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Speaker Silver, Senator Squadron celebrate new law pushing Lunar New Year as school holiday

NEW YORK – Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, State Senator Daniel Squadron, elected officials from around the city, and community leaders celebrated a new law that will require the city to consider closing schools on Lunar New Year. The legislation (A.7756 Kim/Silver/S.6688 Golden/Squadron) was signed into law Wednesday by Governor Cuomo.

Schools in neighborhoods throughout the city with high populations of Asian American students, such as Chinatown in Manhattan and Flushing in Queens, annually see large numbers of absences on Lunar New Year. At P.S. 124, on Division Street in Manhattan, school officials reported absentee rates of up to 60 percent last Lunar New Year holiday. The 2015 Lunar New Year - the Year of the Sheep – falls on a day, Feb. 19, when schools are already scheduled to be closed for winter recess.

“Lunar New Year is a day of great celebration and a time for families to be together, especially here in our Chinatown community. With this new law, we urge the city to ensure that schools are allowed to close so that parents do not have to choose between celebrating their cultural heritage and their children’s learning time. Students, who want to be diligent and have good records, should not have to be marked absent on such an important occasion,” said **Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver**.

“This Lunar New Year, families across the city can celebrate their most important day of the year without worrying about their kids being marked absent from school – but we can’t depend on luck of the calendar,” **Senator Daniel Squadron** said. “Now that our bill to push Lunar New Year has become law, we look forward to working with the city so parents don’t have to make that choice in future years. I thank Speaker Silver, Assemblymembers Kim and Rozic, Congressman Meng, Senators Golden and Stavisky, and Councilmember Chin for their work, and Governor Cuomo for this becoming law.”

“I am thrilled that Governor Cuomo signed this legislation into law,” said **Assemblymember Ron Kim**. As the main sponsor, I collaborated with so many of my colleagues and received tremendous support from Speaker Sheldon Silver to get us this one step closer in embracing and celebrating cultural holidays in New York City. This is about making sure that all Americans, regardless of where we come from, are institutionally recognized as first-class citizens. Our strength as a democratic society lies in our ability to appreciate diversity and grow together by learning from each other.”

“I was pleased to sponsor this bill, and am glad to see it signed into law. New York is one of the most culturally diverse places in the world, and today we recognize that Lunar New Year, which is one of the most widely celebrated holidays in all of Asia, and by millions of Asian-Americans, should be a holiday,” **Senator Martin Golden** said. “When 60% of a school population is celebrating the Lunar New Year, there is no justification for keeping the school open, and today we codify that thinking into law. I want to thank my colleagues in the Senate and Assembly for joining me in support of this measure, and I want to thank the Governor for signing it into law.”

“On behalf of the thousands of Asian American families in my district, I extend my gratitude to Speaker Silver and Senator Squadron for their leadership on this, and to Governor Cuomo for recognizing the deeply rooted importance of the Lunar New Year holiday within our Asian American communities,” **Council Member Margaret Chin** said. “I am proud to have joined my State-level colleagues in strongly advocating for this legislation for many years, and I am so pleased to see it signed into law. I look forward to working with the city’s Department of Education to make sure that our public schools are in fact closed on Lunar New Year from now on.”

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

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