting that until the bill is approved as a NYC Schools chancellor if you consider excusing absence on the day of Diwali affecting this school year.

Thank you for your support and consideration to this request.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dilip Nath
President, New American Voters Association (NAVA)

Dr. Nath also serves on the community board 8 and has been serving as a council member on the Community Education Council (CEC) 26.

**Testimony for Tsering Lama on behalf of Adhikaar
New York City Council Committee on Education**
Oversight of Experience of New Yorkers
enrolled in adult education and adult literacy programs
February 26, 2020

Good afternoon Chairperson Treyger and Committee Members.

My name is Tsering Lama and I am an Organizer at Adhikaar, a workers center and community center based in Woodside, Queens that serves the Nepali-speaking community. My concentration at Adhikaar as an Organizer is in our Domestic Worker program and our overall Adult Literacy classes which we call English for Empowerment (EFE).

Adhikaar's EFE classes support adults of all ages most of whom are from 35 to 79 years old. The classes improve their English to support them in their daily lives in New York City and at their workplace. Adhikaar has run regular English for Empowerment classes at Adhikaar since 2007 soon after we opened our doors in 2005. The classes are volunteer run and since 2007, we have provided EFE classes to an estimated 2,000 individuals. In 2019 alone, 191 individuals came to our center for EFE classes. Although our English for Empowerment classes are not yet funded by the city, we offer this testimony to help the Committee better understand the services we provide and the importance of non-profit run adult literacy and adult education programs for those who live in New York City, especially new immigrants.

According to Asian American Federation's 'Profile of New York City's Nepal[i] Americans' report, NYC's Nepali population is amongst the fastest growing Asian ethnic group. Our community members are likely to be working-age adults with relatively limited English proficiency and low literacy levels. Many of our members, especially women of ethnic and indigenous background in Nepal, have never been through any type of formal schooling before. According to the report, the Nepali community is largely concentrated in the Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, Sunnyside and Woodside. We have a significant population of members that live in Ridgewood, Rego Park, Maspeth, Jamaica, Jamaica Estates, and areas of Brooklyn that include Carroll Gardens, Coney Island, and Fort Greene. The same report highlights that in 2015, about 87% of NYC's Nepali population were foreign born. This data highlights the growing demand from the community in terms of adult education classes.

The Nepali-speaking community we serve is broader than the data of Nepalis from Asian American Federation and incorporates people from Nepal, India, Bhutan, Tibetans who are from Nepal and a broader diaspora. Our curriculum takes this into account and is based on community consultations and individual conversations to understand the broader Nepali-speaking communities needs. EFE classes are the backbone of our center and one of the most popular services at Adhikaar. Although there are other programs in Queens and Brooklyn that support adult literacy, many prefer our center as we have staff and volunteers who are culturally and linguistically competent in serving Nepali and Tibetan speakers seeking to learn English.

EFE curriculum follows MOIA's 'We Speak NYC' guidelines for the EFE and we have shaped our own curriculum that includes topics such as workers' rights, political education, government agencies and other relevant practical skills and information. For example, our EFE students simultaneously learn level-appropriate English and how to navigate the subway system using references familiar to the participants. We also have created specific curriculums to support workers in various industries such as our Nail Salon English for Empowerment classes in Brooklyn that serves nail salon workers who are predominantly indigenous community from Nepal who are limited English proficient and limited literacy in English, Nepali and their indigenous languages.

EFE classes run throughout the year at our community center, multiple times a week depending on volunteer availability and staff capacity, and is easily one of the most popular classes at our center. EFE classes are broken down into three sessions: spring, fall and summer. We host 9-12 classes per session. We have four levels of classes: Beginner, Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. On average per session, we have about 35 members attending "Beginners" class, 40 members attending "Basic" class, 25 members attending "Intermediate" class, and 20 members attending the "Advanced" class.

As the only social-justice oriented grassroots organization supporting the Nepali-speaking community, the impact of our services and activities is vast. Our services furthers New York City's adult literacy initiative and ensures that the Nepali-speaking community members are also factored into the initiative's mission to provide limited-English proficiency immigrants better access education, resources, and opportunities. Adult literacy classes have always been a critical component of how we support our community and how we understand the emerging needs. We have a strong evaluations system for our programs where we get direct feedback from our community and participants. As a result, our members are not only developing and learning the curriculum at hand, but also applying what they've learned at Adhikaar in various aspects of their lives, including at their homes, workplace and in the community. This results in people negotiating higher wages, navigating social services, receiving NYC ID cards, supporting their children in the NYC school systems and so much more. Our efforts also ensure that our limited-literacy members have access to information on issues such as workers rights laws, health care and other issues affecting them. Our

programs also provide a platform for our members to continue learning and understanding relevant and important materials for themselves and their families.

The following are testimonies from three of our students:

- 1) “Around 2010, I began working as a full-time nanny for an Indian family. But over time, I was doing more of the domestic work- making food, cleaning the house- while another younger, college student was hired as the nanny/babysitter. My boss, she was mean. She would always criticize me and my work and was abusive. It was tough but I couldn’t afford to lose my job so I had to bear it. About 4 years ago, I heard about Adhikaar from my friend. I wanted to learn English, because without English, you’re a “blind man” in America, you know. So, she told me Adhikaar had free English classes so I started coming. And I am very thankful because I learned so much- not only English but, you know, survival skills. Getting from place to place, taking the train, understanding my rights at work. In my work, it made me more confident. I was more assertive about my rights- like getting breaks and asking for more pay. And that also changed my relationship with my boss. In my own life, I am proud of myself. I am happy I have the chance to give back to my community by volunteering with Adhikaar. Now, I am an English class facilitator myself and I am thankful because I can give back. Adhikaar is important for our community. The “heart” of the community. And it gives people like us ways to get involved in this country.” - *Mohini, Jamaica, Queens Resident, Adhikaar’s EFE facilitator and Domestic Worker Member Leader*
- 2) Seventeen years ago, Pema Tsomo moved from a small town in Nepal to the U.S. without any formal education. Pema is a single mom to her 14 year old developmentally challenged son and lives in Woodside, Queens. “Mothers of small children face so much difficulty. They cannot go to work because they have to watch their child. If they watch their child, who will pay the rent?” she asks. With her son by her side, Pema attends EFE classes at Adhikaar. Here, at the community center, she says, “I meet friends, my heart feels lighter, I get a chance to study.”

On a cold winter day in early 2015, Pema had to leave her son alone to go to work. The police found him alone in Jackson Heights and arrested Pema for negligence. When the authorities failed to find an interpreter in Tibetan or Nepali, she was held in jail. It was a whole three days before an interpreter from Adhikaar was contacted and she was released. At this time Pema had been attending the Beginner Level EFE classes so still needed interpretation.

Following the arrest, the Administration for Children’s Services filed criminal charges against Pema and took her son away from her. Pema was determined to get her son back. She commuted two hours every week to visit him at the foster home in Long Island where ACS had placed him. Adhikaar staff supported her along the way with case management and language assistance. For months afterward, Pema had to sit through court hearings, police interrogations, and visit her son’s school and doctors.

This situation prompted Pema to continue moving through our EFE classes which she continues to attend regularly. Today Pema is able to advocate for herself and her son using the language skills she has learned through EFE. She needs very little support from Adhikaar in supporting her son in communicating with his school and getting the support her son needs.

- 3) In 2015, Rup Narayan Khatiwada, 79, and Tila Rupa Khatiwada, 76, are affectionately known as “Ba” and “Ama” (“father” and “mother” in Nepali). Their journey to Queens, New York, 2009 from Nepal, where they lived as Bhutanese refugees, is inspirational. Resettling in a foreign country in their 70s and not speaking any English proved to be an isolating and daunting experience for the Khatiwadadas. Everyday navigation in the city was a continuous struggle. “The stores were always out in the open back home but here they are inside a building,” says Ba, recalling the fear and uneasiness they experienced when purchasing even the simple necessities in their new neighborhood.

Ama and Ba discovered Adhikaar’s community center and EFE classes. “We were able to learn how to write our names in English and recognize street numbers,” says Ama beaming with pride. Recognizing the power that the knowledge of language provides, the Khatiwadadas are among the strongest advocates of the free EFE classes, eagerly encouraging many “younger” community members to attend. They are a constant and inspiring presence at Adhikaar.

These are a few stories of members whose lives have changed for the better as a result of the EFE classes. We thank the Committee on Education and Chairperson Treyger for hosting this important hearing. We commend Speaker Corey Johnson and Council Members Dromm and Menchaca as well as others on their support of Initiatives on Adult Literacy Education. We encourage you to continue supporting current adult education and literacy programs throughout the city and increase support for non-profits such as ours who are currently not a part of the city’s funded programs. The partnership between non-profits such as Adhikaar in reaching new immigrants and hard to reach communities is critical to increasing individuals capacity to learn English. This helps community members navigate everyday life in the city, increase their skills in the workplace to negotiate their rights, support their kids in schools and so much more. All of this increases the economic stability of communities in New York City.

BY DARREL GANESH. SUKHDEO
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26TH FEBRUARY 2020

PER: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF A CITY HOLIDAY FOR THE FESTIVAL OF DIWALI.

DEAR CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Once upon a time, 186 years ago, in a land far far away, West Bengal in India, In a time before the internet or Jet planes or Refrigerators, my paternal great great grandparents left West Bengal on a wooden Sail Ship for a land they never heard of called Guyana in the West Indies. They received an Indentureship Contract to work for 5 years on Sugar plantations, upon which they could return to India. My maternal Grandparents also left India, about 10 years later., also with a 5 year contract but for Trinidad. Upon the end of the 5 years, the British still needed them to work, so offered them 2 acres of land and 5 pounds Sterling, to remain working the plantations. Needless to say, two-thirds of the Indians grabbed that offer. So five and six generations later we have millions of IndoCaribbean people around the world.

The system of obtaining workers after slavery was abolished in 1833 was called Indentureship, other wise known as Indian slavery, the newly imported workers, including my forebears were sent to the same slave barracks to live, whipped and beaten just like slaves, raped and families sepatwd just like slaves. Overworked and underpaid every single day of their lives. Such was the imperial policies of the british empire, for indentureship was a government program. America declared independence from these imperial overlords and declared all are free to speak and practice religion. And religion is what has brought us all here today.

So now we come to the part of the story you all waiting for, me, Darrel G. Sukhdeo, i was born in Guyana and raised in Trinidad, and for the last 20 years have called new york city my home, but here while there is talk of religious freedom there is no religious equity! In a time when our president is blatantly oppressing masses across this country, we here in new york city have declared our rejection of him because we know the president's policies are unjust. Yet we must look within our city to see some of our own injustices, like religious parity for all. I implore you council members to vote yes on making Diwali a citywide holiday from business, banking and school.

As a Hindu I am required to give SEVA (service to my community without regard for anything in return). Since 1999 I have been a community activist, fighting to improve life and living conditions for my community, partnering with city agencies, foundations and nonprofits all across this city to bring more services into my community. I have been politically engaged doing my civic duty as well. I've lobbied this city council before, as I have the state assembly and State senate and State governor, as well as the United States Congress. I have also volunteered with local nonprofits and houses of worship, including Hindu Temples, to perform Seva in my community. I work hard and pay taxes, spend most of my income in this city and among local businesses. This is what I believe it means to be American, to be a New Yorker. The same can be said for most immigrants in my community and most immigrant communities. There are many natiive New Yorkers who do not do any of this, i could name names, so who is more American the native or the immigrant New Yorker? Am I right or am I right?

I know for a fact, as does the New York city finance department that my community pays more taxes per household than the city average, and as a community we contribute significantly to the economy and well being of this greatest of cities. One example: our housing values have skyrocketed over the past 3 decades because we continue to invest in home improvement, year after year, across all our neighborhoods, our communities take a lot of pride in

education, home ownership, business & industry and our respective jobs and careers. I would argue we contribute more to the new York City economy than any other immigrant community, I challenge you to disprove me.

Diwali is a festival of lights, embracing acceptance and renewal. I ask you to make this festival a New York Festival as all New Yorkers both native and immigrant share these values. YOU share these values, don't you? So make Diwali a citywide holiday like christmas, for business, banking and schools. Let all New Yorkers have this day to embrace acceptance and renewal. Show the nation leadership in the American values you hold dear.

As a community we will do our part to inform all New Yorkers about the best ways to celebrate Diwali and share the festival all across New York City.

Thank you for your continued good work and leadership of our beloved New York City.

Your humble servant
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Res. No. 0146 - 2018

**Resolution calling upon the
New York City Department of Education
to establish Diwali as an official holiday
for New York City public school students**

Hearing at
City Council of the City of New York



Supported by



Indian Diaspora Council International
www.IndianDiasporaCouncil.org

Presented by:
Ashook Ramsaran
President
AshookRamsaran@gmail.com

February 26, 2020

Res. No. 0146 - 2018
City Council of the City of New York

Presentation by

Indian Diaspora Council International

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Indian Diaspora Council

Indian Diaspora Council International

Shared heritage, aspirations and interests

www.IndianDiasporaCouncil.org

Post Office Box 650523 New York 11365 USA

PRESS RELEASE

February 26, 2020 (EST-USA)

IDC Supports NYC Resolution 0146-2018 to establish Diwali as an official holiday in NYC Public Schools

The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC) unequivocally endorses and supports New York City Resolution 0146-2018 “calling upon New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students”.

Following its long tradition of embracing diversity and responding positively to the aspirations of its changing population and demographics, the City of New York has an unmatched history of responding favorably to be inclusive by bringing more opportunities, recognition, awareness, understanding and education to make this city the welcome home of millions -- the most diverse city in the world, to live, to succeed, to contribute, to collaborate, and to make it better today and tomorrow.

Diwali, a rich and enduring celebration known by many as the Festival of Lights, is celebrated throughout the world by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains, as well as many other religions, groups, associations and individuals, transcending borders and religions. It is another historic opportunity for New York City to officially educate all of its students in public schools to learn about Diwali and join in celebrating a universal declaration of “light over darkness, good over evil, and to dispel ignorance and darkness”.

Diwali is publicly recognized and routinely celebrated in several official US federal, state and city venues with high profile and prominent ceremonies and performances: by the President at the White House, at the US Capitol, by Governors including New York State, and at city levels such as New York City – including in this very chamber and at Gracie Mansion. In addition, the occasion of Diwali has been recognized with many prominent Proclamations, Resolutions and Citations from federal, state and city officials from New York (from many of you in New York City Council) to Washington to California, recognizing Diwali as a universal celebration of “light over darkness and good over evil”.

With the population in the USA of people with origins in South Asia exceeding 4 million, including a significant percentage in New York tri-state region, the prominence of Diwali celebration among many is certainly becoming more visible and widely accepted. It is to be noted that people with origins in South Asia in New York account for approximately 21% of new immigrants in 2016.

Approval by New York City would not be without NY precedent: Six Long Island schools have declared Diwali holiday in 2018. East Meadow, East Williston, Hicksville, Syosset, Half Hollow Hills & Herricks.

New York City public schools are the incubators where young minds are nurtured to become learned, informed and supportive of our celebrated diversity. By establishing Diwali as an official public school holiday, this body would certainly enhance the learning experiences of New York City children.

The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC) urges approval of New York City Resolution 0146-2018, a fitting and timely tribute to the city and to our children, especially at this time of US history..

For more information, please contact Ashook Ramsaran @ ashookramsaran@gmail.com

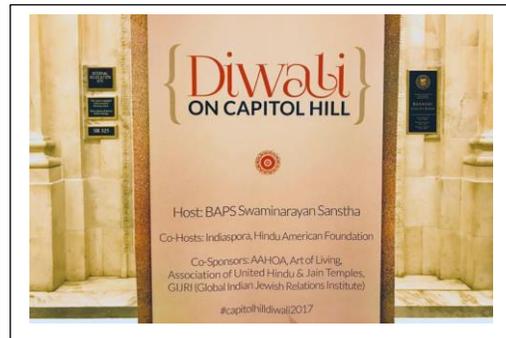
*The **Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC)**, established in 1997 and headquartered in New York, USA, is an international non-profit, non-political and secular organization with global affiliates, chapters and membership in 21 countries, with the objective to embrace, engage, and enhance the shared heritage, aspirations, and interests of persons of Indian origin with optimum inclusivity.*

Diwali Celebrations and Proclamations Brighten the United States

Washington, DC (November 8, 2017) — This year, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) led its most comprehensive government outreach campaign in honor of the Hindu festival of lights, more commonly known as Diwali or Deepavali. From city councils, state houses, and governors' mansions across the country to America's national capital, HAF ensured Diwali was recognized by more government officials than ever before.

In addition to again having the State Assembly of California proclaim October as Hindu American Awareness and Appreciation Month, spearheaded by Assemblymember Ash Kalra, HAF successfully engaged the following government entities to issue proclamations in honor of Diwali this year:

- Mayor Muriel Bowser - City of Washington, DC
- Governor Sam Brownback - State of Kansas
- Governor John Kasich - State of Ohio
- Governor Roy Moore - State of North Carolina
- Governor Tom Wolf - State of Pennsylvania
- City Council of Troy, Michigan
- Michigan State Assembly



HAF leaders were invited to attend the first ever Diwali celebration hosted by the Governors of North Carolina and Pennsylvania, as well as the first celebration hosted by Governor Larry Hogan of Maryland. Governor Greg Abbott of Texas also observed Diwali again this year, lauding the contribution of the Hindu American community's service during Hurricane Harvey and the ongoing relief efforts.

Diwali celebrations culminated with a grand reception on Capitol Hill, where HAF co-hosted a grand event with the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Indiaspora, and several other community organizations.

More than 30 members of Congress attended, including Hindu American Congressional leaders Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard (HI-2), Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal (WA-7), and Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL-8), as well as Raj Shah, White House Deputy Press Secretary and the most prominent Jain American in the US government. The diplomatic community was also well represented with Ambassadors Navtej Sarna of India, Niermala Badrising of Suriname, and Ashok Mirpuri of Singapore.

You can see more pictures of the Capitol Hindu Diwali event here: [BAPS Celebrates Diwali at the U.S. Capitol, Washington DC, USA](#)

<https://www.hafsite.org/diwali-celebrations-and-proclamations-brighten-united-states>

Hindu New Yorkers call on city to make Diwali a public school holiday

November 04, 2019



A PERFORMER DANCES DURING A DIWALI CELEBRATION AT CITY HALL LAST WEEK. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL.

By Jonathan Sperling

More than a dozen city councilmembers came together on Oct. 30 to celebrate Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, but many Hindu New Yorkers and their advocates say it's time for the city to do more to recognize the holiday — and the city's rising Hindu population.

They have called on the city to make Diwali a public school holiday, especially considering the rapidly growing population of residents from South Asia and the Caribbean.

In recent years, the city has declared Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha and the Lunar New Year [as public school holidays](#) in recognition of the influence of various religions and cultures in New York City. But the city's growing Hindu community has yet to receive the same treatment, even though Diwali is celebrated in countries that account for some of the city's highest populations of immigrants.

“We know that the Guyanese community is the second-largest in Queens. Trinidadians are right there and Indians are right there. That's what the data shows,” said Assembly District 31 District Leader Richard David, who was raised in a Hindu household in Jamaica. David is a professor of Caribbean studies at York College and is running to represent District 31 in the state Assembly.

David published [an op-ed](#) in the *Daily News* last month arguing that, despite the growing Hindu population of more than 200,000 citywide, there's a “disconnect” between the diversity lauded by city leaders and the lack of action in recognizing Diwali as a public school holiday.

“Communities have been organizing around getting Diwali [recognized] for a long time, as long as the 80s and 90s,” David said. “I see it as inevitable because the populations are growing. I'm incredibly hopeful this is something the mayor will do before he comes out of the office.”

Queens Councilmembers Adrienne Adams, Daniel Dromm, Barry Grodenchik, Robert Holden, Peter Koo, Karen Koslowitz, I. Daneek Miller, Donovan Richards, Eric Ulrich and Paul Vallone helped organize Wednesday’s Diwali event. The NYPD Desi Society was honored with a proclamation from Queens Councilmember Rory Lancman, while Dr. Samin Sharma was honored with a proclamation from Grodenchik.

Rajeev Pandya was honored with a proclamation from Brooklyn Councilmember Mathieu Eugene.

“Diwali is a special time when millions of South Asians all across the world rejoice and fill the world with light and love,” Lancman said. “I am honored to join the many Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists in our city who celebrate this important holiday.”

With population data reflecting the city’s large Hindu community, David added that part of the frustration surrounding Diwali not yet being recognized is “the ambiguity” of the process.

“There’s been a mismatch and ambiguity behind what it would take to have a public school holiday. We know the numbers are there in terms of population. Every major retailer did a Diwali event this year,” David said.

“It’s long overdue.”

<https://queenseagle.com/all/hindu-new-yorkers-call-on-city-to-make-diwali-a-public-school-holiday>



President Trump Celebrates Diwali at White House; Praises India, Indian Americans

WASHINGTON (TIP): Following in the footsteps of his predecessor Barak Obama, President Trump himself led from the front by hosting a Diwali celebration in the White House on October 17.

In his first Diwali celebration in the Oval Office of the White House, Trump was accompanied by senior Indian-American members of the administration, including US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, Seema Verma, administrator of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Ajit Pai, Chairman of the US Federal Communications Commission and Raj Shah,

contd on Page 32



President Trump is lighting 'diya' in the Oval Office

President Trump Celebrates Diwali at White House; Praises India, Indian Americans

Principle Deputy Press Secretary. Many community leaders and President's daughter Ivanka Trump also joined the celebration.

"Today, I was deeply honored to be joined by so many administration officials and leaders of the Indian-American community - to celebrate Diwali -- the Hindu Festival of Lights," Trump said. "Today, we proudly celebrate this holiday in THE PEOPLE'S HOUSE. In so doing, we reaffirm that Indian-Americans and Hindu-Americans are truly cherished, treasured and beloved members of our great American family."

"As we do so, we especially remember the People of India, the home of the Hindu faith, who have built the world's largest democracy. I greatly value my very strong relationship with Prime Minister Modi," he further added.

Trump also lit diyas on the occasion and hailed the Indian American community's contribution in different fields.

"Our Indian-American neighbors and friends have made incredible contributions to our country - and to the world. You have made extraordinary contributions to art, science, medicine, business and education. America is especially thankful for its many Indian-American citizens who serve bravely in our armed forces and as first responders in communities throughout our great land," he said.

Diwali, he said, is one of the most important celebrations in the Hindu religion. "A time of peace and prosperity for the New Year, it is a tradition that is held dear by more than 1 billion Hindus worldwide and more than 2 million Hindus in the United States. It is also celebrated by millions of Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains in America, India and around the world," he said. The tradition of Diwali celebration at the White House was first initiated by President George Bush.

If New Bill Is Passed, New York State Would Add 6 New Holidays To The School Calendar

HICKSVILLE, N.Y. (CBSNewYork) — March 6, 2019 at 6:40 pm

New York is a diverse melting pot and now there's a push to make school calendars look that way, too.

As CBS2's Carolyn Gusoff found out Wednesday, a bill being considered in Albany could add religious holidays to the academic year.

Wednesday prayers at a Sikh temple in Hicksville draw a crowd, while down the road a Hindu temple is also thriving. Long Island's growing South Asian population has prompted a new look at school calendars to more fairly reflect their diversity.

"It's only appropriate and fair to extend a holiday like Diwali or Eid or Vaisakhi to people from the South Asian community," said state Sen. Kevin Thomas, D-Garden City. "These are like Christmas and New Year."

If a new bill is passed in the New York state Senate, six new religious holidays will be added to the school calendar.

Thomas, New York's first senator of Indian descent, is sponsoring a bill to give districts the ability to close on six additional religious holidays — two Islamic, two Hindu, one Sikh and Christian Good Friday. New York City schools already close on the Lunar New Year and Islamic Eid al-Fitr. Some Long Island schools added Diwali.

"Diwali is the festival of light and happiness also. This is the most important Hindu holiday," said Pipai Mani, the priest at Asamai Hindu Temple in Hicksville.

FLASHBACK: Hindu Group Makes New Push To Add Diwali To NYC School Holidays

The bill allows school closure when at least 7.5 percent of student population is of that faith. "Everyone is entitled to their own religion and this way it would show no discrimination from one to the other," one person said.

Parents often make hard choices between faith and education. Many said they would welcome the change.

"So they can enjoy and know their culture. It's very hard to keep up with your family tradition," Smithtown resident Amita Tank said.

There is at least one voice of opposition. Nick Fish, the president of the American Atheists, called the goal admirable, but added, "Trying to program breaks around every conceivable religious holiday is not workable. Picking and choosing with an artificial limit is discriminatory and unequal." New York state education officials say there is nothing in current law that prevents such a move as long as children attend the required 180 days.

Under Thomas' bill, no current holidays would be eliminated if the population is under 7.5 percent in a district.

THE DIWALI COALITION OF NYC
CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO JOIN THEM FOR

*A Historic
Press Conference:
Diwali As A School Holiday*

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2020

AT THE STEPS OF CITY HALL

MANHATTAN

NY 10007

EVENT BEGINS - 12:00 PM SHARP

**FOLLOWED BY A HEARING IN THE CITY
COUNCIL CHAMBER AT 1:00PM**

Diwali Holiday Resolution 0146-2018 has been signed by:

**DANIEL DROMM ● COSTA G. CONSTANTINIDES ● PAUL A. VALLONE ● BARRY S. GRODENCHIK ● RORY I. LANGMAN ● I.
DANEEK MILLER ● ADRIENNE E. ADAMS ● DONOVAN J. RICHARDS ● MARGARET S. CHIN ● PETER A. KOO ● CARLOS
MENCHACA ● DEBORAH L. ROSE ● KAREN KOSLOWITZ ● JUSTIN L. BRANNAN ● KEITH POWERS ● ANTONIO
REYNOSO ● DIANA AYALA ● RITCHIE J. TORRES ● ROBERT F. HOLDEN ● CARLINA RIVERA ● JAMES G. VAN
BRAMER ● FRANCISCO P. MOYA ● HELEN K. ROSENTHAL ● BEN KALLOS ● MARK LEVINE ● ALICKA AMPRY-
SAMUEL ● RAFAEL SALAMANCA JR. ● ANDREW COHEN ● BRAD S. LANDER ● MARK TREYGER ● STEPHEN T.
LEVIN ● FERNANDO CABRERA ● LAURIE A. CUMBO ● RUBEN DIAZ SR. ● ERIC A. ULRICH**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL DR. NEETA JAIN, VIJAH RAMJATTAN, RICHARD DAVID
(917) 846-8938 (917) 207-4655 (917) 310-5148**

Diwali Proclamation – City of Aurora, Illinois

Office of Mayor Richard C. Irvin
City of Aurora, Illinois



Proclamation

AURORA DIWALI FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

WHEREAS, Diwali – the festival of lights – is India's biggest and most important holiday of the year. It is a time of love and laughter; family and friends; fun and foods that delight; and celebrated annual by Indians of all faiths and all across the diaspora; and

WHEREAS, Diwali is the time of celebration of victory of Good over Evil that signifies a special time of peace and serenity all while building bridges of understanding and tearing down barriers of intolerance; and

WHEREAS, the Aurora Indian American Community Outreach Advisory Board held its first Diwali celebration on Sunday, October 12, 2014 and today, celebrate its 6th annual Diwali celebration on Saturday, October 19, 2019; and

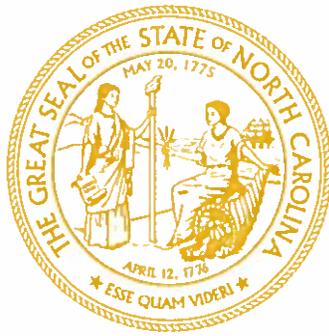
WHEREAS, the annual Diwali celebration in Aurora honors the global Diwali celebrations while shining a spotlight on the local achievements, successes and strides of the Indian-American community of Aurora.

NOW THEREFORE, I, MAYOR RICHARD C. IRVIN, Mayor of Aurora, Illinois, do hereby recognize the hard work of the Aurora Indian American Community Outreach Advisory Board, the contributions of Aurora's Indian American community and the celebration of the Diwali Festival of Lights as one of the largest and most vibrant festivals in the City of Lights. Happy Diwali 2019!

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Aurora to be affixed this 19th day of October 2019.

Mayor Richard C. Irvin





State of North Carolina

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

DIWALI

2019

BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Diwali is a festival of historic, religious, and cultural significance, celebrated annually by over a billion people, and including millions of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists throughout the United States and across the globe; and

WHEREAS, the diverse languages, traditions, and religious beliefs of the Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist communities of our state comprise a vital part of North Carolina's ethnic and social fabric; these communities, as well as all Indian Americans, have contributed greatly to the economic and cultural prosperity of our state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Diwali, an abbreviation of the Sanskrit "Deepavali," is a festival of lights during which celebrants light small oil lamps, place them around their homes, and pray for knowledge, peace, compassion, and universal well-being; the rows of lamps symbolize the light of knowledge and truth triumphing over negative qualities such as ignorance and greed, as Diwali celebrates the victory of good over evil; and

WHEREAS, Diwali is a time for *dana* (charitable giving) and *seva* (selfless service) by bringing light in the form of wisdom, knowledge, nourishment, and shelter to alleviate the tangible forms of suffering such as hunger, disease, and poverty; and

WHEREAS, Diwali is celebrated by Hindus as a day of thanksgiving for the homecoming of Lord Rama and the beginning of the new year; and

WHEREAS, for Sikhs, Diwali is celebrated as the day that revered teacher Guru Hargobind was released from captivity by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir; and

WHEREAS, for Jains, Diwali marks the anniversary of the attainment of moksha, or liberation, by Mahavira at the end of his life in 527 BC; and

WHEREAS, for Buddhists, Diwali is commemorated as the day the great Emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism as his faith; and

WHEREAS, the State of North Carolina is proud and honored to wish all celebrants a joyful and prosperous Diwali this and every year;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ROY COOPER, Governor of the State of North Carolina, do hereby proclaim October 25 – 29, 2019 as "DIWALI" in North Carolina, and commend its observance to all citizens.





Roy Cooper

Governor

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina at the Capitol in Raleigh this eighteenth day of October in the year of our Lord two thousand and nineteen and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-fourth.



Indian Diaspora Council

Indian Diaspora Council International

Shared heritage, aspirations and interests

www.IndianDiasporaCouncil.org

Post Office Box 650523 New York 11365 USA

PRESS RELEASE

February 26, 2020 (EST-USA)

IDC Supports NYC Resolution 0146-2018 to establish Diwali as an official holiday in NYC Public Schools

The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC) unequivocally endorses and supports New York City Resolution 0146-2018 “calling upon New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students”.

Following its long tradition of embracing diversity and responding positively to the aspirations of its changing population and demographics, the City of New York has an unmatched history of responding favorably to be inclusive by bringing more opportunities, recognition, awareness, understanding and education to make this city the welcome home of millions -- the most diverse city in the world, to live, to succeed, to contribute, to collaborate, and to make it better today and tomorrow.

Diwali, a rich and enduring celebration known by many as the Festival of Lights, is celebrated throughout the world by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains, as well as many other religions, groups, associations and individuals, transcending borders and religions. It is another historic opportunity for New York City to officially educate all of its students in public schools to learn about Diwali and join in celebrating a universal declaration of “light over darkness, good over evil, and to dispel ignorance and darkness”.

Diwali is publicly recognized and routinely celebrated in several official US federal, state and city venues with high profile and prominent ceremonies and performances: by the President at the White House, at the US Capitol, by Governors including New York State, and at city levels such as New York City – including in this very chamber and at Gracie Mansion. In addition, the occasion of Diwali has been recognized with many prominent Proclamations, Resolutions and Citations from federal, state and city officials from New York (from many of you in New York City Council) to Washington to California, recognizing Diwali as a universal celebration of “light over darkness and good over evil”.

With the population in the USA of people with origins in South Asia exceeding 4 million, including a significant percentage in New York tri-state region, the prominence of Diwali celebration among many is certainly becoming more visible and widely accepted. It is to be noted that people with origins in South Asia in New York account for approximately 21% of new immigrants in 2016.

New York City public schools are the incubators where young minds are nurtured to become learned, informed and supportive of our celebrated diversity. By establishing Diwali as an official public school holiday, this body would certainly enhance the learning experiences of New York City children.

The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC) urges approval of New York City Resolution 0146-2018, a fitting and timely tribute to the city and to our children, especially at this time of US history..

For more information, please contact Ashook Ramsaran @ ashookramsaran@gmail.com

The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC), established in 1997 and headquartered in New York, USA, is an international non-profit, non-political and secular organization with global affiliates, chapters and membership in 21 countries, with the objective to embrace, engage, and enhance the shared heritage, aspirations, and interests of persons of Indian origin with optimum inclusivity.

Indian Festival of Lights Diwali added to New Jersey School District Holiday Calendar

MILLBURN, NJ (TIP):

The Universal Society of Hinduism welcomed news that Millburn Township Public Schools in New Jersey has added Nov. 7 to its 2018-19 draft holiday calendar.

The date recognizes the Hindu festival Diwali (festival of lights), which falls on Nov. 7 in 2018.

In a statement from Nevada Rajan Zed, president of the Universal Society of Hinduism urged the Millburn Township's Board of Education to unanimously approve this Diwali holiday to its holiday calendar when it meets Oct. 9. The board should respect the feelings of Hindus in the 5,000 student school district who have pushed for the Diwali holiday for many years, he said, which would bode well for a school district that reportedly has 99 percent of graduating seniors going on to attend four-year colleges.

The Hindu community is rapidly growing in New Jersey, Zed said. Three public school districts have reportedly declared the Diwali holiday this Oct. 19, the date on which Diwali falls in 2017. Glen Rock Public Schools, West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District, and Piscataway Township Schools all close schools and school district offices for Diwali.

In neighboring New York, six school districts have declared Diwali a school holiday, Zed said. East Meadow School District, East Williston Union Free School District, Half Hollow Hills Central School District, Herricks Union Free School District, Hicksville Union Free School District and Syosset Central School District.

The Mineola Union Free School District has also announced that no homework or examinations would be given on Diwali.

"The remaining 674 public school districts and private-charter-independent schools in New Jersey should seriously look into declaring Diwali as an official holiday, thus recognizing the intersection of spirituality and education," Zed said. "The awareness about other religions thus created by such holidays like Diwali would make New Jersey students well-nurtured, well-balanced, and enlightened citizens of tomorrow."

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, New Jersey State Board of Education President Arcelio Aponte and New Jersey Department of Education Commissioner Kimberley Harrington, should work towards adding Diwali as an official holiday in all the public school districts in the state, and persuading the private-charter-independent schools to follow, Zed said.

<https://www.theindianpanorama.news/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/TIP-October-20-NYC.pdf>

Diwali Reception 2018

November 20, 2018

“Our greatness is not in spite of our immigrants but because of our immigrants. That is the American way,” said Mayor Bill de Blasio at the Diwali Reception 2018 at Gracie Mansion. The program for the evening began with a welcome and invocation by Pandit Chuneall Narine, the Founder and Priest of Shri Trimurti Bhavan Temple in Queens, NY. Pandit Narine then initiated the lighting of the Diyas (candles) with Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray.

After the lighting of the Diyas, First Lady Chirlane McCray conveyed the joy the celebration of Diwali brings to her and Mayor Bill de Blasio. “What we love most about this magnificent holiday beyond the dazzle of the colors and lights, beyond the exhilarating aromas is that Diwali celebrates the light within each of us.” She expressed the importance of positive light especially at a time when there are many individuals struggling with untreated mental health challenges and substance abuse. She noted, “Diwali calls on us to embrace our inner light and reminds us that we are stronger when we come together.”

Mayor Bill de Blasio continued on to say, “The lights of Diwali remind us that wisdom outshines ignorance and unity defeats division.” He also noted that New York City attracts talented and diverse individuals and presented a proclamation to honoree Padma Lakshmi, who immigrated from India as a child. While most recognized for her roles in *Top Chef* and *Star Trek*, Padma is also a producer, actress, model, TV host, business woman, and award-winning author. Ms. Lakshmi continues to fight for the rights of immigrants and reproductive rights of women.

Upon being presented the proclamation that named November 20, 2018 as Padma Lakshmi Day, she stated, “I am able to be fully Indian with ease and fully American at the same time because I think that is the beauty of America. You don’t have to give up one to gain the other.”

In conclusion, she encouraged the crowd to make a commitment to give back to the community. She expressed how heartbreaking it has been seeing children separated from their families. She stated, “I encourage you all to get involved because this country is made up of us, not them. Us.”



First Lady Chirlane McCray welcoming the South Asian community to Gracie Mansion.

Advocates renew pressure to recognize Diwali as a school holiday



Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, a 2021 mayoral candidate, told POLITICO he sent a letter to City Hall on Oct. 21 asking them to make Diwali an official holiday. | Evan Agostini/Invision/AP Photo

By **MADINA TOURÉ** 10/31/2019 05:00 AM EDT

A long-simmering fight to recognize Diwali as a school holiday is gaining in intensity years after Mayor Bill de Blasio proclaimed he wouldn't add any more school holidays to the academic calendar.

Diwali is a festival of lights celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and some Buddhists in South Asian as well as Caribbean countries. There are currently more than 200,000 people of South Asian descent in New York City. In 2015, de Blasio announced school holidays for the Muslim holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha as well as for the Asian Lunar New Year following years of advocacy. The city also recognizes Christian and Jewish holidays, including Christmas, Passover, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

At the time, the mayor said he only made campaign promises to create the Lunar New Year and Muslim holidays and would [not recognize any more](#) for city schools. He cited a state requirement of 180 days of instruction, but the move upset South Asians who wanted a school holiday for one of the most important festivals of their calendar.

Neeta Jain, a Democratic district leader for the Flushing, Hillcrest and Kew Gardens areas of Queens, told POLITICO that 16 Council members agreed to co-sponsor a resolution introduced by Council Member Daniel Dromm in 2013 that calls on the city's Department of Education to [recognize Diwali as a school holiday](#) — a resolution that was introduced again last year.

Dromm said the resolution is still in limbo. It currently has only five sponsors — all of them representing Queens where the South Asian population is concentrated. It needs at least 26 yes votes to be approved by the Council.

"Councilman Danny Dromm, his office, Rory Lancman's office, Barry Grodenchik's office and other offices are joining hands together and I'm not leaving them alone, pushing them so hopefully within 30 days, we will have majority of signatures for our resolution," Jain said during a Diwali celebration at City Hall on Tuesday night. This year, the holiday fell on Sunday, Oct. 27th.

Jain said she, Dromm, Lancman and other community organizations met with DOE and administration officials in 2013 to discuss the issue. Barring a few additional meetings with the administration, she said "so far nothing [has] happened."

Lancman told POLITICO following the City Hall celebration that it's "impossible" to argue against recognizing Diwali given recognition of other holidays.

"This is a very, very important issue to the South Asian community that I represent," he said, adding other communities will push for holidays. "Diwali's not gonna be the last holiday that the city is gonna need to recognize 'cause there are other communities in the city of New York."

Assemblyman David Weprin, who also has a large South Asian community in his district, said that when he was on the Council, they suspended alternate side parking on Diwali. He was optimistic the mayor's office would change course.

"I predict that that will happen sooner rather than later," Weprin said.

The DOE said it offers teachers a "Learning About Diwali" resource, which includes sample lessons for all grade levels as well as suggested activities, books and websites. The education department reiterated there are no plans for a Diwali school holiday, but said they will continue to assess the situation.

"The DOE is committed to equality and respect for families and children of all faiths," Miranda Barbot, a DOE spokesperson, said in a statement. "Based on attendance patterns, there are no commitments for Diwali to be added to the holiday calendar at this time, but we will continue to monitor for any changes."

It's unclear precisely how many of the city's 200,000 South Asians are school-aged.

But Dilip Nath, president of the New American Voters Association, referred to the city's recent decision to close schools on Dec. 23 after complaints from parents and teachers over a one-day school week ahead of Christmas. He also said that in the past, advocates and elected officials proposed trading Brooklyn-Queens Day — a day that students have off and teachers use for professional development — for a Diwali holiday. And he said he met with members of the administration as recently as three weeks ago, who told him they need more data.

"We don't need more data," Nath told POLITICO during a separate Diwali celebration at Gracie Mansion this month. "There's enough data and in fact, the mayor recognizes this holiday."

One attendee at the Gracie Mansion event could be seen holding up a sign calling on the mayor to recognize the holiday.

Ahead of the celebration, Richard David, a Democratic district leader for Assembly District 31 and a co-founder of the Indo-Caribbean Alliance, said he grew up in a Hindu household and that recognizing the holiday would make the annual celebration more meaningful.

"Just last month, the mayor added another public-school holiday by extending the winter break, overlooking Diwali yet again," David wrote in a [Daily News op-ed](#). "The disconnect between words and deeds reduces the celebration to a photo-op. I have respectfully declined the mayor's invitation this year and I urge others to do the same."

In March, State Sen. Kevin Thomas, the first senator in New York of Indian descent, announced he was sponsoring legislation that would give school districts the authority to close school on six extra holidays, including Diwali.

"While it's long overdue, I'm glad to be the one addressing this concern for many of the residents in my district," Thomas [said in a statement](#) at the time.

In 2014, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed into law legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Ron Kim and co-sponsored by State Sen. Toby Stavisky [mandating that school boards weigh closing schools](#) on a day in which a large number of students will not be in attendance as a result of religious or cultural observances. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens) introduced similar legislation when she was in the state Assembly.

Dromm said he met with DOE officials and Community Affairs Commissioner Marco Carrión two years ago on the issue as well.

"Their position at that time was ... you needed to have 10 percent of the population in the school system in order for them to consider a holiday for it," Dromm said. "So not much has happened since then."

Assemblyman Kim told POLITICO that before the legislative session begins, he and other lawmakers plan to communicate with City Hall — and push for a bill that requires any city with at least 1 million individuals to recognize Diwali if the city doesn't make the holiday official.

"We have a new executive director of the [New York State Asian Pacific American Task Force] and we're committed to pushing this forward and making this one of our issues ... if the city doesn't get it done, we're prepared to get it done at the state level for them," Kim said.

He too appeared optimistic about the city finding a solution, saying that City Hall has been responsive in the past to calls for additional holidays.

Meng said she supports Thomas' bill.

"I have noticed just in recent years more and more community leaders and people just pushing this issue so it definitely has garnered more interest and I hope City Hall takes a closer look at making Diwali a school holiday," she said.

Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, a 2021 mayoral candidate, told POLITICO he sent a letter to City Hall on Oct. 21 asking them to make Diwali an official holiday.

When asked if he would recognize the holiday if he were mayor or elected mayor, Adams said he would. And he dismissed logistical concerns, referring to the mid-winter and spring recesses as well as the new Dec. 23 holiday.

"There are ways to move around the calendar to get the required number of days," he said. "I say don't take days from instruction. If anything, add days to instruction."

Shubhani Chaitanya, a Brahmacharini, or Hindu monk, who teaches with the Long-Island based Chinmaya Mission, emphasized the importance of the holiday for Hindu culture.

"I really haven't been involved at all [in the political fight] because my thing is really teaching and creating awareness about Hindu religion and spirituality," Chaitanya said. "But I do feel like these days are important, especially if they're taking Eid off and they're celebrating Chinese New Year. Diwali is a huge thing for Hindus all over."



VIRGINIA GOVERNOR

Ralph S. Northam

Diwali

10/23/2019

WHEREAS, Diwali or Deepavali, is celebrated in autumn of each year by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and others throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia and around the world; and

WHEREAS, Diwali is celebrated by lighting the *Diya*, or oil lamp, which symbolizes dispelling darkness and bringing light into life with traditional offerings, rituals, and festivals; and

WHEREAS, Diwali is a festival of lights that includes many traditions such as gathering with friends and family for community prayer, exchanging gifts, setting off fireworks, and decorating houses with colorful rangolis; and

WHEREAS, Diwali is also the Hindu New Year, and it is celebrated on the last day of the last month in the lunar calendar; and

WHEREAS, for Hindus, Diwali is celebration of good triumphing over evil, and that light will prevail over darkness; and

WHEREAS, for Sikhs, Diwali is the day on which the sixth founding Sikh guru, Guru Hargobind, was released from confinement by the Mughal Emperor Jehangir; and

WHEREAS, for Jains, Diwali symbolizes Lord Mahavira attainment of Nirvana; and

WHEREAS, for Buddhists, Diwali represents the day Emperor Ashoka chose the peaceful path of Buddhism over destruction and carnage; and

WHEREAS, diversity represents one of our greatest strengths, and Virginia joins with all those around the world celebrating Diwali;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Ralph S. Northam, do hereby recognize October 23-27, 2019, as **DIWALI** in our **COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**, and I call this observance to the attention of all our residents. Saal Mubarak.

<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/proclamations/proclamation/diwali.html>

Officials push for no school on Diwali

Comrie introduces new legislation upstate to recognize Hindu holiday



PHOTO BY ANTHONY O'REILLY

State Sen. Leroy Comrie, at podium, stands with religious leaders at Shri Surya Narayan Mandir, a temple in Jamaica, to push for the passing of a state bill that would make Diwali a public holiday in an effort to give students that day off.

Posted: Thursday, June 11, 2015 10:30 am by Anthony O'Reilly / Associate Editor

Each year, thousands of Hindu parents in Queens are forced to pull their children out of school so they can celebrate Diwali.

State Sen. Leroy Comrie (D-Hollis) is seeking to put an end to that.

"We're asking that in this most diverse state, and this state that has opened its doors to people from all over the world that we recognize Diwali as a public school holiday," Comrie said last Saturday outside of Shri Surya Narayan Mandir, a Hindu temple in Jamaica.

Comrie on May 13 introduced new legislation that would create a public holiday on Diwali. The bill is in front of the Judiciary Committee.

The Assembly companion to the bill, also awaiting committee review, is sponsored by Assemblyman Mike Miller (D-Woodhaven), whose district has a large concentration of those who observe Diwali, which takes place anywhere from mid-October to mid-November.

A state law already permits the Department of Education to give students Diwali off, as well as Lunar New Year and the Muslim holidays Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

But only the last two were added as days off on the 2015-16 school calendar, sparking outrage by the Hindu and Asian communities.

Mayor de Blasio during a February press conference announcing the addition of the two holidays, said he and city Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña will work to recognize other religious and cultural holidays.

"What we've found in this process is that we are in a very tight situation, as I said, with the number of days that we have to achieve each year, so it's going to take more work to get to that," de Blasio said then.

South Asian leaders gathered with Comrie outside the Jamaica temple last week echoed the senator's call to have children off during the Hindu Festival of Lights.

"To make Diwali a holiday in New York state would be finally a recognition to all Hindus," Ram Hardwar, a priest at the temple, said. "We are approaching or maybe have passed a population of one million Hindus in the five boroughs. We think it's finally time for the Hindus to be recognized."

Mohammed Hack, president of the Inter-Faith Council for Community Development, stressed the diversity of faiths in the city and how each one deserves equal recognition.

"Our great nation by the Constitution offers us freedom of religion and it is very important that every religion benefit from that," Hack said, adding that he supported the addition of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha to the school calendar. "We can't offer to some faith and neglect the other."

Alicia Hyndman — a Democrat who is looking to replace former Assemblyman Bill Scarborough and represent Jamaica in a special election — also pushed for passage of the bill.

"We know that in the public school system we have such a diverse population of children," Hyndman said.

Comrie said he will have his "fingers and toes crossed" that the Senate and Assembly bills are passed this legislative session, which ends in two weeks.

Six New York school districts declare holiday on Hindu festival Diwali

Hindus have welcomed the inclusion of Diwali, most popular of their festival, by declaring holiday for students on October 19 by six school districts in New York State on their school calendars for 2017-2018.

These are East Meadow School District, East Williston Union Free School District, Half Hollow Hills Central School District, Herricks Union Free School District, Hicksville Union Free School District and Syosset Central School District. Another Mineola Union Free School District announced that no home work or examinations would be given on Diwali, reports suggest.

In neighboring New Jersey 2017-2018 school calendars; Glen Rock Public Schools announced closure of schools and offices on Diwali; in West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District, schools will be closed on October 19; and in Piscataway Township Schools, there is “No School for Students” on Diwali. In Pennsylvania, Unionville-Chadds Ford School District headquartered in Kennett Square approved closure of schools on Diwali; while Harvard Public Schools in Massachusetts has declared October 19 as “early release day”, reports add.

Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada today, describing it as a step in the right direction, urged all other public school districts and private-charter-independent schools in New York State to do the same.

Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, pointed out that it would be a positive thing to do in view of presence of a substantial number of Hindu students at schools around the state, as it was important to meet the religious and spiritual needs of these pupils.

Rajan Zed indicated that schools should make efforts to accommodate the religious requirements of Hindu students and show respect to their faith by not conducting regular business and scheduling classes on Diwali. We did not want our students to be put at an unnecessary disadvantage for missing tests/examinations/papers, assignments, class work, etc., by taking a day-off to observe Diwali.

If schools had declared other religious holidays, why not Diwali, Zed asked. Holidays of all major religions should be honored and no one should be penalized for practicing their religion, Zed added

Rajan Zed suggested all New York State schools, public-private-charter-independent, to seriously look into declaring Diwali as an official holiday, thus recognizing the intersection of spirituality and education. Zed noted that awareness about other religions thus created by such holidays like Diwali would make New York State students well-nurtured, well-balanced, and enlightened citizens of tomorrow.

Zed urged New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, New York State Education Department Board of Regents Chancellor Betty A. Rosa and New York State Commissioner of Education MaryEllen Elia; to work towards adding Diwali as an official holiday in all the 728 public school districts, and persuading the private-charter-independent schools to follow.

Rajan Zed further says that Hinduism is rich in festivals and religious festivals are very dear and sacred to Hindus. Diwali, the festival of lights, aims at dispelling the darkness and lighting up the lives and symbolizes the victory of good over evil. Besides Hindus; Sikhs and Jains and some Buddhists also celebrate Diwali.

Hinduism is oldest and third largest religion of the world with about 1.1 billion adherents and moksh (liberation) is its ultimate goal. There are about three million Hindus in USA.



Resolution No. 0146 – 2018 City of New York

Resolution calling upon the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students.

By Council Members Dromm, Constantinides, Vallone, Grodenchik, Lancman, Miller, Adams, Richards, Chin, Koo, Menchaca, Rose, Koslowitz, Brannan, Powers, Reynoso, Ayala, Torres, Holden, Rivera, Van Bramer, Moya, Rosenthal, Kallos, Levine, Ampry-Samuel, Salamanca, Cohen, Lander, Treyger, Levin, Cabrera, Cumbo and Ulrich

Whereas, According to the U.S. Census Bureau's latest American Religious Identification Survey in 2008, there were 582,000 Hindus, 78,000 Sikhs, and 1,189,000 Buddhists in the United States; and

Whereas, According to the Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey, there were about 227,825 New York City residents who identify themselves as Asian Indian, of which many are adherents of Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, or Buddhism; and

Whereas, Diwali, a five-day festival that begins on the 15th day of the Hindu month of Kartik (October/November), is the most important festival on the Hindu calendar, celebrating the triumph of good over evil and marking the New Year; and

Whereas, Diwali is commonly known as the Festival of Lights, with celebrants lighting millions of lanterns, symbols of knowledge and inner light, to dispel ignorance and darkness; and

Whereas, For Sikhs, Diwali is the day the Mughal Emperor released Hargobind, the revered sixth Guru, from captivity; and

Whereas, For Jains, Diwali marks the anniversary of the attainment of moksha, or liberation, by Mahavira, who was the last of the Tirthankaras, or the great teachers of Jain dharma; and

Whereas, Some Buddhists celebrate Diwali to commemorate the day King Ashok converted to Buddhism; and

Whereas, Despite the large number of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists in New York City, Diwali is not recognized as a school holiday in the New York City public school system; and

Whereas, In 2007, the United States House of Representatives passed a resolution recognizing the religious and historical significance of Diwali, and in 2013 hosted the first-ever Congressional Diwali celebration; and

Whereas, In 2011 and 2013, the US Senate passed a resolution recognizing the historical and spiritual significance of Diwali for Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains; and

Resolution No. 0146 – 2018 City of New York

Whereas, Since 2003, the White House has held an annual Diwali celebration; and

Whereas, New York City has already acknowledged the significance of Diwali by suspending alternate side parking rules on Lakshmi Puja, the third and most important day of the holiday; and

Whereas, Currently, New York City public schools are closed on several religious holidays; and

Whereas, It should be noted that Chancellor's Regulation A-630 puts forth guidelines regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations for religious observance and practices for public school students; and

Whereas, Pursuant to Regulation A-630, reasonable accommodations include excused absences for religious observance outside of school grounds, as well as in-school provisions such as time for praying or sitting separately in the cafeteria during periods in which a student may fast; and

Whereas, Despite the intentions behind this regulation, many parents, students and advocates have expressed concern that students who celebrate Diwali are still left at a disadvantage, having to choose between celebrating an important holiday or being absent from school, which can result in these students falling behind their peers, missing lessons and tests, and having lower attendance records; and

Whereas, Other American localities with growing Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist populations have incorporated Diwali into their school holiday calendars, including Passaic and South Brunswick in New Jersey; and

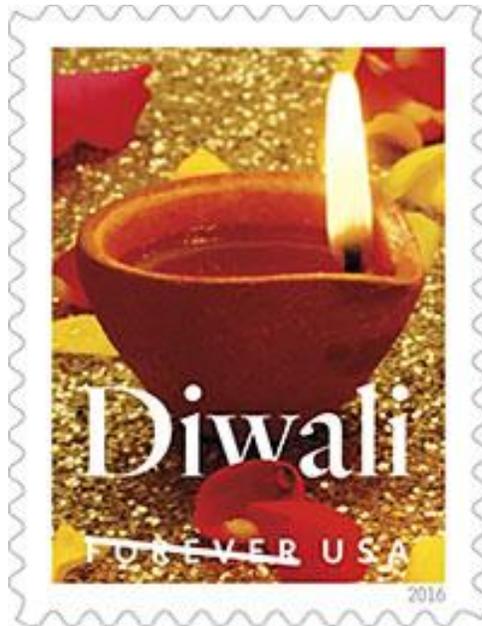
Whereas, New York City is a diverse and dynamic locality in which tolerance and acceptance are central values, and the incorporation of Diwali as a public school holiday would serve as an important embodiment of this tolerance and acceptance; and

Whereas, The New York City Department of Education has authority over the school calendar and, as a matter of policy, can incorporate Diwali as an observed holiday; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students.

U.S. Postal Service Honors Festival of Diwali with a Forever Stamp

Hindu Holiday Celebrated in Late October
August 23, 2016



WASHINGTON — The U.S. Postal Service will commemorate the joyous Hindu festival of Diwali with a Forever stamp. The Wednesday, Oct 5, first-day-of-issue dedication ceremony will take place at the Consulate General of India, New York.

The stamp design is a photograph featuring a traditional diya oil lamp beautifully lit, sitting on a sparkling gold background. Diya lamps are usually made from clay with cotton wicks dipped in a clarified butter known as “ghee” or in vegetable oils.

Also known as Deepavali, Diwali celebrates the triumph of good over evil. Spanning five days each autumn, it is considered by some to be the start of the new year.

On the Hindu calendar, Diwali falls on the eve of, or on, the new moon that occurs between mid-October and mid-November. In 2016, the main day of the festival will be celebrated Oct. 29 for South Indians and Oct 30 for North Indians.

Diwali is a shortened version of the Sanskrit word *Deepavali*, which roughly translates as “a necklace of lights.” During Diwali, the flickering oil-wick diyas sprinkle the homes of observers around the world.

Before the festival, many Hindus traditionally go shopping, clean their homes, open their doors and windows, create intricate rangoli — a vibrant floor pattern traditionally made from materials such as rice powder, colored sand and flower petals — and light diyas with hopes that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, will visit. In some regions of India, people play games, just as Hindu lore says that the god Shiva did. On the festive main day of the holiday, families pray for Lakshmi, dress up in their best clothes, enjoy lavish feasts and sweets, exchange gifts and light fireworks. Diwali also marks the new year for people in Gujarat and a few other states of India. Diwali also is celebrated as a major holiday by followers of the Jain and Sikh faiths.

Sally Andersen-Bruce of New Milford, CT, photographed the diya. Greg Breeding of Charlottesville, VA, designed the stamp and William J. Gicker of Washington, DC, service as the project’s art director. The Diwali stamp is being issued as a Forever stamp. This Forever stamp will also be equal in value to the current First Class Mail 1-ounce price.

NYC Comptroller Supports Holiday For Diwali



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

Nothing would please the New York Hindu community more than a holiday for Diwali. If it could get another one for Holi or Phagwah then that would be a real boon. However, as it stands neither is on the cards despite vociferous statements in various places.

These calls are wedded to emotions and appeal to the fact that since other religions have holidays then Hindus must be included. Well, it doesn't work like that, not in New York with its politics and bureaucracy.

In the 2015-16 School Year, the Muslim community was granted two school holidays by the City, while the Chinese had their Lunar New Year recognized as a holiday as well. What this means is that three additional holidays were added to the school calendar and students and teachers got the day off from school. But this did not magically happen.

According to sources the Muslim community had campaigned for ten years for the holidays. When Mr. Bill de Blasio was the Public Advocate it is said that he was approached by members of the Muslim community and was asked to support their case for the holidays. Mr. de Blasio ran for Mayor and was reminded that should he win the holidays ought to be on his to-do list.

As any politician might do he needed the support of the Muslim community. Mr. de Blasio won and the holidays were granted. The Chinese community adopted a similar strategy and when it looked as if it might not be given Chinese leaders took to the streets in demonstrations to remind Mayor de Blasio of his promise. The Hindu community could not get its act together. There were too many crossed signals and one was not sure who or which organization was leading the drive for the holiday.

The mantra that was off-repeated was that, 'Hindus need a holiday too. If the others can get it so can we. We have a big population and it is time that the City recognizes us with a holiday.' But there is another dimension to this and it is called num-

bers. New York is a City that looks at numbers. There is strength in numbers, as we know, and if they don't add up the City will take steps to delimit and discard. For example, if student attendance is poor in a class the City will close that class and place the students in another class. It does not pay them to open classes for undersubscribed populations.

The same logic applies to the call for holidays. The Muslim community has consistently kept students at home on Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha, two of the main holidays. The Chinese community has done the same with students on the Lunar New Year. These patterns of absences together with politicking from the community organizations sent a strong message to City. If the classes are only fifty per cent filled then it affects instruction, bussing, meals, homework policy and so on. When the statistics are tabulated across the City it makes sense for the administration to grant a holiday. The twin effects of advocacy and non-attendance made their mark.

What of the Hindu community? Many agree that there should be a holiday but as we have seen the leadership is lacking. The South Asians and Indo-Caribbeans are apart when it comes to political agitation. Apart from a handful of persons the two communities seldom meet. Two years ago there were petitions online for a Diwali holiday and a Diwali Coalition was formed but this fizzled out without any results. The petition mustered only 2,000 signatures. A radical group from the South Asian community said it had the strategies and the know-how to get the job done. It organized a picket demonstration in Manhattan and proclaimed victory afterwards but the City did not take any notice.

What is noteworthy is that Diwali is a school

holiday in certain districts in New Jersey and in California. The festival is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains and in the Caribbean by non-Hindus also. Dr. Uma Mysorekar from the Hindu Temple in Flushing has argued that if the other religions are able to get a holiday then the same should apply to the Hindu community.

Mr. de Blasio, however, was having none of it. He reiterated that the two Muslim holidays were campaign promises and

The Federation of Hindu Mandirs that is based in Queens needs to reach out to the Caribbean Hindu community and point out the importance of the holiday to the members. The Federation has been silent on the Diwali holiday and there is room for it to be more proactive.

Given the need for more work to be done it would appear that the best chance for the holiday to be a reality lies in the making of alliances with various parties. The Hindu

vid Weprin. Mr. Stringer held a 'Diwali Breakfast' in his office a week ago and representatives from a number of communities were invited. There was a lamp-lighting ceremony after prayers from Pandit Mahendra Doobay and members of the Flushing Temple. Dr. Mysorekar pointed out that everyday is Diwali and she lit diyas 'for the city, the country and the world.'

Aliyah Latif said that Mr. Stringer has been a tireless supporter of the



NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer and Dr. Dhanpaul Narine at the Diwali Breakfast.

he would not go beyond the Chinese New Year. The Mayor said, 'I understand anyone's impulse to add additional days but at this point I don't intend to make any additions anytime in the foreseeable future.' The calendar for the NYC schools for 2016-17 does not include Diwali as a holiday. This means that the campaign has to begin from now to have Diwali recognized in the 2018 school year.

What are the chances that this can happen? The key to success as in ventures of this kind is community mobilization. The Hindu community needs to take a page and learn from the other communities and with the estimated 500,000 Hindus in the New York area there should be better outreach and involvement.

It is essential that the Hindu communities from South Asia, the Caribbean and elsewhere meet and plan a course of action.

community will do well to invite the support of the Muslim and Chinese communities and work with them as partners. Hindu leaders should begin to actively court the support of the political establishment, especially those candidates that will be running for office.

It is no secret that Mayor Bill de Blasio plans to run for a second term. Shouldn't the leaders remind him of the Diwali holiday in exchange for their support? This is the politics of give and take, of alliances, of holding politicians accountable. This is why Mayor de Blasio was able to say that he was granting two Muslim holidays to the Muslim community to fulfill a 'campaign promise.'

As it stands the best chance for a Diwali holiday seems to rest with Councilman Daniel Dromm, New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer and Assemblyman Da-

Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities and over the last few years he has become an advocate for a number of issues that are related to these communities.

In his remarks Mr. Stringer outlined the importance of the Indian community to the City. He thanked Aliyah for her work he acknowledged the Indian, Indo-Caribbean, Nepali, and Bangladeshi communities at the function to celebrate Diwali.

According to Mr. Stringer, 'one of the great issues that we have today is that in our great diverse city we have persons here that have made great contributions to our civic life and our cultural heritage and our business community. Today we are celebrating the victory of light over darkness and the triumph of knowledge over ignorance and we do this in the spirit of truth and justice.'

Mr. Stringer said that

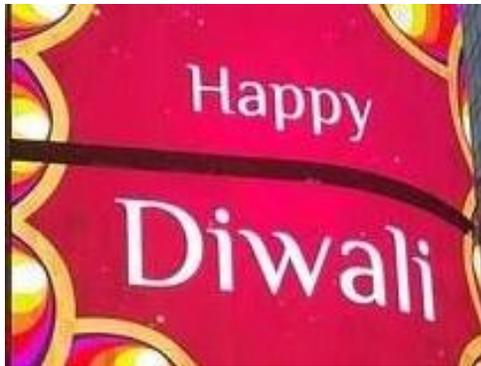
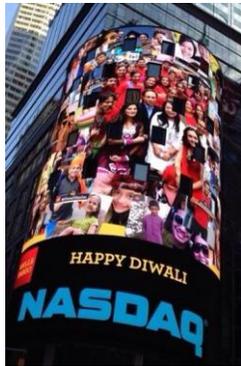
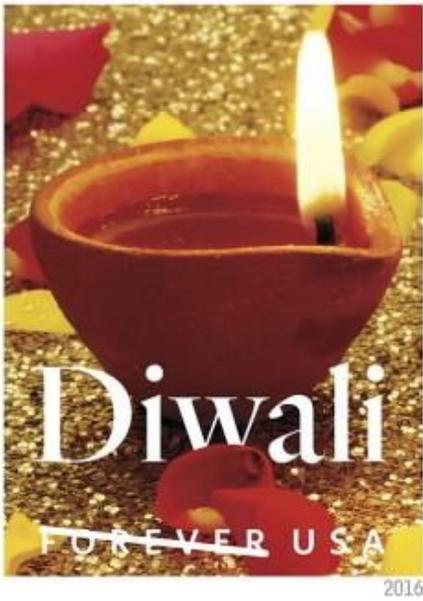
New York has always been a beacon to the world and when there is talk of justice efforts should be made to reach every community. Mr. Stringer said further that, 'immigrants built New York City and we can honor their work by making sure that newcomers have equal opportunities to succeed. Over the last two years I have worked very hard to do just that.' He pointed out that he would try to frame policies so that everyone can have an equal economic playing field.

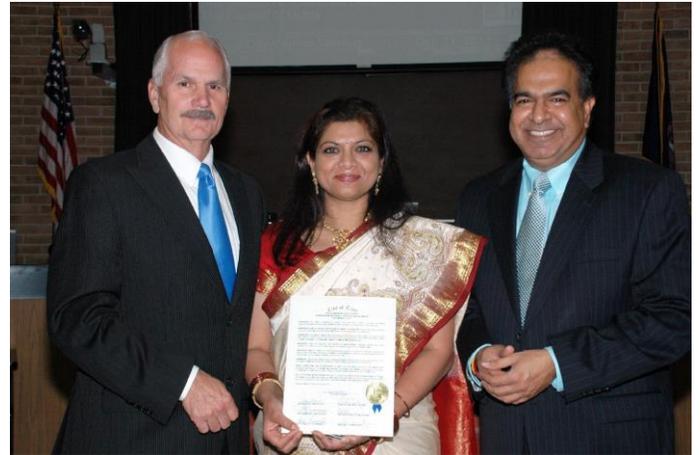
The idea is for minorities to have an opportunity to access contracts from various agencies and Mr. Stringer has promised to be the watchdog for the community. He said that if we are to have one New York people would have to be treated equally. Mr. Stringer continued, 'I am so proud that we are all here today. I am so proud of all of you.' Mr. Stringer introduced Councilman Daniel Dromm from Jackson Heights.

Mr. Dromm said that the Diwali breakfast was a positive step to recognize the diversity of the City and he thanked Mr. Stringer. Mr. Dromm pointed out that he is fortunate to represent Jackson Heights and he stated that the contribution made by the Indian community has transformed 74th Street into an international business hub. He urged everyone to see the movie 'In Jackson Heights' as it shows the diversity of the City.

Mr. Stringer said to loud applause that, 'Diwali has to be recognized as a holiday for the children just as the other cultures are given a holiday for their festivals.' Assemblyman Mr. David Weprin said our strength is our diversity. He said that Diwali is a beautiful festival and he concluded by saying that, 'soon Diwali will be a New York City holiday.'

The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of THE WEST INDIAN.







Proclamation

WHEREAS, throughout its history, New York State's greatest strength has been its diverse population and, as home to people of all backgrounds and all countries of the world, we appreciate our various communities that are united by their values and beliefs, and that celebrate the time-honored traditions of their ancestral cultures; and

WHEREAS, within the Indian and South Asian communities, Diwali is the most significant celebration of the year, known as "The Festival of Lights," it marks the traditional end of the harvest season and commemorates the victory of righteousness and the lifting of spiritual darkness represented in a wonderful display of illuminated objects that conveys a message of unity throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, the Empire State welcomes events that preserve the rich traditions and culture of our many diverse communities and the annual celebration of Diwali invites all to experience one of the most meaningful events observed by the large and vibrant Indian and South Asian communities across our state; and

WHEREAS, the State of New York is the quintessential representation of multiculturalism as the "Melting Pot of the World" with millions of diverse people who live and work together, and Diwali is a time of year for all to share in a moment of reflection, joy, and thankfulness; and

WHEREAS, on this occasion, many have come together to celebrate the spirit of hope for all mankind that guides our communities and, as Diwali inspires events that are source of much festivity, all New Yorkers extend appreciation to our Indian and South Asian communities for their noteworthy contributions and commitment to upholding and sharing an honored ancestry and history of rich customs, and we join in this wonderful celebration with greatest hopes for joy, peace, and prosperity in the future;

Now, Therefore, I, Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York, do hereby proclaim October 30, 2016 as

"DIWALI" – THE "FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS"

in the Empire State.



Given under my hand and the Privy Seal of the State at the Capitol in the City of Albany this eleventh day of October in the year two thousand sixteen.

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

William J. Mahoney
Secretary to the Governor

**NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER**

cordially invites you to celebrate

Diwali

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2018
6:00pm to 8:30pm

DAVID N. DINKINS MUNICIPAL BUILDING
1 Centre Street North, Mezzanine Level
New York, NY 10007

To RSVP, please email EventsRSVP@comptroller.nyc.gov or call (212)669-4466. If you need language translation services or other special accommodations, please call (212)669-4315.

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- COUNTY OF ERIE - STATE OF NEW YORK -
- OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE -
- EXECUTIVE PROCLAMATION -

DIWALI INDIAN FESTIVAL

WHEREAS, Diwali, a five-day festival that begins on the 15th day of the Hindu month of Kartik (October/November), is the most important festival on the Hindu calendar, celebrating the triumph of good over evil and marking the New Year; and

WHEREAS, Diwali is celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and some Buddhists to mark different historical events. For Sikhs, Diwali is the day the Mughal Emperor Jahangir released Hargobind, the revered sixth Guru in 1619, from captivity. Sikhs celebrate this day by lighting the Golden Temple; and

WHEREAS, for Jains, Diwali marks the anniversary of the attainment of moksha, or liberation, by Mahavira, who was the last of the great teachers of Jain dharma. Buddhists celebrate Diwali to commemorate the day King Ashok converted to Buddhism; and

WHEREAS, in 2007, the United States House of Representatives passed a resolution recognizing the religious and historical significance of Diwali, and in 2013 hosted the first-ever Congressional Diwali celebration. In 2011 and 2013, the US Senate passed a resolution recognizing the historical and spiritual significance of Diwali for Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains; and

WHEREAS, since 2003, the White House has held an annual Diwali celebration with President Obama (in 2009) becoming the first President to light the Diya or oil lamp in the Oval Office. In 2016, a commemorative Diwali postal stamp was issued; and

WHEREAS, the Indian American population in the United States grew from almost 1,678,765 in 2000 (0.6% of U.S. population) to 3,183,063 in 2014 (1% of U.S. population), making it one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. A majority of the Indian Americans are Hindu, Sikh or Jain (58%); and

WHEREAS, New York State population is about 10% Asian American with Indian Americans contributing 25% to it. Today Erie County has a considerable number of residents of Indian Asian Decent.

NOW THEREFORE, in honor of this year's festival, I, Mark C. Poloncarz, hereby proclaim Thursday October 19th, 2017 as Diwali Indian Festival Day in Erie County. I thank the India Association of Buffalo for its service to our community.

Given under my hand and the Privy Seal of the County of Erie, State of New York in the City of Buffalo this eighth day of October in the year two thousand and seventeen.

County of Erie, State of New York
By: *Mark C. Poloncarz*
Mark C. Poloncarz, Erie County Executive

Join Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams, Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus and ISKCON NY for a

Diwali Celebration

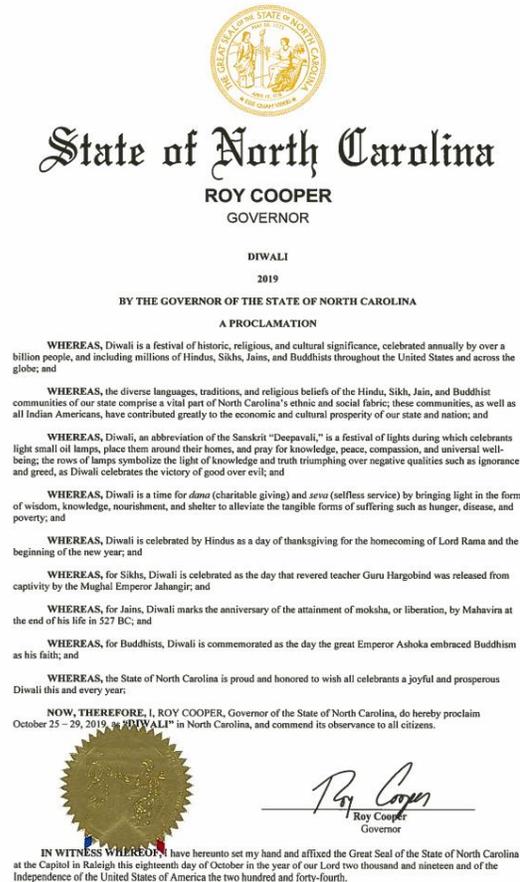
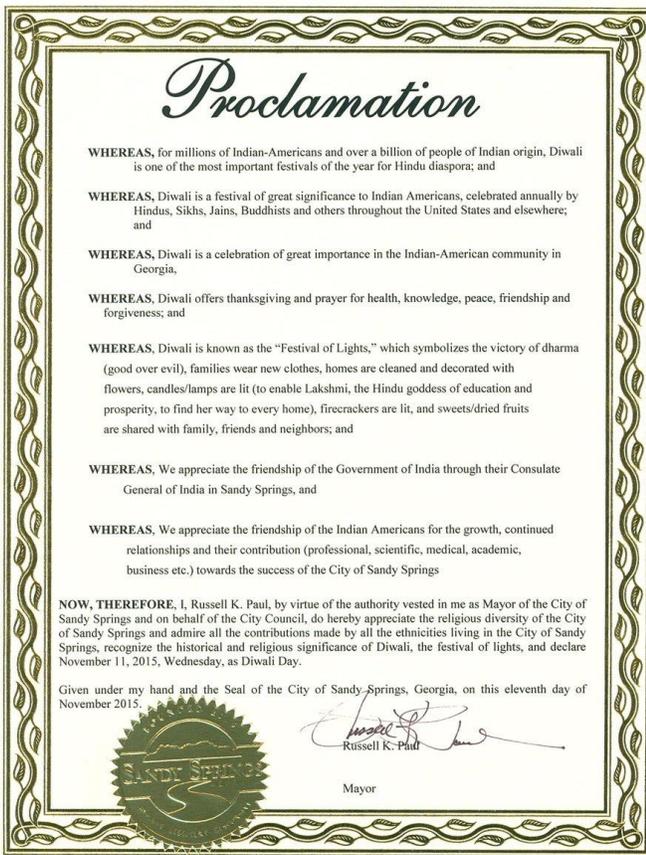
with performance by Sunny Jain of Red Baraat!

Wednesday, November 14th, 2018
6:00pm-8:30pm
Brooklyn Borough Hall
209 Joralemon Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

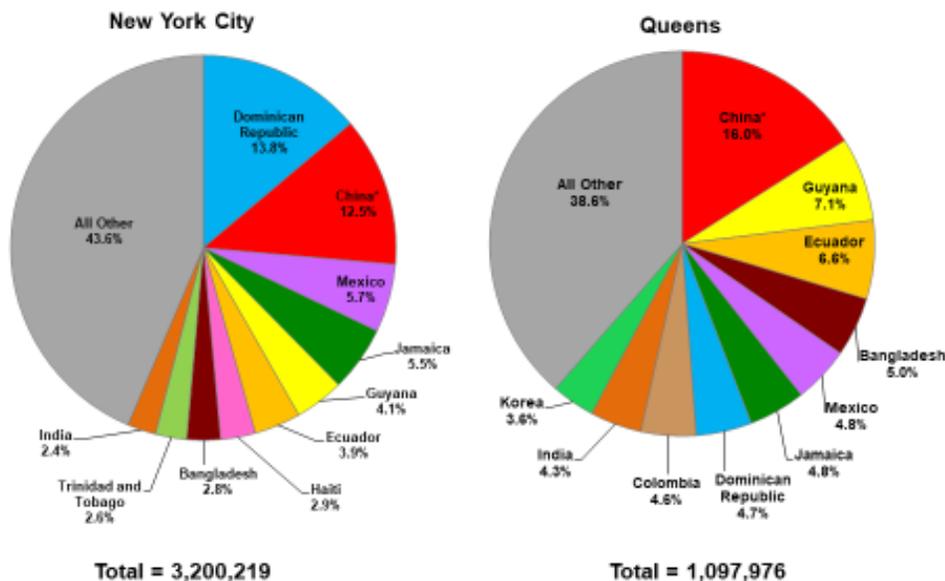
RSVP at BrooklynDiwali.eventbrite.com

To request an assistive listening device, interpretation, or another accommodation, please email Widad Hassan at whassan@cchr.nyc.gov by November 7th, 2018.
Wheelchair accessible entrance on Adams Street

Co-Sponsored by:
Bhavaanee Maa Mandir Inc.
Brooklyn Ganesh Temple
Shri Maha Kali Devi Mandir
Caribbean Equality Project
Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams
NYC Commission on Human Rights
NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs



Top Ten Sources of the Foreign-born Population New York City and Queens, 2016



* Includes the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey—Summary File
Population Division—New York City Department of City Planning

Persons Admitted for Lawful Permanent Residence Queens, 2016

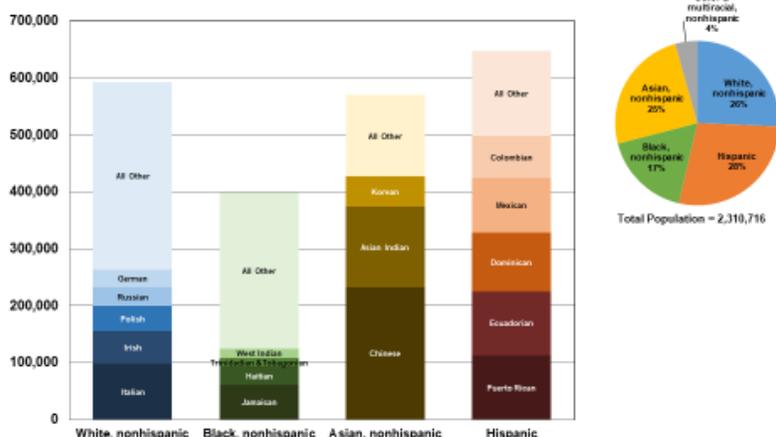
	Number	Percent
Total	40,249	100.0
China*	8,328	20.7
Bangladesh	5,455	13.6
Dominican Republic	3,033	7.5
India	2,050	5.1
Guyana	2,048	5.1
Ecuador	1,868	4.6
Jamaica	1,645	4.1
Colombia	1,150	2.9
Nepal	1,123	2.8
Philippines	1,062	2.6
Pakistan	1,013	2.5



* Includes the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS), Fiscal Year 2016
Population Division—New York City Department of City Planning

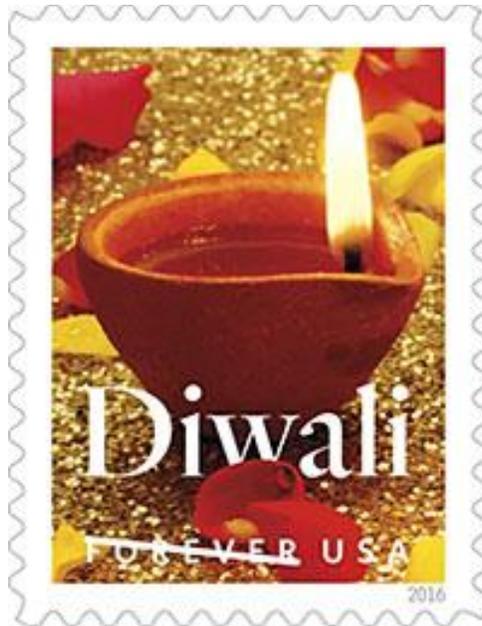
Race/Hispanic Origin and Ethnicity of Queens, 2012-2016



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey—Public Use Microdata Sample
Population Division—New York City Department of City Planning

U.S. Postal Service Honors Festival of Diwali with a Forever Stamp

Hindu Holiday Celebrated in Late October
August 23, 2016



WASHINGTON — The U.S. Postal Service will commemorate the joyous Hindu festival of Diwali with a Forever stamp. The Wednesday, Oct 5, first-day-of-issue dedication ceremony will take place at the Consulate General of India, New York.

The stamp design is a photograph featuring a traditional diya oil lamp beautifully lit, sitting on a sparkling gold background. Diya lamps are usually made from clay with cotton wicks dipped in a clarified butter known as “ghee” or in vegetable oils.

Also known as Deepavali, Diwali celebrates the triumph of good over evil. Spanning five days each autumn, it is considered by some to be the start of the new year.

On the Hindu calendar, Diwali falls on the eve of, or on, the new moon that occurs between mid-October and mid-November. In 2016, the main day of the festival will be celebrated Oct. 29 for South Indians and Oct 30 for North Indians.

Diwali is a shortened version of the Sanskrit word *Deepavali*, which roughly translates as “a necklace of lights.” During Diwali, the flickering oil-wick diyas sprinkle the homes of observers around the world.

Before the festival, many Hindus traditionally go shopping, clean their homes, open their doors and windows, create intricate rangoli — a vibrant floor pattern traditionally made from materials such as rice powder, colored sand and flower petals — and light diyas with hopes that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, will visit. In some regions of India, people play games, just as Hindu lore says that the god Shiva did. On the festive main day of the holiday, families pray for Lakshmi, dress up in their best clothes, enjoy lavish feasts and sweets, exchange gifts and light fireworks. Diwali also marks the new year for people in Gujarat and a few other states of India. Diwali also is celebrated as a major holiday by followers of the Jain and Sikh faiths.

Sally Andersen-Bruce of New Milford, CT, photographed the diya. Greg Breeding of Charlottesville, VA, designed the stamp and William J. Gicker of Washington, DC, service as the project’s art director. The Diwali stamp is being issued as a Forever stamp. This Forever stamp will also be equal in value to the current First Class Mail 1-ounce price.



Indian Diaspora Council

Indian Diaspora Council International

Shared heritage, aspirations and interests

The Corporation

Name: Indian Diaspora Council, Inc.

Acronym: IDC

Original Name: Guyanese East Indian Civic Association, Inc.

Type: Not-For-Profit Organization

EIN #: 11-3480914

Established: September 3, 1997 – New York, USA

Address: Post Office Box 650523, Queens, New York 11365, USA

Website: www.indiandiasporacouncil.org

Email: info@indiandiasporacouncil.org; AshookRamsaran@gmail.com

Telephone: +1-347-494-1502; +1-917-519-5783

Mission Statement & Objectives

Indian Diaspora Council (IDC) is global non-profit organization established in 1997 with the objective to embrace, engage and enhance the shared heritage, aspirations and interests of persons of Indian origin with optimum inclusivity. It shall be secular and non-political with a centrally located secretariat and global country wise network of chapters and affiliates, and collaborating with governments, institutions, organizations and agencies to achieve its objectives.

- ◆ *To* foster, develop and promote good citizenship, civic pride, social, technological and economic empowerment to achieve greater upliftment, understanding, cooperation, collaboration and support among and between people of Indian origin globally.
- ◆ *To* render constructive civic services for the promotion and welfare of the Indian Diaspora community and to inculcate civic consciousness by means of active participation in constructive projects which will improve local, regional and global Indian communities.
- ◆ *To* constantly and actively monitor related Indian Diaspora community issues and facilitate forums, symposia and trade conventions for timely interchange, discussion, debate, and planning for appropriate actions involving associated community groups, associations, institutions and leaders among the Indian Diaspora and among other groups as well.
- ◆ *To* actively solicit respective governmental, institutional, public and private resources for related advice, collaboration, support and assistance for the Indian Diaspora community.
- ◆ *To* inform, educate and engage members of the Indian Diaspora community on critical community issues, for individual and group enrichment.
- ◆ *To* encourage and facilitate timely suggestions, feedback, suggestions, recommendations and responses from the Indian Diaspora community on current issues, problems and prospects for redress and resolution, and provide timely information using updated technological methods.
- ◆ *To* petition respective governmental, public and private entities for redress of grievances and complaints for favorable results benefiting the Indian Diaspora community.
- ◆ *To* provide appropriate advice, referrals and information on current and critical matters which are necessary for the average Indian Diaspora community member to confront and resolve issues of interest and concern.
- ◆ *To* establish relational base links with other groups and organizations for mutual interchange of common concerns, problems and prospects for engagement and progress.

Testimony on Diwali as a School Holiday
New York City Council Hearing
Education Committee
February 26, 2020

Good afternoon, my name is Eric Adams and I am Brooklyn's borough president, representing more than 2.6 million residents who call Brooklyn home. I want to thank Council Member Mark Treyger, chair of the City Council Committee on Education for convening this hearing on Resolution 0146-2018, creating a Diwali holiday for New York City schools.

Approximately 200,000 New York City residents identify as Asian Indian and celebrate Diwali, whether as Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, or Buddhists. The Festival of Lights has significant meaning for these vibrant communities in our beloved city. We proudly and rightly put New York forward as a melting pot where anyone from anywhere can add to the fabric that makes our city great through the celebration of time-honored cultural traditions. We don't require people to dress or worship in any particular way. We accept diversity as a common good. For these reasons, we should recognize Diwali as a school holiday.

Students and families that celebrate Diwali should not have to decide between attending school and practicing their faith. They should not have to fall behind their peers because they choose to honor a rich tradition their families celebrate.

In recent years, we have worked together to recognize holidays for our Muslim neighbors by recognizing Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, as well as the Lunar New Year that is celebrated in many of our East and Southeast Asian cultures. We

cannot leave our Asian Indian communities behind. We must recognize their dignity and officially make Diwali a City-recognized holiday by supporting Resolution 0146-2018.

I want to thank the committee for allowing me to testify on this very important issue.

Thank you for your time and attention.



Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus

www.sadhana.org

Email: info@sadhana.org

Testimony by Karen K Sonilal, Organizing Fellow, Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus
February 2020

Testimony in Support of Diwali as a NYC Public School Holiday

My name is Karen Sonilal and I am the organizing fellow for Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus, a non-profit organization working to empower Hindu American communities to live out the values of their faith through service, community transformation, and targeted advocacy. I'm here to testify in support of Resolution 146 and to call on the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students.

Diwali has always been of great importance to my family and Hindus all over the world. It is a holiday that holds such importance, like Christmas for the Christian faith or Hanukkah for the Jewish faith. I remember growing up and preparing my mind for Diwali a month before it's celebrated. Excited to not only celebrate the festival of lights, but spend the entire day with my family, in prayer and union. Where I come from, namely Trinidad and Tobago, there was no question as to if my parents and I would be home on such a grand Religious holiday. There was absolutely no worry about who would perform puja, our religious ceremony. There was no question in my mind that the Goddess of wealth and light should be celebrated that entire day; or if she would visit my home and my heart on Diwali.

As I grew older and moved to New York City, a land revered for the free and a place where all religions and backgrounds come together, I saw a division in what freedom of religion meant. I saw that while I was given many days off from school because of other faiths, I had to repress my own religious practice. I saw that the parents who were of other faiths, were able to get time off of work, to celebrate with their children who were also at home, while my family and I had to choose between our faith or providing for our family, almost every year.

On a day that I was supposed to be celebrating the Goddess of Light, darkness grew every year that I couldn't be home to do something simple as praying with my family, adorning our Goddess, or emanating positivity, wellness and productivity into our lives. As we take a look at what feels like an option for some, as we advocate for Diwali as a New York City public school

holiday; may we remember the last time we asked children to go to school on the Christmas holiday, the last time we had to work on a religious holiday, and the reason why we differentiate the importance of one grand religious holiday, over another. No child should ever feel as if they need to choose between their education, and their religion. May we stop continuing to ask them to.



South Asian Youth Action

54-05 Seabury Street, Elmhurst, NY 11373 * (718) 651-3484 * www.saya.org *

February 26, 2020

Support of Res. No. 146

Good afternoon, my name is Sonia Bhuta Sisodia and I am the Executive Director of South Asian Youth Action (SAYA). For the past 24 years, SAYA has been committed to creating a safe and affirming space that centers the experiences and perspectives of South Asian youth. We are proud that in addition to our South Asian participants, our programs are attended by youth from all backgrounds. Through our Queens and Brooklyn-based programs located in one community center and nine schools, we support over 1,500 youth annually.

SAYA commends the City for making Eid and Lunar Year public school holidays five years ago. As a City, we need to continue on this path and recognize and celebrate communities that are so often on the margins of visibility and public discourse. SAYA strongly supports the resolution calling upon the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students.

Making Diwali a public school holiday is so much more than just the one day off from school for students. It is a statement from the City telling these youth and their families that they matter, they are part of the New York City community, that they truly belong. Having one's cultural holidays named, recognized and celebrated helps instill confidence and pride in one's identity. It is a statement from the City telling all of New York that South Asians who celebrate Diwali are a valued and important part of the larger community.

I went to NYC public schools in the 80s and 90s and I was one of very few South Asian students at the time in my schools. I always hid my cultural traditions from my peers and was embarrassed of them. That changed when I met my ninth grade biology teacher, who I will name because he is so significant to me and I never had the opportunity to tell him before he passed, Mr. Kevin Sheehy. Mr. Sheehy wanted every student to feel that they belonged and went above and beyond to do that. He was the advisor to our Indian Pakistani Club and arranged school events and assemblies to exchange information and traditions on various cultures. I wish for all NYC students there would be more teachers like Mr. Sheehy. There are other measures the City can take to help students feel like they belong, but naming a holiday is definitely an important step.

Recognizing Diwali as a public school holiday likely results in thousands of students, teachers and administrators who have never heard of Diwali to learn more about the holiday and the cultures and beliefs of South Asians. Teachers may be more likely to discuss the holiday's significance. Beyond the holiday, some teachers and schools may choose to dig a little deeper into the experiences and histories of South Asian New Yorkers. If this is done with intention and thought, this is a win for everyone.

I thank the Council Members who are in support of this resolution. I am hopeful that we can together build a City that continues to work towards being a place where everyone belongs.

Testimony of Kerwin Pilgrim, Director of Adult Learning Brooklyn Public Library

New York City Council Committee on Education
Oversight: Experience of New Yorkers enrolled in adult education
and adult literacy programs.

February 26, 2020

Thank you Speaker Johnson, Chair Treyger and the members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to submit testimony on the experience of New Yorkers enrolled in Brooklyn Public Library's (BPL) adult learning programs. Education for the neediest New Yorkers struggling with literacy is a right, not a privilege. Adult learners need safe spaces to develop their skills as well as challenging opportunities to grow. This testimony will discuss the experience of adult learners, how BPL works to meet their diverse needs, and some of the challenges both the learners and the library face together.

Adult Learners in Brooklyn and the City

Every year several thousand adults come to BPL to learn to read and write, to learn to speak English, to earn their HSE diploma by enrolling in preparation classes, to take the Test Accessing Secondary Completion (TASC), and to find resources and support as they seek employment. They have dreams and resolutions they want to fulfill: improve and complete their education to become more self-sufficient and to better provide for their families. They come to the library with goals: a job, a better job. Some have worked their entire lives; some have recently emigrated from another place. They come to the library because they see us as a lifeline and life changer without limits. The entire BPL team is proud to welcome adult learners into the library community to transform them into lifelong learners and library users.

For over 40 years, BPL has been a trusted provider of free adult literacy programs. BPL's five Adult Learning Centers and classes in numerous libraries provide innovative and impactful educational programs and resources designed for adult learners and speakers of other languages. The Adult Learning department is a continuum that houses our Adult Basic Education (ABE), pre- High School Equivalency (pre-HSE) and High School Equivalency (HSE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and programs, and the department also encompasses our Business & Career Center (B&CC). This continuum allows us to provide the opportunities and support for adult learners at any stage of their education and employment to grow and develop at BPL.

Adult Learning at the Library

The public library is at the heart of the many communities across Brooklyn. I've heard repeatedly from adult learners how much they appreciate coming to a place everyone else in the community already visits; attending classes in our accessible spaces reduces the barriers and stigma they might otherwise face. These learners are welcomed into a learning community in their neighborhoods, they do not have to travel to institutions in another part of the borough or city. Adult learners enjoy the same benefits as everyone else who uses the library, including a wide breadth of free resources and a dedication to their privacy. In addition to their teachers, students also have access to professional librarians and library staff, to computers and computer assistance, books to check out and take home, and a place to bring their families to learn while they themselves learn.

To enroll in our programs, adult learners attend a screening for ABE/pre-HSE/HSE or a registration for ESOL programs. Once they've been assessed, they are placed in the appropriate group or class to improve their skills. Those enrolled in our ABE program work in collaborative small groups for about 4 hours a week facilitated by trained volunteer tutors based at our Learning Centers. The volunteer literacy tutors complete twenty hours of extensive training in learning, reading and writing methodology before stepping into the classroom. These volunteer tutors – some former students themselves – become deeply invested in the progress of their students. Volunteer tutors are complemented by educators with experience in adult education and adult literacy, Literacy Advisors specializing in adult literacy and basic education, and Adult Learning Center Managers possessing experience in adult education. In addition to the small group instruction ABE students also benefit from special workshops and field trips to cultural institutions. We serve over 1, 100 ABE students per year.

Students enrolled in our Pre-HSE/HSE programs usually attend classes 6 hours per week taught by a paid instructor who receives professional development training every year. These students are also encouraged to use online resources designed to help them improve their skills and ability to prepare and pass the TASC exam. More and more we are teaching our learners how to use our online resources remotely from at home so they could continue to learn beyond our classroom walls at hours that are convenient to them. We serve over 2, 500 students per year in our Pre-HSE/HSE program.

Adult learners enrolled in our ESOL programs usually attend classes 6 hours per week taught by a paid instructor who received professional development training every year. These students are encouraged to immerse in other English language activities including joining our ESOL conversation groups or Business English classes. We serve over 2,200 students in our ESOL program every year.

BPL has continued to add to our continuum to meet the needs of our adult learners. Our ESOL students are being taught to ensure they possess the digital literacy skills

needed in today's workplace. HSE and high level ESOL students can now opt to attend classes both at the library and our partner agencies to gain certification in medical billing or the food service industry. HSE candidates may choose to take the TASC test (standardized test in the 5 subjects) at one of our 7 NYS approved TASC testing sites or the portfolio-based National External Diploma Program (NEDP) pathway to earn their HSE diploma.

Many of our adult learners are also jobseekers. Our B&CC librarians work with adult learners to assist them in reaching their career goals. In addition to offering one on one resume and career help, librarians offer workshops on a host of business and career topics. Librarians also introduce students to online resources to help them in their career planning and to help prepare for civil service exams.

BPL supports all of our adult learners with case management to help alleviate barriers from 10 identified areas, including financial and health barriers, with referrals to various partners to assist participants with housing, SNAP, transportation, as well as with referrals to training and other educational programs. BPL employs six part-time case managers and 6 literacy advisors to lead this effort.

Investing in Needed Programs and Spaces

Adult education programming at BPL encompasses a wide range of adult basic education and ESOL. BPL has received Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding for ESOL and pre-HSE/HSE instruction, as well as funding to establish seven HSE/TASC testing sites. Additionally, three of the BPL Adult Learning Centers are funded to provide Literacy Zone services such as advisement and counseling, referrals, employment fairs and workshops – to support their learning endeavors.

In the past few years however, WIOA (previously the WIA) has evolved to require that participants in ESOL and pre-HSE classes obtain a workplace certification at the same time they pursue English language skills and HSE. The BPL team is extremely proud to serve the higher-level adult learners through WIOA and HSE test sites. While this is a boon for the higher-level students, there has been an unexpected effect on the lower level student traditionally served at the BPL. Many ESOL students simply ask to learn how to improve their English language proficiency without the workforce or certification emphasis. In many Brooklyn communities, there are few services to serve this population of learners and an unfunded and unmet need for more services.

As the Library has expanded services at its Learning Centers, we're also investing in renovating them. With support from the City Council and Mayor, three of the five Learning Centers will soon receive major renovations. At Central Library, construction will shortly begin on a new, temporary Learning Center designed in partnership with adult learners and literacy tutors. At Eastern Parkway, planners worked with the Learning Center community to come up with design standards for their future space. The same process will also happen at New Lots Library. Safe spaces – both physical and

psychological – are necessary for learning. Adult learners need to feel safe taking risks necessary to the learning process – they need to be free to go beyond their barriers, to learn from making mistakes and to keep trying until they succeed. With your support, we're creating environments to encourage this learning.

CONCLUSION

BPL has a long-storied history of serving adult learners who continue to look to public library to continue their education. BPL is proud to welcome and serve adult learners in innovative and impactful ways. We are responsive to learners and their needs and provide additional services and support to help them achieve their educational and career goals. With support we will continue to address the needs of adult learners in our libraries as their needs evolve.



45 Broadway, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10006
Tel: 212-967-0322 | www.unhny.org

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**Presented by Lena Cohen, Policy Analyst
February 26, 2020**

Good afternoon Chair Treyger and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses of New York. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 43 neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers.

UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels. Immigrants make up a significant percentage of the individuals our members serve annually in their programs with specialized immigrant services, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, legal services, and citizenship, newcomer, and refugee assistance.

We thank the City Council for negotiating a FY2020 budget that included \$12 million for New York City adult literacy programs. This testimony will focus on the network of adult literacy services in New York City and recommendations to strengthen these programs moving forward.

Adult Literacy Overview and Need

Adult literacy supports individuals, families, and communities through a broad range of benefits. At its core, English language proficiency is essential to fully partake in the economic, social and civic aspects of our society. From the ability to navigate public transportation, to the ability to communicate with health professionals, to the ability to support a child's success in the school system, to the ability to find good paying employment or to pursue higher education, English language skills are a necessity.

In today's economy, New Yorkers cannot hope to compete for well-paying jobs if they lack basic English skills. However, with New York City currently being home to nearly 2.2 million adults without a high school diploma, English proficiency, or both, the City's Office of Workforce Development reported that **only 3% of those in need of language development skills are able to participate in City-funded classes.**

Further exacerbating the funding challenges are recent changes in federal policies that make adult literacy classes much more difficult to access. The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) implemented new provisions in 2018 that made it more difficult for individuals with the lowest skills levels, or those lacking permanent documentation, to be served. Instead, WIOA now incentivizes services to those adult learners closest to achieving a near-term workforce outcome. For instance, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) formerly administered an English Language Civics (EL Civics) program, which provided literacy and civics instruction to immigrants on the pathway to becoming citizens. In 2018, that service option was eliminated and replaced by the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) program, which employs a higher-level training curriculum. NYSED has estimated that as a result, up to 17,000 students that were previously served in EL Civics with these federal dollars faced displacement by higher-skilled learners.

Adult Literacy Programs and Student Experience

Adult literacy programs typically serve individuals who fall into one of two categories: 1) Foreign-born individuals who lack English proficiency, but who have varying levels of proficiency and skills in their native language, and 2) Native-born individuals who lack a high school diploma or other basic skills necessary to succeed in academic environments and the workforce. To meet the needs of these individuals, adult literacy programs are generally divided into four programmatic types: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Basic Education in Native Language (BENL), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation.

Students seeking to enroll in adult literacy classes have a variety of learning environments they can choose from. Typical examples of the types of organizations that offer adult literacy include: Community-based organizations (CBOs), the City University of New York (CUNY), Public Libraries, and the NYC Department of Education's Office of Adult & Continuing Education (DOE OACE).

In New York City, characteristics typical of CBOs often include robust wrap-around support services, a culturally and linguistically competent staff, a longstanding reputation in the neighborhood as a safe and trusted source of community services, and convenient operating hours, including nights and weekends. CBO classes are free of charge, with programs typically relying on government and/or philanthropic support to operate. Through CBOs students can access ABE, BENL, ESOL and HSE classes, as well as Bridge, Family Literacy, Civics programs.

Despite the evidence-based approaches adult literacy programs employ, and the rigorous professional development regime for instructors, the success of adult learners is often predicated on how well programs can accommodate their other social service needs. A working parent without reliable access to childcare, or an adult learner with mental health challenges, or a skilled professional from abroad in need of immediate employment, can more easily commit and benefit from classes if those needs are met. While the level of support services offered vary by provider, resources in community-based organizations like settlement houses can include: case management, workforce development

programming, child care assistance, college planning guidance, legal assistance, behavioral health services, and housing assistance.

UNH Recommendations

In order to ensure that all New Yorkers who wish to access these programs can continue to do so, United Neighborhood Houses urges the City to:

- 1. Invest \$2 million in a pilot program;**
- 2. Baseline \$12 million for DYCD-funded adult literacy programs in the FY2021 budget**

Pilot Program

One of the significant challenges of the adult literacy system is that it is seriously underfunded, and where funding does exist, it is at reimbursement rates that do not fully cover the cost of delivering high-quality adult literacy classes. A 2017 DYCD-commissioned report conducted by the Literacy Assistance Center -- titled *Investing in Quality* -- analyzed the true costs of providing quality adult literacy programming and found that on average, adult literacy programs cost about \$3,600 to provide instruction and support to each student they serve¹; instead, the current reimbursement rate hovers between \$850- \$1,000 per student. This means that many adult literacy providers are actually experiencing a loss on contracts when they provide literacy services to their community and must raise private dollars to support this program.

UNH recommends the City Council work with the Administration to set aside at least \$2 million for a pilot program that would fund programs at approximately four times DYCD's current rate. The purpose of this project is to demonstrate whether funding programs at or closer to the level called for in the *Investing in Quality* report will lead to greater student gains and/or a wider range of student outcomes than current levels of funding enable programs and students to achieve. It would also potentially enable the Council, DYCD, CUNY, DOE, and other funders to correlate specific program enhancements to targeted student goals and outcomes.

Baseline Funding

With the support and leadership of the City Council, the City has invested an additional \$12m in adult literacy programs in the last four fiscal years. In FY2017 and in subsequent years, the City grew adult literacy funding through DYCD from \$4.9 million to a total of \$15 million. However, \$12m of that funding is one-year in nature, meaning each year programs don't know if they can keep the doors open or must lay off staff and cancel classes. This perennial uncertainty makes retention of qualified staff very difficult, as well as precludes long-term planning. It is essential that this funding be baselined in the FY2021 budget. Without baselining, it is near impossible for providers to plan their programs for future years and ensure stability for their students and staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for the Council's leadership on these critical issues.

¹ Literacy Assistance Center, 2018. *Investing in Quality, A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders*: <http://www.lacnyc.org/investing-in-quality.html>.

Student Story

On behalf of Yekaterina of University Settlement:

“My name is Yekaterina. I am from Kazakhstan. It’s really far from here—it’s close to Russia.

I’ve been living in New York for about two years now. I like to go out for fun and just to walk around New York because there’s still a lot of places that I didn’t visit yet. And there’s always something new you can find on the street.

I speak Russian, that’s my first language, I speak English, Chinese, and Ukrainian.

My friend told me that there is a program in Manhattan that provides intensive English classes. Adult Literacy helped me a lot and our teacher was great. His name was Jay, and he was a great teacher—he taught me a lot and I learned a lot from him.

My goals were to find a place in the United States, to start a new life and first of all I needed to know the language that people speak around me to find a good job and to fit in the society.

I found my first job at University Settlement at Adult Literacy. While working as an office assistant, I learned a lot about the environment in the office. That’s the first thing that was a bit different for me because that was the first time that I worked in the United States and everything is new. So that was a big, huge step for me here in the United States to get a job in the office.

Thanks to Adult Literacy I found another job, a full-time job, at University Settlement at the Consultation Center. The Consultation Center is a mental health clinic at University Settlement. We help people who struggle with mental health issues and I am an administrative assistant there. I’m happy to have that job because, again, it helps you a lot when you move from another country and you start your life from zero to get a full-time job in an office and with a good environment—it’s amazing!

I want to tell you that program is an amazing program, Adult Literacy is an amazing program, because you can find a program that’s free and it’s intensive English and they help you with your job, they help you to build your resume, they help you to study English, and there’s so many things that this program helped me with. So I’m really grateful for that.”

Written Testimony

Designate Diwali
as an official public holiday in the
New York City Public School System

Submitted by:

Ms. Sheetal Shah
Managing Director & CFO
Hindu American Foundation
101 Warren St, Apt 1530
New York, NY 10007
www.hinduamerican.org

Wednesday, February 26, 2020 at 1:00pm

Dear City Council Members:

On behalf of the Hindu American Foundation, I'm writing to urge you to support Resolution 146, which calls "upon the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students."

First, we want to commend Council Members Dromm, Constantinides, Vallone, Grodenchik, Lancman, Miller, Adams, Richards, Chin, Koo, Menchaca, Rose, Koslowitz, Brannan, Powers, Reynoso, Ayala, Torres, Holden, Rivera, Van Bramer, Moya, Rosenthal, Kallos, Levine, Ampry-Samuel, Salamanca, Cohen, Lander, Treyger, Levin, Cabrera, Cumbo and Ulrich for introducing this important resolution.

We also acknowledge and commend members of the Hindu American community in New York for their organic, grassroots effort on this campaign.

According to the Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey, there were about 227,825 New York City residents who identify themselves as Asian Indian, of whom approximately one-third or more are adherents of Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, or Buddhism. While many of the Hindus in New York City originate from India, there are sizable Hindu populations from Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan throughout the five boroughs.

Every borough of New York City is home to at least one Hindu temple, from the Bhakti Center in Manhattan to the Brooklyn Hindu Temple to the Shree Ram Temple in Staten Island to the Vishnu Mandir in the Bronx. Queens, of course, is home to an estimated 60% of the city's total number of Hindus and dozens of Hindu temples (some 60 alone have been founded by Indo-Caribbeans). Both the Gita Mandir in Queens,

established in 1975, and the renowned Ganesh Temple in Flushing, consecrated in 1977, are considered to be two of the oldest in the United States. The Ganesh Temple is home to over 25,000 devotees and host to thousands more during its Diwali celebrations.

Beyond serving the Hindu population, most Hindu temples and community organizations are also actively involved in *seva*, or selfless service of those in need, locally as well as nationally.

In 2014, the City Council urged the State of New York's Department of Education to "establish Diwali as an official school holiday for NYC public students" (Res. 18632013). The City already suspends alternate side parking on Diwali.

In 2013 and 2019, the State of California, also home to a large population of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains, worked with the Hindu American Foundation to declare October as 'Hindu American Awareness & Appreciation Month,' highlighting the importance of Diwali as well as a number of contributions of the Hindu American community to the U.S.

Passage of this resolution would build on that precedent and bring us closer to achieving a more pluralistic and dignified society, with a public education system in place where all children are equal and can thrive in a more respectful environment.

Lastly, it is worth noting that some American localities with growing Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist populations have incorporated Diwali in their school holiday calendars, such as Passaic, New Jersey, South Brunswick, New Jersey, and Howard County, Maryland.

We believe that New York City is the greatest city on Earth and that we should not only follow the example of other cities and states who expanded religious freedom and embrace diversity—but we should be leading them. New York City has begun to demonstrate this through its inclusion of Eid and Lunar New Year as public school holidays. It is now time for the City to equally recognize its Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhists denizens alongside its Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Chinese residents.

Diwali, is a five-day festival that begins on the 15th day of the Hindu month of Kartik (October/November). It is the most important festival on the Hindu calendar, celebrating the triumph of good over evil and marking the New Year.

Hindus celebrate Diwali as the victory of good over evil and of knowledge over ignorance. Sikhs celebrate Diwali as the Day of Liberation, when the sixth Sikh Guru, Hargobind, was released from imprisonment along with 52 other kings. Jains commemorate Diwali as the day Lord Mahavira, the last of the Tirthankaras, attained Nirvana, or liberation.

For more information about Diwali, you can read the HAF Diwali Toolkit at: www.hinduamerican.org/diwali-toolkit.

Testimony to the New York City Council for Diwali as a Holiday

Wednesday, February 26, 2020

I have taught for more than 30 years with the New York City Department of Education. I am also the President of a Hindu temple, the Shri Trimurti Bhavan Inc, that is located at 101-18 97 Avenue, Ozone Park, New York, 11416.

I have seen how our City thrives on diversity and have taught countless lessons in the classrooms on the strengths of this diversity. I see the pride in the faces of students as they celebrate their culture and explain to the school community the history of their festivals. And yes, we get holidays to observe some of them.

Diwali is important enough to merit a school holiday. It is celebrated across a wide spectrum of cultures. It is important for the Jains, the Sikhs, the Hindus and the Pew Research Center (2012) found that 10 per cent of Moslems in the US also celebrate Diwali. This should not be seen as strange.

The growing inter-faith movements across the world see Diwali as the appropriate medium to reinforce the message of peace and tolerance. The Tekreet Movement in Pakistan held an interfaith service in 2018 in an Anglican Cathedral in Lahore on the occasion of Diwali to pray for peace. Diwali has brought persons in rival nations together. In the US, the lamp is lit in the White House, at Diwali, to dispel darkness and ask for peace and good sense to prevail.

What does this have to do with Diwali as a school holiday? As we have seen, the message of peace and light over darkness is powerful. In New York City, surveys by students at Forest Hill High School, and others, show that Diwali has cut across boundaries. Teachers, parents, and students already know of Diwali. They hold Diwali programs in the schools and all cultures participate in them. The data support the idea that Diwali should be a school holiday.

There is overwhelming support from all sections of the New York community for the City to go one step further and grant the holiday. The Mayor too has recognized the importance and significance of Diwali. He holds an annual event at Gracie Mansion to observe Diwali. Every year, amidst the festivities, the Mayor hears calls by members of the audience, 'Please give us a holiday for Diwali.'

The time has come for the City to do what is right, to grant a holiday for Diwali, and officially add to the marvelous diversity that is New York!

Dhanpaul Narine PhD (London School of Economics)

718 501 3189

doclse007@aol.com

President of the Shri Trimurti Bhavan Inc.

101-18 97 Avenue, Ozone Park New York 11416

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kushmani Doobay

Address: 512 e 42nd lane BK NY 11208

I represent: Sadhana Coalition of Progressive Hindus

Address: Ny Ny

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 146 Res. No. 146

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karen Sonilal

Address: 107-42 116th street S. Richmond Hill NY 11419

I represent: Sadhana Coalition for Progressive Hindus/Self

Address: "

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0196

in favor in opposition

Date: 02/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: VISHWAA SOFAT

Address: 90 Washington St Apt 7B New York NY

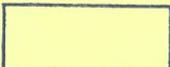
I represent: Public School Student

Address: Stuyvesant High School

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vishwaa Sofat

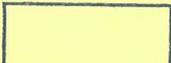
Address: 90 Washington St Apt 7B NY NY

I represent: Public School Student

Address: Stuyvesant High School

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 146 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

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Name: Dilip NADU

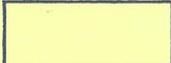
Address: 7634 172nd Street, NY 11366

I represent: New American voters Association (NAVA)

Address: Same as above

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Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Julie Quinton

Address: 227 Ocean Parkway

I represent: Adult Education student

Address: tehr panel

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stephanie Varner

Address: _____

I represent: ADULT EDUCATION

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ELIZABETH CHAVEZ (STUDENT)

Address: 31-24 86TH ST. EAST ELMHURST. NY 11369

I represent: Adult education.

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mayra Mantilla

Address: 310 E 115th St.

I represent: NYCCAL - Adult education

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. Adult Ed.

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Caroline Tasso

Address: 882 3rd Ave Brooklyn NY 11232

I represent: Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jie Ling Huang

Address: 1227 66th Street

I represent: NYCCAL Adult Education

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: IVAN GUZMAN

Address: 564 1st Avenue

I represent: NYCCAL Adult Education

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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Appearance Card

146

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: Feb 26, 2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Radhika Mohan - Hindu Temple

Address: 45-57 Bowne St Flushing

I represent: Hindu Temple Society, N.A.

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0146

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DR Meeta Jain

Address: 150-251 61st Rd FLUSHING, NY 11367

I represent: International Ahimsa Foundation Inc

Address: 37 W 39th Room 305, NY, NY 10018

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Referred Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RAVINDRA GUPTA

Address: 51 LARCH DRIVE

MANHASSET HILLS, NY 11040

I represent: HINDU CENTER

Address: 45-52 Kissena Blvd

FLUSHING, NY 11355

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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146

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: Feb 26, 2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ramakrishna Mohan

Address: 45-57 BOWNE STREET FLUSHING NY 11355

I represent: THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

146

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Usha B. Mehta

Address: 57-10 Junction Blvd. HSB Elmhurst

I represent: INDIA HOME

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0146

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vishwika Sifat

Address: 26 Washington St. 2B, New York, NY

I represent: N/A

Address: N/A

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SUMESHWAR SINGH

Address: 103-16 135 St South, Richmond Hill Queens, 11419

I represent: Diwali (Res 146)

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146
 in favor in opposition

Date: 07/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abigail ^{Devi} Arjune

Address: 7 Garland Lane, Valley Stream, NY 11581

I represent: Diwali Coalition of Valley Stream

Address: same as above

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Appearance Card

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ALBERT BALDO

Address: 106-11 LIBERTY AVENUE

I represent: COMMUNITY (PWR DISTRICT LEADER)

Address: 106-11 LIBERTY AVE

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Appearance Card

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Neeta Jain

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[Empty box]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Res 146+812 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: FRANCES MEYERS

Address: _____

I represent: myself and family

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

41

Appearance Card

[Empty box]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Richard David

Address: _____

I represent: Diwali Holiday

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

39

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 146 Res. No. 146

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: VIJAH RAM JATTAN

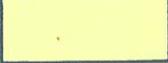
Address: 150-74 116th Avenue, Jamaica NY 11434

I represent: United Madrassi Association, Inc.

Address: 150-74 116th Avenue, Jamaica NY, 11434

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NATALIA WISLOCKA - NYCCAL Student

Address: ADULT EDUCATION

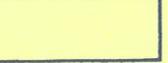
I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Diwali

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Bene madho Rishi Misir (Dharamacharya)

Address: Brooklyn, N.Y.

I represent: U.S.A Pandits Parish & Federation

Address: of Hindu Mandir
Jamaica Queens

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

146

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KAVITA SHAH

Address: 178-36 WEXFORD TERRACE

I represent: INDIA HOME JAMAICANY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146
 in favor in opposition

Date: February 26, 2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sandhya Prashad

Address: 90-20 209th Street, Queens Village, NY 11428

I represent: Aiya Spiritual Center

Address: 85-61 144th Street, Briarwood, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KASHY D. THOMAS

Address: 85-15, 250 Street

I represent: World Malayalee Council

Address: 85-15, 250 St Bellevue
Bellevue NY 11426

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ASHISH GATHODIA

Address: 14015 HOLLY AVE 2B FLUSHING NY

I represent: HINDU CENTER

Address: KISSENA BLVD

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Devrani Brahmanand & Nusraba HOSRIN

Address: _____

I represent: Forest Hills High School

Address: 67-01 110th St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MR JILRAJ BARCHAN

Address: 107-51 115th St

I represent: SWADANA MANDIR

Address: Queens NY 11419

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

Mycal
Advocacy
Panel

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ira Yankwitz

Address: Literacy Assistance Center

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Diwali

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sonia Sisodia

Address: 164 Burns St., Forest Hills

I represent: SAYA

Address: 5405 Seabury St. Queens, NY 11373

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Adult Ed Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 02/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SHIVANI DAMERA

Address: 120 WALL STREET, 9th FLOOR

I represent: ASIAN AMERICAN FEDERATION

Address: ASIAN PANEL (KAS) KOREAN COMMUNITY SERVICES
CHINESE-PLANNING COUNCIL ARAB AMERICAN ASSOCIATION of

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. adult education Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jhordence Jimenez

Address: 24 Thayer St EC New York NY

I represent: NMTC

Address: 45 Wadsworth Ave 10016

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 2-26-20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: STEPHANIE VARNER /

Address: SARAH TYSON

I represent: ADULT ED CHAPTER-UFT

Address: 52 B'WAY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

23

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 146
 in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020 Diwali

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KISHOR H. BHUTA

Address: 12 Vineland Ave. S.I. NY 10312

I represent: Golden Age Community, Inc

Address: Staten Island

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0146

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ASHOOK RAMSARAN

Address: 69-70 184 St F/MEADOWS NY 11365

I represent: INDIAN DIASPORA COUNCIL INT'L

Address: PO Box 650523 FRESH MEADOWS NY 11365

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Judy Garcia

Address: 75 Maiden Lane New York NY

I represent: Literary Partners

Address: MS Garcia wishes to testify on

same panel as Mr. Tassi

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anthony Tassi

Address: 75 Maiden Lane, New York NY

I represent: Literary Partners

Address: Mr. Tassi wishes to testify in

same panel as MS. Garcia

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

NYCCAL Advocacy
Panel

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Adult Literacy
Educational

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liza Schwartzfeld

Address: _____

I represent: New York Immigration Coalition

Address: _____

NYCCAL
panel
(advocate)

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ariel Savransky

Address: _____

I represent: VOA-Federation

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tsering Lama

Address: 71-07 Woodside Ave, NY 11377

I represent: AdhiRaar (Adult Education)

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

Name: Teresa Baik (PLEASE PRINT) Education/Adult Literacy

Address: 203-05 32nd Ave. Bayside NY 11361

I represent: Korean Community Services (KCS)

Address: 203-05 32nd Ave. Bayside NY 11361

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: Adult Education

Name: Deowalie Ricknauth (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 4214 Ave R

I represent: BPL Student

Address: Pacific & Grand Army Plaza

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

Name: Robert Zweig (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 52 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007

I represent: NYL Department of Education

Address: 52 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: STACIE EVANS, UNIVERSITY

Address: DIRECTOR OF LANGUAGE LITERACY

I represent: PROGRAMS/CUNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2-26-2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rong Zhang

Address: Dept of Youth and Comm. Development

I represent: Assistant Commissioner

Address: 123 William Street, 17th floor New York, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amy Peterson

Address: _____

I represent: Mayor's office of

Address: Workforce Development

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 1416

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RANJU BATRA

Address: 142 LEXINGTON AVE NY, NY 10016

I represent: DIWALI FOUNDATION USA

Address: 142 LEXINGTON AVE, NY, NY 10016

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1466 Res. No. 146

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RAVI BATRA

Address: 142 LEX AV, NY NY 10016

I represent: Chair, Nat'l Advisory Council on Senior Affairs

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Adult Education Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Li Hua Yang

Address: 165 Eldridge St.

I represent: AAF Panel Chinese - American Planning Council

Address: 165 Eldridge St.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 146 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dana Ramsemoog

Address: _____

I represent: community member (chayya)

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 146 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sonia Bhuta Sisodia

Address: _____

I represent: Sanya

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 146 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hallie yee

Address: _____

I represent: CACF (Coalition for Asian American children/fam)

Address: 50 Broad St

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 146 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Annetta Seecharran

Address: _____

I represent: Chayya CDC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Adult Education Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mary Hetteix

Address: 613 77th St. Brooklyn 11209

I represent: Arab American Association of NY

Address: 7111 5th Ave. Brooklyn 11209

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2-26-2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Tyson

Address: 2652 Cropsy Ave. 1A

I represent: Adult Education (DOE)

Address: _____