

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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February 26, 2020
Start: 1:26 p.m.
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Mark Treyger,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alicka Ampry-Samuel
Inez D. Barron
Joseph C. Borelli
Justin L. Brannan
Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.
Daniel Dromm
Barry S. Grodenchik
Ben Kallos
Brad S. Lander
Stephen T. Levin
Mark Levine
Farah N. Louis
I. Daneek Miller
Ydanis A. Rodriguez
Deborah L. Rose
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.
Eric A. Ulrich

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A P P E A R A N C E S

3

Amy Peterson

4

Director of the Mayor's Office of Workforce
Development

5

Robert Zweig

6

Superintendent for the New York City Department
of Education District 79 Alternative Schools and
Programs

8

Rong Zhang

9

Assistant Commissioner for Literacy at the
Department of Youth and Community Development

10

Stacie Evans

11

University Director for Language and Literacy
Programs at the City University of New York

12

13

Julie Quinton

14

Director of Make the Road New York's Adult
Education programs

15

Elizabeth Chavez

16

Make the Road New York

17

Ivan Guzman

18

English student at the University Settlement

19

Natalia Wislocka

Adult Education

20

Jhordana Jimenez

21

Adult Education

22

Deowatie Ricknauth

Adult Education

23

Jieling Huang

24

Adult Education

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

1
2
3 Mayra Mantilla
Counselor at University Settlement

4
5 Vishwah Sofat
Senior at Stuyvesant High School

6
7 Stephanie Varner
Retired Adult Education teacher

8
9 Caroline Iosso
Director of Community and Government Affairs at
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow OBT

10
11 Judy Garcia
Literacy Partners

12
13 Anthony Tassi
Literacy Partners

14
15 Richard David
Professor at York College

16
17 Devrani Brahmanand
Senior at Forest Hills High School

18
19 Nusaiba Hossain
Senior at Forest Hills High School

20
21 Sandhya Prashad
Student at Pays Law School

22
23 Ravi Batra
National Advisory Council for South Asian Affairs

24
25 Dr . Neeta Jain
Founder and President of International Ahimsa
Foundation

Sumeshwar Singh
York College

Tsering Lama
Domestic Worker in English for Empowerment,
Organizer of Adhikaar

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

3

Ira Yankwitt
Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance
Center

4

5

Ariel Savransky
Advocacy and Policy Advisor at UJA-Federation of
New York

6

7

Liza Schwartzwald
Manager of Education Policy with the New York
Immigration Coalition

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9

Mary Hetteix
Adult Education Program Coordinator for the Arab
American Association of New York

10

11

Teresa Baik
Director of Education at KCS

12

13

Christina

14

Shivani Damera
Program Assistant at the Asian American
Federation

15

16

Hallie Yee
Policy Coordinator for the Coalition for Asian
American Children and Families

17

18

Annetta Seecharran
Executive Director of Chhaya Community
Development Corporation

19

20

Sonia Bhuta Sisodia
Executive Director of South Asian Youth Action

21

22

Diana Ramsamooj
Fellow Educator and Community Leader

23

Frances Meyers
Adult Education Teacher

24

25

Ashook Ramsaran
Indian Diaspora Council

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

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3 Vijah Ramjattan
4 President of United Madrassi Association

5 Pratima Kushmani Doobay
6 Brooklyn New York born and raised Guyanese
7 American Hindu identified woman

8 Kavita Shah
9 Indian Home

10 Albert Baldeo
11 Community Activist

12 Devi Arjune
13 Valley Stream

14 Dilip Nath
15 New American Voters Association

16 Kishor Bhuta
17 President of Golden Age Community Incorporated of
18 Staten Island

19 Benanato Miser[SP?], I've been working for New
20 York City for 30 years.

21 Karen Sunnyval[SP?]
22 Organizing Fellow for Sadhana, Coalition of
23 Progressive Hindu's
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25

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2 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: [GAVEL] Good afternoon, I
3 am Council Member Mark Treyger, Chair of the
4 Education Committee. I'd like to welcome you all to
5 today's oversight hearing on the Experienced of New
6 Yorkers Enrolled in Adult Education and Adult
7 Literacy Programs.

8 We will also hear testimony today on Resolution
9 Number 146, sponsored by Council Member Dromm and
10 Resolution Number 812, sponsored by Council Member
11 Salamanca. I will talk more about these Resolutions
12 shortly after some opening remarks.

13 Before we get started, I'd like to recognize the
14 members of the Education Committee who are here,
15 Council Member Grodenchik, Council Member Louis,
16 Council Member Ampry-Samuel, Council Member
17 Rodriguez, Council Member Borelli, Council Member
18 Dromm. That's it for now.

19 Across our City, thousands of adult learners
20 enrolled in adult educational programs and courses at
21 New York City libraries, the City University of New
22 York CUNY, the DOE and the Department for Youth and
23 Community Development DYCD.

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25

1
2 These programs include English as a second
3 language, adult basic education, high school
4 equivalency courses and career technical education.

5 ABE programs teach lower literacy levels in order
6 to prepare students for HSE courses and HSE courses
7 are at the high school level and prepare students for
8 the HSE exam.

9 In 2014, New York State replaced GED exams with
10 the Test Assessing Secondary Completion TASC Exam. I
11 want to take a moment to share an experience in my
12 district. After Hurricane Sandy hit my community in
13 Southern Brooklyn very hard, we had a lot of work to
14 do to get folks back up on their feet and one of the
15 things I worked on in partnership with folks like Amy
16 Peterson, was to push for a Workforce One Center to
17 open in Coney Island to connect people with
18 employment opportunities to turn adversity into
19 opportunity for folks. But I want to share the
20 experience that I've had with the Workforce One
21 Center.

22 There were some folks that were hired but there
23 were a number of folks who were turned away because
24 they did not have adequate credentials to get
25 employed and to get work and I scanned the district

1
2 and realized that there were few opportunities to
3 build capacity.

4 So, my office stepped up to fund free adult
5 education courses. But in the first cohort of the
6 High School Equivalency Course, not a lot of folks
7 completed the course; I wanted to learn why. Through
8 no fault of their own, the students who are actually
9 adults, were not able to complete the courses because
10 there weren't enough supports to help them through
11 some of the barriers they were facing.

12 So, the following year, I doubled down and
13 increased funding. I wanted to do whatever possible
14 to make sure our adult education program set the
15 students up for success. Now, I'm proud to report
16 that the adult education courses that I fund in my
17 district provide free meals, free childcare services,
18 case management and other support, which has been
19 proven crucial for the success of the program and of
20 our students and we're seeing many improvements. If
21 you look at some of the infographics that we have up
22 there as well.

23 We've had a 100 percent increase in enrollment
24 and a 120 percent increase in attendance. That is
25 significant. There has been steady year to year

1
2 gains in students in taking and passing the test.
3 The per student funding rate increased by 97 percent
4 from fiscal year '18 to fiscal year '20. Let me say
5 it very clear, we need to reimagine adult education
6 in this City. It is my understanding that the adult
7 education system which the DOE offers does not offer
8 any emotional support, social, emotional support for
9 our students, for our adults. They don't provide
10 meals, many of these classes are at night, we can't,
11 just like you can't expect children to concentrate in
12 class if they are hungry. The same applies for
13 adults, we're human beings as well. We need to set
14 up all students, regardless of age, up for success.

15 Despite the wide range of city agencies
16 supporting adult learners, research shows that our
17 City has so much more work to do. 25 percent of New
18 York City residents are functionally illiterate.
19 Meaning that they don't have the literacy skills
20 necessary for most jobs and many everyday situations.
21 And this is not just about workforce and jobs, this
22 is about just basic life skills. About being able to
23 support children that they have in school. Being
24 able to increase participation in civic life.

1
2 It's not just about workforce connections but
3 also, just about basic life connections to education,
4 civic life, democracy. Literacy is about
5 independence and liberation and not having to rely on
6 anyone else to get basic understanding that you could
7 do this on your own.

8 As a teacher, I was taught that our job is to
9 create independent thinkers, critical thinkers, where
10 our students could be independent. We have a lot of
11 work to do. Despite the millions of City residents
12 who could benefit from adult education literacy
13 programs, only a small fraction are currently being
14 served. Additionally, data shows that the number of
15 people taking and passing the states HSE exam
16 declined significantly since 2010. While
17 approximately 44,000 New York residents took the HSE
18 exam from 2010 to 2012, only about 27,000 residents
19 took this exam from 2015 to 2017.

20 Even more alarming, there was a 49 percent
21 decline in the number of HSE test passers from 2010
22 to 2017. I understand that there has been some
23 recent improvement in those numbers, with the number
24 of test takers increasing by about 2,000 from 2015 to
25

1
2 2017 and test passers increasing by 7 percent during
3 that period.

4 I also understand that the overall decline in
5 test passing rates is largely attributed to the
6 states 2014 decision to switch the HSE exam from the
7 GED to the TASC exam and steady decline in funding.
8 Still, it's been over five years since the switch
9 from the GED to the TASC exams. We should be seeing
10 greater increases in number of TASC testers and
11 passers. We should also be fighting for the state
12 for more funding and funding that is not just tied to
13 the test but funding that is actually more flexible
14 to meet the everyday needs of New Yorkers.

15 The benefits of adult education are clear.
16 According to Literacy New York, minimum wage
17 employees wages increased by 18 to 25 percent within
18 18 months of completing an adult education program.
19 Additionally, individuals with adult education
20 experience improved health and life expectancy as
21 well as an increase quality of life for their
22 children independence.

23 Adult education also has a broader impact on
24 society. A focus on adult education saves government
25 by decreasing costs for healthcare, incarceration and

1
2 public assistance. Given the benefits of adult
3 literacy, we must not become complacent with the
4 status quo of low literacy rates and low HSE passing
5 rates.

6 I'd like to challenge our city agencies to
7 rethink and reimagine adult education here. This
8 issues must be addressed creatively and ambitiously.
9 What would it look like if every single adult
10 education program had social workers? What would it
11 look like if all adult education programs provided
12 free childcare, metro cards, food and other critical
13 wraparound services, similar to the ones I fund in my
14 district? What would enrollment numbers and passing
15 rates look like then?

16 This hearing not only provides an opportunity for
17 us to learn about the adult literacy services offered
18 by city agencies but critical to this hearing, is
19 stretching our thinking around this often overlooked
20 surface. The Committee is interested in learning
21 from community based providers like opportunities for
22 better tomorrow which provide the wraparound services
23 to its adult learners and as a result is seeing real
24 impact and real student learning.

1
2 The Committee is also especially interested in
3 learning from adult learners, teachers and other
4 critical voices about how we can improve adult
5 literacy programs in our city. For our city
6 partners, CUNY, DOE, DYCD and the libraries, we look
7 forward to hearing about how you have been working
8 together and within your respective agencies to
9 improve adult literacy in our city.

10 As I stated earlier, we'll also hear testimony on
11 two resolutions. Resolution Number 146 and
12 Resolution calling upon the New York City DOE to
13 establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York
14 City public school students and Resolution Number
15 812, a Resolution upon the New York City DOE to
16 incorporate Three Kings Day as an observed school
17 holiday in the school calendar for the city school
18 district of the City of New York.

19 I want to thank everyone who is testifying today.
20 I want to thank the City Council staff for all of
21 their tremendous work, Malcom Butehorn the Committee
22 Counsel, Jan Atwell Policy Analyst, Kalima Johnson
23 Policy Analyst, Chelsea Baytemur Financial Analyst,
24 Masis Sarkissian Financial Analyst.

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2 I want to thank my Chief of Staff Anna Scaife who
3 is also my Budget Director and helped me put together
4 the program in my district to provide free meals and
5 childcare for students in my district, which I'm very
6 proud of and I thank Anna for that. And my Policy
7 Directive Vanessa Ogle, who is handling our tech
8 screen today.

9 I will now turn the floor over to my colleague
10 Council Member Dromm for his remarks on Resolution
11 146.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you very much Chair
13 Treyger and thank you for the work that you're doing
14 on adult literacy and adult education and career
15 education. We worked a little bit on that when I was
16 Chair of Education Committee, I'm glad to see that
17 you're following up on it and really supporting that
18 and I want to thank you also for today's hearing on
19 Resolution 146, which calls on the New York City
20 Department of Education to establish Diwali as an
21 official holiday for New York City public school
22 students.

23 Diwali is the most important festival on the
24 Hindu calendar. Celebrating the triumph of good over
25 evil and walking the new year. Diwali, beginning on

1
2 the 15th day of the Hindu month of Kartika, usually
3 in October or November is commonly known as the
4 festival of lights. With celebrants lighting
5 millions of lanterns, symbols of knowledge and inner
6 light to the dispel ignorance and darkness.

7 In addition to Hindu's, Diwali is celebrated by
8 Sikhs, Jains and many Buddhists. Currently, New York
9 City public schools are closed on several religious
10 holidays for Christians, Jews and Muslims. However,
11 despite the large number of Hindu's, Sikhs, Jains and
12 Buddhist's in New York City, Diwali is not currently
13 recognized as a school holiday in the City's public
14 school system.

15 While Chancellor's regulations allow excused
16 absences for religious observances, many parents,
17 students and advocates have expressed concern that
18 students who celebrate Diwali are still left at a
19 disadvantage. Having to chose between celebrating an
20 important holiday or being absent from school, which
21 can result in these students falling behind their
22 peers missing lessons and tests and having lower
23 attendance records.

24 On Long Island, Sikhs school districts have
25 already declared Diwali a school holiday. New York

1
2 City cannot fall behind Long Island. We are the most
3 diverse inclusive and accepting city in the U.S. and
4 the incorporation of Diwali into the holiday calendar
5 is a reflection not only of who we are but also of
6 what we value. Now more than ever, it is important
7 to reaffirm these values.

8 In fact, tomorrow, another one of my resolutions
9 will be introduced about the need for religious
10 literacy education and professional development. One
11 of the most cherished memories of my career as a
12 teacher was presenting new cultures to students
13 including discussing the significance of Diwali.
14 Actually, for those students whose family celebrated
15 the holiday, such lessons were an affirmation of
16 acceptance.

17 I know there is concern about losing another
18 instructional day, but it is possible to reconfigure
19 the calendar so that it does not happen. All
20 districts are required to make provisions for snow
21 days but many districts that don't use their snow
22 days will end the school year earlier, while New York
23 City does not. City schools will go all the way
24 through June 28th this year regardless of whether or
25 not snow days are used.

1
2 This issue has become even more compelling since
3 it was last heard by this Committee in November 2016.
4 The diverse communities of Hindu's, Sikhs, Jains and
5 Buddhists have only grown in my district and
6 throughout the city. In the three years since I
7 chaired that hearing of the Education Committee, the
8 momentum has grown and now 35 of my colleagues have
9 signed on to this legislation as co-sponsors.
10 Designating Diwali as a school holiday is long
11 overdue. This hearing and a subsequent adoption of
12 Resolution 146 will, I hope, push this over the
13 finish line.

14 Thank you very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you, yes thank you to
16 Chair Dromm and also just in proud Council tradition,
17 whenever we're happy with remarks we have like our
18 spirit hands. We do this, but yes, Chair Dromm has
19 certainly led the way and he has been an outstanding
20 voice for our diverse community. So, thank you Chair
21 Dromm for your leadership on that and now, I will
22 turn the floor over to another one of my outstanding
23 colleagues Council Member Salamanca for his remarks
24 on Resolution 812.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you Chair
3 Treyger. Good afternoon. One of the things that
4 makes New York City the greatest city in the world is
5 its diversity. Walk down in the street across the
6 five boroughs and you are bound to hear several
7 different languages spoken.

8 Our communities truly are a melting pot of
9 different cultures and customs. Nowhere is it more
10 apparent than in our schools. Of more than 1.1
11 million students in the New York City school system,
12 nearly half speak a language other than English at
13 home and of those 1.1 million students, 40 percent
14 are of Hispanic or Latino decent. The largest
15 percentage of any demographic. That should be no
16 surprise when you consider Hispanic's and Latino's
17 make up nearly 30 percent of New York City's
18 population. The cultures and traditions of the
19 Hispanic and Latino culture is felt immensely in my
20 borough of the Bronx. As proud Puerto Rican myself,
21 my family and I, my friends and my community
22 celebrate many of the holidays our ancestors
23 celebrated in the native countries.

24 Among them, [SPEAKING IN OTHER LANGUAGE 26:47-
25 26:48], the Three Kings Day in English. For many

1
2 Hispanics and Latino's, the holiday season does not
3 officially end until January 6th, which is when Three
4 Kings Day is celebrated and around the world.

5 People celebrate the holiday with various
6 rituals, feasts, parades and among families with
7 exchanging of gifts. Considering what a special
8 holiday it is for people around the world and here in
9 New York City, I was proud to have passed legislation
10 that suspended alternate side parking on Three Kings
11 Day. But for Hispanic's and Latino parents in the
12 City, Three Kings Day also presents a dilemma. Their
13 children falling behind from missing a day of school
14 while celebrating a cherished cultural holiday.
15 Parents should not have to make that decision any
16 longer.

17 That is why I am sponsoring Resolution 812, which
18 will call on the Department of Education to recognize
19 January 6th, Three Kings Day an official school
20 holiday. New York City schools are already closed on
21 several religious holidays currently as a diverse and
22 dynamic locality in which tolerance and acceptance
23 are core values. The incorporation of three kings
24 day as a holiday, will serve as an important
25 embodiment of these values.

1
2 I thank my colleagues who have already signed on
3 in support of Resolution 812 and I hope more of my
4 colleagues will support this Resolution in the
5 future.

6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you Council Member.
8 I'd like to remind everyone who wishes to testify
9 today that you must fill out a witness slip, which is
10 located on the desk to my left, on the desk of the
11 Sergeant at Arms near the front of this room. If you
12 wish to testify on Resolution 146 or 812, please
13 indicate on the witness slip whether you are here to
14 testify in favor or in opposition to the Resolution.

15 I also want to point out that we will not be
16 voting on these Resolutions today to allow as many
17 people as possible to testify. The testimony will be
18 limited to three minutes per person.

19 Also, just to note for folks in the audience, the
20 way the process works is today, we have a hearing on
21 bills or resolutions and then we have to schedule a
22 vote at a later date.

23 So, I just want to make it clear so no one feels
24 why aren't we voting here today, it's because that's
25 the way the process works. Today is the hearing and

1
2 we'll schedule a vote in the near future. And also,
3 please note that all witnesses who we have the panel
4 already here up. I will now turn to our Committee
5 Council to issue the oath to folks. We have Amy
6 Peterson from the Mayor's Office of Workforce
7 Development, Robert Zweig New York City DOE, Stacie
8 Evans is that correct? University Director of
9 Language Literacy and Rong Zhang from DYCD.

10 And some new members, Council Member Lander has
11 joined us and Council Member Levine and Council
12 Member Kallos and Council Member Levin has joined us
13 as well. And with that, I'll ask the Committee
14 Council to swear in the Administration.

15 COUNCIL CLERK: You can just raise your right
16 hands please. Do you swear to tell the truth and
17 nothing but the truth before this Committee and to
18 answer Council Member questions honestly?

19 And if we just want to start down here and work
20 our way down, just make sure the mic is on please.

21 AMY PETERSON: Good afternoon Chair Treyger and
22 Members of the Committee on Education. I am Amy
23 Peterson, Director of the Mayor's Office of Workforce
24 Development. I am joined here today by Robert Zweig,
25 Superintendent for the New York City Department of

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2 Education District 79 alternative Schools and
3 Programs, Rong Zhang, Assistant Commissioner for
4 Literacy at the Department of Youth and Community
5 Development, and Stacie Evans, University Director
6 for Language and Literacy Programs at the City
7 University of New York. Thank you, Chari Treyger,
8 for the opportunity to speak today about adult
9 education and for your leadership on this issue and
10 the innovation and focus that you have brought to
11 workforce and adult education programs in Coney
12 Island.

13 The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development is
14 focused on providing New Yorkers with resources and
15 opportunities to develop new skills, enter the
16 workforce and earn wages that allow them to achieve
17 economic stability, regardless of their starting
18 skill level or educational attainment.

19 We are working across City agencies and in
20 partnership with the workforce development and adult
21 education community to expand access to good jobs for
22 all New Yorkers.

23 Today, I would like to speak to the vital
24 importance of adult education services in workforce
25 development and in preparing New Yorkers for jobs and

1
2 careers. English proficiency is needed in most jobs,
3 making English for Speakers of Other Languages a
4 vital workforce preparation program.

5 Adult Basic Education helps people develop their
6 reading and math skills, also critical to a skilled
7 workforce.

8 And finally, High School Equivalency instruction
9 helps people earn a credential that is required for
10 roughly 80 percent of jobs with advancement potential
11 and is a prerequisite for many training programs.

12 In New York City, these adult education and
13 literacy services are available through the
14 Department of Education, the many community-based
15 programs that receive contracts from DYCD, the
16 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, CUNY and the
17 three public library systems. Funding to support
18 these programs comes from city, state, and federal
19 streams as well as private foundations. Adult
20 education and literacy services are also integrated
21 into our workforce programs.

22 The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development is
23 focused on two primary opportunities related to adult
24 education. One, maximizing the availability of
25 services across communities and within varying

1
2 education levels and needs and two, connecting adult
3 education with workforce programs and other
4 wraparound services.

5 The City provides adult education through its key
6 programs at DOE, DYCD, CUNY and our library system,
7 but we are also integrating adult education into our
8 workforce programs to address both the quantity and
9 connectedness of adult education services. Examples
10 of our programs and integration include: DOE
11 consolidated District 79 Alternative Schools and
12 Programs with the Office of Adult and Continuing
13 Education about a year ago under the leadership of
14 Executive Superintendent Tim Lisante and
15 Superintendent Robert Zweig. Since then, DOE has
16 significantly increased its focus on helping more New
17 Yorkers earn their High School Equivalency.
18 Additionally, DOE has focused on increasing the
19 number of its High School Equivalency and instructors
20 who are embedded in community based workforce
21 programs. District 79 has long engaged in this
22 practice for programs serving young adults and now
23 DOE hopes to replicate this successful practice in
24 adult serving programs.

1
2 DYCD in coordination with the Mayor's Office for
3 Economic Opportunity, recently awarded contracts for
4 its Advance and Earn program which will combine adult
5 literacy, work experience and skill training to
6 prepare young adults for careers.

7 In addition to the English language classes
8 offered by DYCD and DOE, the Mayor's Office of
9 Immigrant Affairs oversees a free English language
10 learning program focused on conversation called We
11 Speak NYC. We Speak NYC has created materials and
12 resources, available digitally, that help New Yorkers
13 learn English, including by watching episodes of an
14 Emmy Award winning TV show featuring everyday stories
15 of immigrants learning to interact with and access
16 City services. Those videos, alongside workbooks,
17 short stories, and more, were developed in
18 conjunction with CUNY, and are meant to help
19 educators and learners looking to improve their
20 language skills. MOIA also oversees community
21 classes that are led by trained volunteers who use We
22 Speak NYC videos and materials to facilitate seven to
23 ten week classes all across the five boroughs.

24 SBS and DOE have partnered to integrate High
25 School Equivalency Prep and workforce development

1
2 services for young adults 18-24. Our center in West
3 Farms neighborhood in the Bronx is a combination D79
4 referral center and Workforce One Career Center.
5 Young adults that are served at this site received
6 educational placement services to determine which
7 path is best for them to attain the High School
8 Equivalency or Hight School Diploma, tailored
9 candidate services, direct matching to jobs and High
10 School Equivalency Prep class.

11 In addition, SBS/DOE have developed a series of
12 workshops to provide an in-depth introduction and set
13 of fundamental skills for three occupational tracks,
14 in food service, healthcare and tech. An additional
15 track in transportation for diesel tech is under
16 development. These workshops serve as pre-trainings
17 for young adults that can subsequently enter SBS
18 trainings in these occupations.

19 SBS also offers the following bridge training
20 programs tailored to meet the needs of foreign-born
21 New Yorkers. These programs are designed to equip
22 foreign-born New Yorkers with all of the
23 prerequisites necessary to enter occupational
24 trainings that lead to quality living wage jobs
25 including contextualized English for the specific

1
2 occupation, methods of capitalizing on previous
3 experience and education in the American workplace
4 and connection to networks necessary to advance their
5 career. These include: Foreign trained nurses;
6 bilingual medical assistants; web development; and
7 commercial driving.

8 NYCHA operates a pre-apprenticeship construction
9 training program under the NYCHA Resident Training
10 Academy, which embeds contextualized math and reading
11 in its curriculum and cohort and connects cohort
12 graduates to union apprenticeship opportunities. In
13 2017, in partnership with SBS, NYCHA piloted two
14 academic preparation cohorts to prepare NYCHA
15 residents training academy graduates for the
16 competitive Electrician Local 3 Apprenticeship
17 program. To date, over 30 NYCHA residents have
18 passed the rigorous Local 3 exam.

19 CUNY and the Young Men's Initiative are
20 integrating adult education, workforce services and
21 parenting services through the CUNY Fatherhood
22 Academy. The CUNY Fatherhood Academy serves young
23 adult custodial, noncustodial, and expectant fathers
24 and combines parenting workshops, high school
25 equivalency preparation courses, college exploration

1
2 and enrollment support service and job readiness
3 service.

4 CUNY, SUNY and the Mayor's Office for Economic
5 Opportunity are partnering on HSE Connect to provide
6 a streamlined pathway from High School Equivalency
7 preparation and diploma attainment to postsecondary
8 education for adults with legal system involvement.

9 HRA allows Cash Assistance recipients under age
10 25 to participate full time in adult literacy program
11 and they are excused from additional work activities.
12 For recipients who self-enroll into adult literacy
13 programs, the Education Services team at HRA manages
14 a list of 245 registered High School Equivalency,
15 Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of
16 Other Languages programs, including some Department
17 of Education District 79 programs. In 2019, a total
18 of 2,004 Cash Assistance recipients were enrolled.

19 The Parks Department offers High School
20 Equivalency preparation and testing through two
21 programs, the Green Applied Projects and Parks and
22 the Parks Opportunity Program.

23 The above are just a few examples of where we are
24 integrating adult education into our other programs.
25 To increase coordination and access to adult

1
2 education, the Mayor's Office of Workforce
3 Development is working with our partner agencies to
4 integrate State funded DOE adult education teachers
5 into HRA workforce program and SBS Workforce One
6 Career Centers to broaden the reach of the DOE
7 program and tie adult education directly to career
8 readiness.

9 A key priority of the Mayor's Office of Workforce
10 Development is to increase awareness and access for
11 all New Yorkers to the workforce and adult education
12 programs offered through City agencies. We will do
13 this by; engaging on the ground with communities
14 through outreach including local resource fairs and
15 community partnerships; reaching all New Yorkers
16 through a Working NYC Communications Campaign; and
17 creating a map and on-one portal with access to the
18 City's workforce and adult education services.

19 In 2016 and 2017, the Mayor's Office of Workforce
20 Development and DYCD worked with the Literacy
21 Assistance Center and the adult literacy community
22 leading to the 2017 report by the Center, Investing
23 in Quality, A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs
24 and Funders. The report outlines 14 Building Blocks
25 for a quality adult literacy program. As we work to

1
2 expand access to adult education and integrate adult
3 education into our other programs, we are doing our
4 work with those Building Blocks as a framework.

5 Through our efforts, we are looking to increase
6 access to student support services, which is Building
7 Block 5, including counseling and case management
8 that respond to complexity of adult students lives
9 and support their persistence and success.

10 Our office will continue to partner with DOE,
11 DYCD, MOIA, CUNY, and with the public libraries to
12 capitalize on existing successful models and explore
13 new innovative solutions to help more New Yorkers
14 improve their English, develop their literacy skills
15 and earn a high school equivalency diploma, which
16 will position them for better jobs, advanced training
17 and economic security and mobility.

18 We will also connect adult education with the
19 broader workforce system, through employees,
20 apprenticeships, industry partnerships, subsidized
21 jobs, and other training programs, so New Yorkers can
22 access a range of career opportunities.

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

1
2 ROBERT ZWEIG: Good afternoon Chair Treyger and
3 Members of the City Council Committee on Education.
4 My name is Robert Zweig and I am the Superintendent
5 of District 79 Alternative Schools and Programs at
6 the New York City Department of Education. I am
7 pleased to be here today to discuss our work in
8 providing high quality adult educational programming
9 to New York City residents and I thank the City
10 Council for your work to support adult education.

11 I come to this work having spent most of my
12 career in alternative education in New York City as a
13 former teacher, assistant principal and principal
14 within D79. Doing this work for the past 30 years
15 have given me an essential grounding and insight into
16 the challenges of teaching and leaning in Adult
17 Education, as well as the barriers that some of our
18 students face.

19 Our students represent the rich diversity of the
20 New York City. Last year, we served students
21 representing approximately 180 countries. The
22 average ages of an adult education student is 39
23 years old. Sixty-five percent of our students are
24 women and over 10,000 of our students are parents.
25 Almost 80 percent are low income.

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The majority of students we serve, 68 percent are seeking English as a second language 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 career training programs. While Adult Basic Education more commonly known as ABE and Adult Secondary Education known as ASE prepares students for the high school equivalency test. Our adult learners can participate in classes at any of our sites regardless of their borough of residence.

As part of the City's Equity and Excellence agenda for all, the DOE is committed to empowering New York City's adults in their pursuit of knowledge and helping students earn the gateway credentials to a career opportunities. Over the last 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 within our district to enhance our Adult Education programs

1
2 and provide more cohesive professional development
3 and support for teachers.

4 Since this change was made, we have performed a
5 comprehensive review of the program and have already
6 implemented a number of initiatives to improve
7 instruction and better support students.

8 These improvements are showing results. We have
9 seen a sizable increase in High School Equivalency
10 attainment and measurable skill gain in the 2018-2019
11 school year. This positive trend appears to be on
12 track to continue and steadily improve over this
13 year.

14 In 2017-2018, Adult Education had 253 High School
15 Equivalency graduates. In 2018-2019, we began
16 implementing changes to realign our curriculum,
17 enhance professional support for teachers and provide
18 more support for students. That number has now risen
19 to 989 graduates, almost a 300 percent increase. We
20 are pleased we are making progress, but we realize we
21 have much more work to do.

22 Adult Education also has a robust and expanding
23 Career and Technical Education program serving almost
24 2,000 students at seven sites across the City. Our
25 Career and Technical Education program is

1
2 specifically focused on workforce development and
3 students who complete classes, gain industry
4 knowledge and state certifications, in addition to
5 earning their high school equivalency diploma,
6 allowing them therefore to pursue meaningful
7 employment and/or post-secondary education. Our
8 course offerings range from basic computer literacy
9 to certified nursing assistant, automotive and
10 construction programs. More recently, we have
11 expanded our offerings to include additional
12 certifications focused on preparing students for
13 participation in the 21st Century economy. Some of
14 those include: Communication to media; computer
15 graphics technology, fashion apparel; design
16 engineering; and more.

17 All adult education classes are taught by
18 certified teachers and over the past year, we have
19 made curriculum and professional development a
20 priority. More recently, we have recommitted to
21 ensuring our programs are providing curricula aligned
22 to the standards and skills students need for their
23 High School Equivalency exam. We are also working to
24 provide our teachers with constructive feedback and
25

1
2 coaching to build their capacity to effectively
3 prepare students to obtain their diploma.

4 Additionally, we now employ an Adult Education
5 Professional Development committee in partnership
6 with the UFT to further support our teachers. In
7 fact, we had our second meeting this morning.

8 We recognize that students progressing through
9 our programs face many challenges. From work
10 schedules to childcare, as well as the grade level
11 proficiency at which they may be entering our
12 programs. We are now deploying two different sets of
13 support staff to better meet out students needs.

14 As of the 2018-2019 school year, we have eight
15 Assessment Coordinators who work with and advise
16 students, tracking their progress and test readiness.
17 These coordinators ensure that students are on track
18 for taking the TASC in order to earn their High
19 School Equivalency Diploma and monitor their results
20 to provide follow up supports for students as needed.

21 To further support students, we deploy 29 case
22 managers across all boroughs as community referral
23 resources. These support staff conduct informational
24 workshops for students on relevant issues and help
25 refer and connect students to local agencies and

1
2 service providers. In cases where students could not
3 attend school due to childcare issues, case managers
4 have assisted by connecting them to the DOE's LYFE
5 program. Which under D79 offers high quality earlier
6 childhood education services for the children of
7 student parents, ranging in age from 6 weeks to 3
8 years old. With this obstacle to attendance removed,
9 these students are free to attend class regularly and
10 improve their futures and those of their children.

11 Case managers can help get experienced students
12 back on track, identifying students who possess
13 engineering degrees from their home countries and
14 enrolling them in programs designed to put them on a
15 path to rebuild their careers here in New York City.
16 When our students have struggled with health issues
17 or food scarcity, our case managers have referred
18 them to essential healthcare treatment and food
19 pantry programs to ensure that their basic needs are
20 met. These are just a few examples of the essential
21 work our case managers are doing to support students
22 and the impact that work can have in bettering the
23 lives of our fellow New Yorkers. It is clear how
24 vital these services are in supporting students in
25 their paths to success, as we continue to explore

1
2 ways to enhance that impact and expand our number of
3 case managers in Adult Education.

4 In the fall of last year, we began the Adult
5 Education Student Advisory Committee, which meets
6 with the Superintendents team to discuss and offer
7 suggestions on student resources, curriculum, climate
8 and culture concerns and more. This committee offers
9 valuable insight into the needs and aspirations of
10 our adult students and is directly from their
11 perspective.

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

17 In our efforts to further emphasize workforce
18 development, we are looking at new ways to leverage
19 partnerships with community-based organizations.
20 We've done this successfully with St. Nick's Alliance
21 in Bushwick, combining their workforce training and
22 wraparound services with our academic instruction,
23 which allows both parties to maximize resources and
24 prepare students for the 21st century workforce. We
25

1
2 hope and are confident to expand programs similar to
3 this model going forward.

4 To ensure that New Yorkers are aware of the
5 services and opportunities available to them via
6 Adult Education, we deploy eight full time community
7 liaisons. Their primary responsibility is to engage
8 with community leaders and other City agencies, as
9 well as attend events throughout the city to
10 advertise class availability. In addition, Adult
11 Education partners with other divisions within the
12 Department of Education in conducting outreach. We
13 have also begun to streamline our messaging to
14 students through an outreach team that more
15 intentionally communicates our focus on helping adult
16 students earn their High School Equivalency diplomas.

17 The majority of Adult Education programs are
18 funded by a prescriptive New York State Employment
19 Preparation Education grant, known as EPE, that
20 comes from the New York State Education Department.
21 This grant provides more than \$30 million in annual
22 funding.

23 Federal funding for Adult and Continuing
24 Education includes a five year Workforce Innovation
25 Opportunity Act, known as WIOA, a grant for a total

1
2 of approximately \$5 million annually. And we also
3 received almost \$14 million in City funding this year
4 to support adult education services.

5 We are committed to ensuring that New York City
6 residents have access to high-quality education. The
7 trajectory of our programs over the past year and a
8 half have demonstrated immense progress and we are
9 confident that these trends are continuing in the
10 right direction. We greatly appreciate the
11 partnership with Chair Treyger in thinking and
12 working holistically on this issue in order to
13 enhance Adult Education, not only in his district but
14 citywide. We know that we have more work to do and
15 we look forward to our continued partnership with the
16 City Council in these efforts.

17 Thank you.

18 RONG ZHANG: good afternoon Chair Treyger and
19 Members of the Education Committee. I am Assistant
20 Commissioner Rong Zhang for Literacy at the
21 Department of Youth and Community Development. On
22 behalf of Commissioner Bill Chong, thank you for the
23 opportunity to comment on DYCD's Adult Literacy
24 Services.

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2 The ability to read and write is fundamental to a
3 person's capacity to succeed in life. English
4 proficiency is associated with the ability to find
5 and keep employment that pays a living wage and
6 provides opportunities for upward advancement, helps
7 parents fully support and participate in their
8 child's education and to actively engage in civic
9 life.

10 The most recent census data for New York City
11 show that there are 1.76 million or 22.4 percent of
12 the individuals aged 5 years and over who speak
13 English, less than a very well and 544,714 or 9.1
14 percent of persons aged 25 years and over who have
15 less than a 9th grade education. These data point
16 toward a high need for ESOL instruction and adult
17 basic education classes. In neighborhoods with
18 large, low-income immigrant populations, the need is
19 particularly high. For example, Queens Community
20 Districts 3 and 7, that is Jackson Heights and
21 Flushing and Brooklyn Community District 11
22 Bensonhurst, have the highest populations of persons
23 who speak English less than very well and Manhattan
24 Community District 12 that is, Washington Heights and
25 Inwood area, Queens 3 Jackson Heights and Brooklyn 7,

1
2 Sunset Park have the highest populations of persons
3 who have less than a 9th grade education.

4 These findings are supported by DYCD's
5 comprehensive community needs assessment survey. A
6 survey that collected information from residents who
7 were asked, among other questions to identify the
8 service gaps in their community. In New York City
9 overall, survey respondents ranked English classes as
10 the number two service gap from a listing of 28
11 items. In ten communities, residents ranked English
12 classes as their number one service gap. Six
13 communities ranked Adult Education Literacy
14 instruction as among their top five service gaps.

15 We thank the Council for its strong, long-
16 standing partnership on Adult Literacy programs. It
17 has been critical to funding programs across the
18 City. DYCD currently commits \$16.6 million to
19 support Adult Literacy Programs from a mix of Federal
20 CSBG and CDBG funding and City tax levy funding.
21 This work, of course, is complimented by other
22 literacy programs supported by the Department of
23 Education, the City University of New York and the
24 public libraries.

1
2 DYCD's adult literacy programs include a variety
3 of courses to meet the various needs of our
4 participants. For example, these programs offer
5 Adult Basic Education that teaches both native and
6 non-native English speakers reading, writing and
7 math. We offer HSE prep classes to prepare students
8 for the Test Assessing Secondary Completion, known as
9 TASC, ESOL Civics classes and English for Speakers of
10 Other Languages that teach listening, speaking,
11 reading and writing to individuals whose primary
12 language is not English.

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

19 To assist in career and college exploration with
20 participants, DYCD has partnered with CUNY to train
21 our instructors, counselors, case managers on their
22 Career Kits curriculum. The participants learn how
23 to meet literacy goals while simultaneously teaching
24 about careers, incorporating career content into
25 reading, writing, math and research activities, learn

1
2 about CUNY admission procedures, college prep
3 programs, financial aid and practice techniques.

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

14 We have partnered with MOIA to discuss ways to
15 promote We Speak NYC, a video series produced by MOIA
16 and CUNY to help English language learners improve
17 their language skills while learning about City
18 services and their rights. MOIA staff presented We
19 Speak NYC to our literacy providers. A joint
20 professional training session on best practices
21 around integration of the video into the English
22 programming has been offered to our providers.

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

1
2 STACIE EVANS: Good afternoon Council Member
3 Treyger and Members of the Committee. I am Stacie
4 Evans, University Director for Language and Literacy
5 Programs at CUNY. I oversee CUNY's adult literacy
6 and language immersion program. Thank you for the
7 opportunity to testify today. Prior to joining the
8 Central Office team at CUNY, I was an adult literacy
9 instructor and program director and then the adult
10 literacy advisor in the Mayor's Office of Workforce
11 Development. Adult literacy has been my entire
12 career and I thank the Council for its ongoing focus
13 on this issue.

14 Ninety percent of middle-skill jobs in key
15 industry sectors require a high school credential and
16 at least a 9th or 10th grade reading level, yet a
17 large share of New Yorkers lack basic literacy,
18 numeracy and/or English language skills. These
19 adults are locked out of higher education and
20 training programs as well as the majority of jobs
21 with advancement potential. For many adults, then,
22 adult literacy programming is a critical first step
23 toward college and career attainment and long-term
24 employment success and economic stability. The City
25 University of New York has collaborated with the City

1
2 and State for decades to offer high-quality
3 programming specifically designed to respond to the
4 needs of adults with limited educational attainment.

5 The CUNY Adult Literacy High School Equivalency,
6 English Language program launched in 1984 and has
7 been a cornerstone of CUNY's Continuing Education and
8 Workforce Programs division. Over 36 years, it has
9 helped tens of thousands of adults and older youth
10 develop the foundational academic and language skills
11 critical to achieving their education, employment,
12 and career goals. CUNY Adult Literacy programming is
13 supported by City, State, and federal WIOA funding.
14 The combined program budget is \$11.4 million, with
15 \$3.5 million coming from City sources.

16 CUNY operates Adult Literacy programs at colleges
17 across the five boroughs, seven community colleges
18 and seven community colleges. CUNY Adult Literacy
19 offers 15 programs in English for Speakers of Other
20 Languages, 13 Basic Education programs for students
21 functioning below a ninth grade level and 11 High
22 School Equivalency programs. These programs help New
23 Yorkers learn English, increase their facility with
24 reading, writing and math and prepare for the Test
25 Assessing Secondary Completion, the TASC exam, which

1
2 has replaced the GED in New York State. Learners who
3 pass the TASC earn a high school equivalency diploma.
4 Classes are offered days, evenings and weekends to
5 accommodate students work and family obligations, and
6 citywide, nearly 200 classes are offered each year,
7 serving close to 7,000 students. Forty percent of
8 students in Basic Education programs have reading and
9 math skills below the 8th grade level, with nearly
10 2,000 assessed below the 6th grade level.

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

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

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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 student in High School Equivalency 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. 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.

1
2 CUNY's Adult Literacy Programs include case
3 management staff. Counselors provide crisis
4 intervention, short-term support for a range of
5 issues, and referrals to additional campus-based
6 supports. CUNY strives to offer students a one stop
7 service model in which their varied needs can be met
8 in one location, increasing the likelihood that they
9 will access those services and stay enrolled. When
10 learners needs fall outside the capacity of the
11 program or campus, case managers refer students to
12 external providers. Staff support students through
13 these external referrals to ensure that students
14 connect with the destination program and that the
15 transition between services is smooth.

16 While the City's ongoing support for adult
17 education has enabled many programs, including
18 CUNY's, to provide free classes to thousands of
19 adults, federal funding to maintain such services has
20 not followed suit. In 1965, the federal budget for
21 adult education was roughly \$409 per student served.
22 In 2016, it was \$364 per student. Although the
23 number of students and total funds allocated has
24 increased over this time, funding per student has
25 decreased.

1
2 Increased funding and more finely-tuned funding
3 formulas would enable CUNY to enroll more of the
4 millions of New Yorkers who need services and allow
5 for the development of innovative models to better
6 serve historically marginalized learners.

7 In addition to funding levels remaining largely
8 flat, the funding formula is still determined by an
9 annual cost per program slot that hasn't been
10 adjusted to account for economic increases over time.
11 That low, fixed cost limits options for innovation
12 and programming. A higher cost per slot would allow
13 providers to strengthen existing services and offer a
14 greater range of services. Providers would be able
15 to hire more full-time staff in general and more case
16 management staff specifically, including licensed
17 social workers. Programs would be able to pay more
18 competitive salaries, offer staff enhanced and
19 ongoing professional development and incorporate more
20 instructional and technological tools into their
21 programming.

22 Flexibility in program slot cost would allow
23 programs to incorporate service delivery models such
24 as team teaching and bridge programming that have
25 proven successful but which carry a higher price tag.

1
2 In addition to providing more funds for adult
3 literacy programs in general, a critical needs are is
4 enhanced wraparound supports delivered by staff who
5 are trained and knowledgeable in next step planning
6 for college and careers. With increased, targeted
7 funding, CUNY could address this need with sustained
8 professional development in career pathway advising,
9 creating a network of peer-mentors, establishing
10 centrally located CUNY navigators and creating and
11 maintaining a database of current career and job-
12 training resources for case managers to access.

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

24 The New York City Regional Adult Education
25 Network, part of a statewide network created and

1
2 funded by the New York State Education Department,
3 hosts regular meetings for program directors,
4 provides limited professional development workshops
5 for any program that receives funding from State Ed.
6 These meetings and workshops are opportunities for
7 literacy staff from a variety of provider types to
8 meet and work together. The Department of Youth and
9 Community Development hosts meetings and workshops
10 for providers who receive funding as part of its
11 Adult Literacy and Immigrant Services portfolio. The
12 Literacy Assistance Center, the New York City
13 Employment and training Coalition, the workforce
14 Professionals Training Institute, United Neighborhood
15 Houses, New York Immigration Coalition, the New York
16 City ABE Conference and others also provide workshops
17 and trainings for staff from provider agencies and
18 organizations.

19 CUNY's Central Office team leads the state's
20 Teacher Leader Institutes to provide training for
21 teachers across the State. CUNY is also fortunate to
22 be able to have our professional development team
23 provide additional support to instructors and case
24 managers across the CUNY programs. The professional
25 development team also created the CUNY Career Kits, a

1
2 set of comprehensive career preparation resources
3 that address ten industry sectors and integrate
4 reading, writing, research and math skills. The
5 Career Kits are a free resource available online.

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

16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I just want to like
18 associate my name with your remarks because they were
19 pretty spot on. So, I want to thank you. Anyone
20 else join us? Okay, I'll get right to certain
21 questions. Oh, sorry, Council Member Barron, forgive
22 me, who has joined us as well.

23 When folks were testifying, I just kind of
24 glanced over the different titles of folks from the
25 Administration testifying here today. This is a

1
2 question to the whole panel. Who is the most senior
3 person in the City Administration responsible for
4 overseeing Adult Education Literacy in New York City
5 governance today?

6 AMY PETERSON: So, the Mayor's Office of
7 Workforce Development oversees both Adult Education
8 and Workforce Development but as you just noted, the
9 Adult Education encompasses a number of agencies
10 which all report to different Deputy Mayor's. Deputy
11 Mayor Thompson whose office I report to is very
12 focused on ensuring that New Yorkers get the
13 preparation that they need, both for jobs but as you
14 said, certainly civic engagement and all of that.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, I'm not sure if I got a
16 clear answer to that Ms. Peterson and again, I come
17 from a school of thought that says, if everyone's
18 responsible than no one's responsible. And so, what
19 I'm hearing is that we don't really have a senior
20 point person at the highest levels of the City
21 Administration responsible to oversee Adult Education
22 in New York City. That this responsibility has been
23 divvied up and divided across a number of agencies
24 and that's unfortunate because this is a very, very
25 serious issue and I think it has so much

1
2 transformative potential that if we get this right,
3 we actually help solve many, many pressing issues
4 facing the City of New York. And so, I think we do
5 need to have a senior person responsible at the
6 highest levels of City Hall to be the point person on
7 Adult Education in New York City.

8 AMY PETERSON: Okay, and I just want to clarify.
9 So, me, our office, is responsible for both Workforce
10 Development and Adult Education.

11 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right.

12 AMY PETERSON: And I would say that I agree
13 completely that we need to have a focus on adult
14 education but we also need to ensure that it's
15 actually coordinated with Workforce Development. I
16 think that the combination of the two offices and I
17 think the past Administration and certainly redone in
18 this Administration, speaks to the need to make sure
19 that we're maximizing the services that we're
20 providing to these New Yorkers and the way to do it
21 is together, I think in combining these efforts and
22 we talked about that a lot in the testimony.

23 So, I think it's important but we certainly and
24 Stacie mentioned she used to work in my office, you
25 know, she did a very good job ensuring that -

1

2 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yes, she did but we let her
3 go.

4 AMY PETERSON: I know but ensuring with me the
5 like equal importance of Adult Education and
6 Workforce Development in our office.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yeah, I mean, I just, I
8 personally don't, as an educator, not just as a
9 Council Member, I don't feel comfortable putting it
10 all under the wheelhouse of just Workforce because I
11 learned in the case of my district, which you're very
12 familiar with, that setting up a workforce center in
13 Coney Island was not the end of our responsibility.
14 In many ways it was the beginning of our
15 responsibility because I could have simply said,
16 okay, they hired a few people to work on Sandy
17 projects, I can call it a day.

18 No, I did not do that; I wanted to know why many
19 people were turned away for jobs and employment and
20 we learned that it's not just about workforce, it's
21 just about basic life skills, readiness and as I
22 mentioned, I funded and I continue to fund an Adult
23 Education program in my district. I learned things
24 that are very important that I think apply beyond my
25 district. I learned about proximity. You can't say

1
2 that oh, courses are available in Manhattan for folks
3 in Coney Island, it doesn't work that way because
4 there are barriers to that challenge.

5 So, having a class in the west end of Coney
6 Island made a difference. I learned about the issue
7 of food insecurity. These classes are at night,
8 three hours a night and these are human beings. They
9 have to eat, it's a basic life necessity and so, we
10 had to address that need where we fund meals.

11 Also, as noted by testimony of Superintendent
12 Zweig that a significant number of students in the
13 New York City Adult Education program are parents.
14 While childcare was a major issue for us and we had
15 to provide resources to provide childcare services
16 for folks taking the courses in addition to case
17 management and other supports and the data, again,
18 this is just one program in one district, but the
19 data was very telling. Retention, students are
20 staying and completing the course and that's -
21 attendance is really a big indicator of so many other
22 issues. If they are not showing up, we have to find
23 out why. If they are staying, let's find out why.
24 What can we do to replicate that?

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2 I just want to also just highlight the gravity of
3 this issue. There is over 8.5 million New Yorkers
4 approximately. Do we have data, anyone have
5 available how many New Yorkers over high school age
6 are without a high school diploma?

7 STACIE EVANS: So, New Yorkers who either lack a
8 high school diploma or lack sufficient English
9 proficiency, it's about 2.3 million.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I want to repeat that.
11 There's over 8.5 million people who live in New York
12 City, how many are without a high school diploma or
13 the equivalency of a diploma?

14 STACIE EVANS: 2.3 million.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: 2.3 million and we have
16 just learned in addition to that staggering number,
17 we've just learned there is no senior point person in
18 City Hall responsible for the big picture of this
19 issue and this is a crisis, this is a crisis.

20 I want to note Mr. Zweig that in the DOE itself,
21 I've met with you, I have much respect for you. I
22 think you are very much hands on and understand the
23 challenges but you are a Superintendent. You report
24 to a Superintendent. I know within the DOE itself,
25 there's a Deputy Chancellor for Early Childhood

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2 Education, to my knowledge, there is not even a
3 Deputy Chancellor for adult or secondary education,
4 is that correct?

5 ROBERT ZWEIG: That's correct. I think all of us
6 fall under First Deputy Chancellor Cheryl Watson-
7 Harris.

8 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I hear you.

9 ROBERT ZWEIG: But you are correct.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: But Josh Wallack is
11 responsible for all early childhood education. We
12 don't have the equivalent in this piece. So, we have
13 I think a problem in terms of structure at City Hall
14 and government that there is no point person
15 responsible for this at the highest levels, both in
16 terms of the Mayor's Office and in terms, I think, in
17 DOE. Even though again, I have much respect for
18 folks who are sitting here in this room today because
19 I know that you care about this issue deeply but this
20 is even above you.

21 I also want to make it clear that this is not
22 just about Workforce. This is not just about
23 Workforce and the funding strings are also important.
24 What are the funding we've heard, what are the
25 funding streams of, we heard about federal, we heard

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2 about state and city. With federal, as we heard from
3 CUNY, it's minimal, it's basically peanuts, it has
4 not been increased over a number of years and could
5 anyone speak to what are the strings attached to the
6 federal funding? That also is very important, are
7 there strings attached to federal funding. Can
8 anyone speak to that?

9

AMY PETERSON: Well, because Adult Literacy
10 funding comes through the Workforce Innovation and
11 Opportunity Act, there are workforce requirements
12 that are attached to that funding and certainly many
13 people come into Adult Ed programs because they want
14 to become employed or become better employed. That
15 is not, as you said, the only reason that people come
16 into Adult Ed programs and to have the majority of
17 our outcomes be tied to the workforce is a problem
18 for programs because programs aren't actually funded
19 at a sufficient level where they can provide those
20 workforce services.

21

There used to be a range of outcomes that
22 students could achieve that were not workforce based
23 but with the implementation of WIOA, all of those
24 what were called secondary outcomes were eliminated
25 from our measures.

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2 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And you mentioned Ms. Evans
3 that in the CUNY budget is \$11 million or so?

4 STACIE EVANS: \$11.4 million.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: \$11.4 and of \$11.4, only
6 3.5 million in the city, is that correct?

7 STACIE EVANS: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And for DYCD, the figure
9 that you mentioned for Adult Literacy was \$16
10 million?

11 RONG ZHANG: Yeah, close to \$17 million
12 currently.

13 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I know that because we have
14 to fight for it on the City Council.

15 RONG ZHANG: Yes, thank you very much for that.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Your welcome but even
17 though we need a lot more and let's be clear, that
18 even that number is grossly insufficient and you
19 still have issues which I know about in my district.

20 For the DOE, what is the total overall budget for
21 Adult Education?

22 ROBERT ZWEIG: It's in the ballpark of \$50
23 million, a little over \$50 million.

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2 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And of the \$50 million, do
3 we know how much is city tax levy and how much is
4 federal?

5 ROBERT ZWEIG: Approximately \$14 million is city
6 and approximately \$5 million is federal.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And the rest, is that from
8 the state?

9 ROBERT ZWEIG: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Does the state also have
11 strings attached to their funding?

12 ROBERT ZWEIG: Strings in terms of?

13 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: It has to be used for a
14 certain purpose, like Workforce.

15 ROBERT ZWEIG: Yes, I mean, the state funding
16 known as Employment Preparation Education is the
17 primary funder and so, it is designed for Workforce
18 Preparation and then there are strings attached with
19 regard to testing and post-testing to assess student
20 progress, things of that sort. Generating contact
21 hours is a big kind of generator of the EPE funds.
22 The contact hours that the student is actually in
23 school.

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2 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Would you say that the
3 strings, that the state imposes on the City are
4 aligned to the needs of learners today?

5 ROBERT ZWEIG: Overall no.

6 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And can the rest of the
7 panel weigh in on that? Are the strings that are
8 attached to the state and federal funding of these
9 programs aligned to the needs of our students today?

10 AMY PETERSON: Aligned that they allow us to
11 offer services yes. Aligned in that we are able to
12 offer services in the way we know that we would like
13 to, not so much. One of the bigger funding streams
14 that used to come through the State Education
15 Department was an ESOL Civics grant that many
16 programs received. It was a great program. That was
17 eliminated in the last funding application and was
18 replaced with an ESOL program that is entirely
19 workforce based. And that's a great program and
20 could have been a good add on to this funding stream
21 but to have ESOL Civics disappear was a huge loss to
22 many programs.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Does DYCD want to weigh in?

24 RONG ZHANG: My understanding is that the way the
25 federal funded programs have Workforce as an outcome

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2 for the programs. So, naturally, programs will tend
3 to serve people with higher levels of English, higher
4 literate people. So, then you have new immigrants
5 whose English is not up there yet and you have people
6 who are very low literate. They may not be
7 necessarily eligible to benefit from that kind of
8 programs and programs may not necessarily want them
9 there because they have outcomes that they have to
10 achieve.

11 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Correct, and so, there are
12 significant strings attached to the federal and state
13 programs that I believe for the most part are not
14 aligned to the needs of students and learners and the
15 City's contribution to these programs which might be
16 the most flexible, is grossly insufficient and is
17 routinely used to kind of supplement just the costs
18 of maintaining the federal and state programs. And
19 so, therefore we have just a complete broken
20 insufficient inadequate structure and we're talking
21 about over two million people and this is - it's like
22 a quarter of our city. That is really, really,
23 really serious.

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2 I just want to go across the panel, how many
3 adult learners are currently enrolled in your Adult
4 Education and Literacy programs overall?

5 ROBERT ZWEIG: So, last school year, DOE, Adult
6 Education served over 43,000 students. I think at
7 the current, we are in the mid 20,000 enrolled now.
8 So, when I say 43,000, that's over the course of the
9 entire school year and it's enrolling admissions,
10 enrolling discharges, so that's a fluent number. At
11 this point, I believe the enrollment is about 27,000.

12 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, last year, total during
13 the whole course of the year over 43,000. Right now,
14 we're about 27,000, is that correct?

15 ROBERT ZWEIG: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And how about for DYCD, do
17 we have how many folks are enrolled in DYCD programs?

18 ROBERT ZWEIG: Last year, with the extension
19 funds, we served about 17,000 and we currently have
20 about \$70,000, so with expansion money in our budget.

21 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Say it again.

22 ROBERT ZWEIG: 17,000.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: 17,000.

24 ROBERT ZWEIG: Yeah.

25 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, and CUNY?

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2 STACIE EVANS: CUNY serves about 7,000 students a
3 year.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, I was not a math
5 teacher, I was a history teacher but I can do some
6 basic math. We heard that there is over 2.2 million
7 folks without a high school diploma or the
8 equivalency of. 27,000 enrolled in DOE, 17,000 DYCD,
9 7,000 in CUNY.

10 If you add that up, 27,000 plus 17,000 which
11 takes us to 44,000 plus 7,000 is 51,000. 51,000 out
12 of 202 million, what's the percentage?

13 UNIDENTIFIED: 2 percent.

14 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, we're at about 2
15 percent.

16 AMY PETERSON: We agree that the number is way
17 too low but there are other programs that aren't
18 represented at this table, including MOIA and the
19 libraries which get you another 15,000 or so.

20 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay.

21 AMY PETERSON: And I would say, and we don't have
22 a number for - you know, part of what we're trying to
23 do is reach people through all of our programs and
24 so, you will see that adult education and adult
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2 literacy is linked to a lot of the workforce
3 programs.

4 Again, it's still under -

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Director Peterson, there
6 are times when it's just, it's very hard to defend
7 the indefensible and this is one of those times.
8 Thank you.

9 See, this is very, this is very serious and I
10 just, I gave you a very small example in my district,
11 which is a small example in my district which was a
12 small microcosm of the bigger picture here.

13 Of the 43- I'm sorry, now, 27,000 students in the
14 DOE Adult Education program, how many full-time
15 social workers do you have serving these 27,000
16 learners?

17 ROBERT ZWEIG: Due to the funding restrictions,
18 we do not have social workers, we do have 29 case
19 managers but no social workers.

20 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, 27,000 learners in DOE,
21 zero social workers. Do you believe that you have a
22 need for social workers?

23 ROBERT ZWEIG: I believe we have a need in
24 providing more support for students to remove
25 barriers from their education. I don't know if

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2 social workers is the only way to get at that but I
3 do believe that we need to provide greater support
4 services for students.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: DYCD of the 17,000 enrolled
6 in the programs, do you know are there any full-time
7 social workers that provide services to any of the
8 17,000?

9 RONG ZHANG: We do not again, due to the funding
10 constraints, we do not necessarily fund social
11 workers in our programs budgets but we understand how
12 important it is to have case managers, counselors,
13 so, DYCD has developed a case management toolkit and
14 to train, you know, program staff, teachers, to help
15 provide case management services.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I'll tell you why it's
17 urgently needed because as Chair of this Committee, I
18 have fought like hell to get social workers hired in
19 the school system and a lot of our English Language
20 learners or now, they're called multilingual
21 learners, they have a very high need for social
22 workers for a lot of trauma they are experiencing in
23 their lives, particularly under this federal
24 administration these days and bilingual social
25 workers have made a tremendous difference in those

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2 schools that were able to hire and obtain them and
3 what they have told me is that when a bilingual
4 social worker takes on a case of a young person, that
5 case balloons to five, six people because their
6 families need help just as much as they need help.

7 And so, the fact that we also have zero social
8 workers to provide services to DYCD programs is also
9 concerning. Can CUNY speak to social workers for the
10 7,000?

11 STACIE EVANS: So, we have 46 case managers or
12 counselors. There are a couple of people who are
13 part-time who are social workers. None of the case
14 managers or counselors are full-time. All of them
15 are part-time because their funding doesn't enable
16 them to be full-time staff. Most of them actually
17 split their jobs between another job. They are
18 either a teacher/counselor or a counselor/coordinator
19 because that's the only way to provide their presence
20 in the program and also meet the rest of our
21 requirements for their funding.

22 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, next question, again,
23 across the panel the same way. Food, does the
24 education department provide meals for the students
25 enrolled in Adult Education?

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ROBERT ZWEIG: In Adult Education, no, we do not.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And, how long are the classes?

ROBERT ZWEIG: Well, they vary, so full-time classes can be up to five or six hours a day, five days a week in the daytime.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Time out. Just five to six hours a day, no food, is that correct?

ROBERT ZWEIG: No food provided by the DOE, no, that is correct.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: DYCD, how long are your programs and classes for the day?

RONG ZHANG: Our classes usually run from two to three hours.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And, they are usually at night?

RONG ZHANG: Yes, there are morning, evening and afternoon classes.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And, do any of them provide free meals?

RONG ZHANG: Not that I know of. And, although DYCD, our discretionary program unit has started work to explore you know, working with you know, food

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2 pantries to bring food to programs or to connect
3 programs to those. I can begin to explore that.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And CUNY, can you speak to
5 the food issue?

6 STACIE EVANS: None of our programs provide food.
7 I mean and I can also put on an old hat from when I
8 was a Program Director and talk about the fact that
9 there have been partnerships between food pantries,
10 between school cafeterias, between different ways to
11 arrange to have food provided for students, but that
12 all comes at extra work for staff in the program, at
13 extra cost for the program. None of it is provided
14 through the funding that we offer.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Alright, and as mentioned
16 as well from the powerful testimony Mr. Zweig, if I
17 heard correctly, about over 80 percent of the
18 students come from low income, is that correct?

19 ROBERT ZWEIG: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, for someone to suggest,
21 oh, let them just pack something at home. Let them
22 just bring, that is not easy for a certain number of
23 families. That is a cost, a significant cost and
24 let's not forget, I'm going to ask, dose the DOE
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2 provide free transportation for adults to get to
3 these classes?

4 ROBERT ZWEIG: For adults, no.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: No, does DYCD provide free
6 transportation to get to these classes?

7 RONG ZHANG: A lot of programs don't. Although
8 programs do provide incentives to participants who
9 let's say, made a good attendance record for the last
10 month or so, then they will provide metro cards for
11 students but that's just you know, program by
12 program.

13 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Can CUNY speak to the
14 transportation?

15 STACIE EVANS: We aren't able to offer metro
16 cards to students.

17 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, there's a narrative
18 developing. I think we're making it very clear that
19 we're serving some of the most highest needs New
20 Yorkers and we are not even making a dent in terms of
21 addressing some of their core human needs, that are
22 not reflected by any of the strings that are attached
23 by federal and state partners, and the city stream as
24 we've heard, is very insufficient.

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2 I want to ask this question again across the
3 panel. What are some worthy goals, if you can design
4 your program, what are some worthy goals outside of
5 just workforce? Outside of just some of the goals
6 that we hear that are not aligned to the needs of
7 people today. What are some worthy goals that you
8 believe are important that should be funded?

9 ROBERT ZWEIG: So, first and foremost from my
10 perspective, any adult that does not have a high
11 school diploma, which as I said in my testimony is a
12 gateway credential. That needs to be a goal and
13 there needs to be incentives for that outcome of
14 leaving our programs with that High School
15 Equivalency diploma and it's our moral responsibility
16 to provide the quality of instruction and support to
17 get them there. So, I think that's the first.

18 Second, in my mind is the whole, and it will come
19 under workforce, but for me at a higher level. This
20 whole idea of 21st Century workforce and career in
21 technical education and what that looks like. And
22 so, some of the things that we've begun to do now is
23 partner with the career and technical education high
24 schools in New York City. Again, in the evening but
25 it's getting our foot in the door for our adult

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2 communities to now have access to those teachers and
3 those resources.

4 So, when I think of goals, you know, that we need
5 to aspire to, it's that High School Equivalency
6 attainment with the opportunity to really be a
7 gateway to the next step and then robust career in
8 technical education that offers the kinds of skills
9 and certifications that people need to compete in the
10 workforce.

11 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you, Director
12 Peterson?

13 RONG ZHANG: Well, in DYCD's overall mission is
14 to help alleviate the effect of poverty in the
15 communities that help New Yorkers to flourish.

16 So, you know, literacy certainly entering
17 literacy programs is certainly an important step
18 towards that goal and also, I think you know,
19 parents, a lot of parents come to our program they
20 want to be able to help their kids. People you know,
21 want to have – want to be able to read and do basic
22 math to enjoy life and life learning skills.

23 And of course, you know, literacy has a lot to do
24 with one's ability to be employing and make you know
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a living wage. So, these are the goals that you know, we strive to achieve.

STACIE EVANS: So, I think I might want to ask you how much time do you have.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: On this question, you have time, yes.

STACIE EVANS: So, most people who walk into Adult Education programs, don't walk in saying that they are there because they want a job. Many do, but that's not necessarily the reason they walk in the door and as programs, because of the way funding has come down, we have become very narrow in how we see the people who come into our programs because we are forced to be very narrow in the way we see them.

I promise I'm going to answer your question.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: No, no, please.

STACIE EVANS: I'm going to do another thing first.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I'm learning.

STACIE EVANS: So, in a program that I ran several years ago, we did a job and education survey just to get a sense of what our students were interested in doing after they left our program and we got back all sorts of really interesting results.

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2 We had a high percentage of students who said they
3 wanted to be teachers, who said they wanted to be
4 artists, who said they wanted to be all kinds of
5 things that it turned out our staff were not prepared
6 for them to want to be. All of our staff saw the
7 results of that survey and were like, well, okay,
8 that's fine but let's try to get them to be
9 interested in healthcare because that's where the
10 jobs are and okay, true, there are jobs in healthcare
11 but the conversation we wound up having to have as a
12 staff was, how could we be the staff of this program
13 and not allow our students to have aspirations that
14 we have for ourselves? Why is it not okay for our
15 students to have those aspirations.

16 So, first we have to expand our picture of who
17 the adults in our programs are. Yes, they probably
18 do need a job right now but what do they actually
19 want? So, that's one thing. Then, outside of job
20 stuff, I would love for people to leave Adult Ed
21 programs with a love for reading for pleasure which
22 is a thing that a lot of students haven't developed
23 because it's work.

24 I would like people to leave Adult Ed programs
25 feeling comfortable entering cultural institutions.

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2 When I was a literacy teacher and we took students to
3 the library, I had a student once who broke down
4 crying because she didn't think she was allowed to
5 go.

6 So, I want students to be past that. I want
7 students to go to museums without feeling shame or
8 fear or any of the things that students feel when
9 they enter these spaces where they feel like they are
10 not supposed to be. I want them to see that the
11 world is open for them.

12 This is not - this is something I said when I
13 interviewed for the Office of Workforce Development.
14 I talked about education for education sake, not with
15 Amy, it was a different E.D. then, which was totally
16 not what you're supposed to say when you're
17 interested in working Workforce but they hired me
18 anyway.

19 These are the things - these are whole people who
20 come into our programs and we need to see them as
21 whole people and provide services for whole people.

22 I'm going to step off my soap box now.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I appreciated every second
24 of that testimony. Thank you very much. Director
25 Peterson.

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2 AMY PETERSON: So, I think our goal as a City and
3 what I'm trying to talk about and do in the work of
4 our office and the work of this Administration, is to
5 make it not just about adult education and a High
6 School Equivalency. Although, credibly important and
7 you know, unbelievable that so many New Yorkers don't
8 have that basic piece but about all the things that
9 you are talking about right and so, my experience in
10 the nonprofit sector is working at a nonprofit that
11 was all about getting women into the construction
12 industry and we had a social worker there.

13 And before you could even get into the program,
14 you needed to have your basic needs met, right. So,
15 all the things that you talked about, childcare and
16 food and basic education, being able to even get into
17 the program and as Stacie just mentioned, the ability
18 to figure out what you want to do and to understand
19 what the options are out there and people don't have
20 that. So, I think understanding how to be able to
21 take advantage of all the City has to offer and to be
22 able to be a full participant both for civic
23 engagement, supporting your children and figuring out
24 a pathway to a career that you are interested in and
25 I would say that adult education is a huge piece of

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2 that but it has to be combined with all of the other
3 pieces and that's what we want to do. Right there is
4 clearly not enough funding and you've alliterated it
5 very well for adult education by itself but there is
6 Fair Fairs and there is a lot of options for food and
7 there are a lot of programs that this City is
8 invested in that reach people in the communities
9 where they are, whether it's jails to jobs or NYCHA's
10 Job plus or whatever it is. But if they're over here
11 and Adult Education is over here, all these great
12 resources that DOE has aren't being funded into those
13 programs that can provide some of these wraparound
14 services and that's what we want to do.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And I appreciate that and
16 you were helpful to my office in getting the
17 Workforce Center open in Coney and I want to
18 acknowledge and thank you for that. But I painted a
19 picture for you that I would check in regularly with
20 Workforce One to find out how things were going,
21 right and they would report to me that some folks
22 were in fact hired. But I would ask out of how many
23 folks who walked in and when I hear that a small
24 fraction are employed but significant numbers are
25 begin turned away because they lack a, b, c and d, my

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2 question back to city government is, who is
3 responsible to say, oh my goodness, a hundred people
4 were turned away, who is finding out why and who is
5 responsible for follow up?

6 If my office did not do that, I don't think
7 anyone would and so - and then, I still learned.
8 That was not enough for me because I worked with the
9 great organization called OBT. They came into my
10 district, we found space, set up a program but I
11 learned that out of the 60 students who came to the
12 first class, only two completed the first cohort.

13 So, I could have said, okay, two people finished
14 a class but no, I wanted to know why did 58 not
15 finish a class and what challenges did the two have
16 completing the class and I learned childcare, which
17 was one of the biggest issues I heard about in terms
18 of a barrier. Food insecurities, classes are three
19 hours a day at night from 5 to 8 p.m. which is also
20 known as dinner time for folks and homework time,
21 right. And so, those are some of the issues we had
22 to come up with and I told OBT come up with a budget
23 that would address these various needs and they said
24 Councilman, be very careful because this will be very
25 expensive. I said, try me.

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2 And so, thanks to the Speaker and my office,
3 we're now funding \$150,000 program to better meet the
4 needs. It's still not fully meeting it because there
5 are still some folks coming into the program reading
6 at the low 8th grade, 7th grade, 5th grade level and
7 that's a remaining challenge for us as well but I
8 wanted to address as many of those needs as possible.
9 I wanted to break down as many barriers as possible.

10 I don't see that happening systemwide across the
11 city. I know that there are various agencies that
12 have various programs, initiatives, there's no one at
13 the top tying this together. No one that we could
14 point to and say, you are empowered with
15 responsibility and the authority to right the ship
16 and that's why you just mentioned - you rattled off a
17 whole number of agencies and NYCHA. It's scattered
18 but yet, I just went through this panel and the
19 numbers are not very high. The need is very great
20 and even those that were serving, we still have those
21 barriers.

22 But we haven't even talked about the issue of
23 even adequate salary and financial resources for the
24 staff working in these programs. Spirit hands.
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2 It is a challenge to retain folks in these
3 programs. They deserve to be compensated and which
4 speaks by the way in terms of certification.

5 According to New York State Education Department,
6 teacher certification requirements for community
7 based organizations, libraries, community colleges,
8 volunteer organizations and other agencies that
9 receive Adult Education funding, such as Adult
10 Literacy Education, Workforce Innovation Opportunity
11 Act, are set by the funding source requirements and
12 by the local organization.

13 To the DYCD and CUNY programs, what certification
14 do you require for teachers in your programs?

15 STACIE EVANS: Teachers aren't required to be
16 certified; they are required to have experience but
17 they aren't required to be certified.

18 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Got it.

19 STACIE EVANS: I will just say in defense of
20 uncertified Adult Ed teachers -

21 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yeah.

22 STACIE EVANS: I was an uncertified Adult Ed
23 teacher for 20 years. There are many wonderful
24 teachers who have not, who do not have DOE
25 certification.

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2 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Agreed, agreed, yes and
3 they still deserve to be compensated, yes, right,
4 yes, yes.

5 RONG ZHANG: And our teachers are not – we do not
6 require state certification requirement,
7 certification but we require a BA degree plus five
8 years' experience.

9 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, and for DOE it's
10 different and so, can you describe how a teacher
11 becomes certified in Adult Education?

12 ROBERT ZWEIG: So, first of all, all Adult
13 Education teachers in the DOE are certified and
14 compensated at the collective bargaining rates.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right, but when you say
16 certified, certified to do what?

17 ROBERT ZWEIG: Yeah, so I just want to put that
18 off on the side, the compensate at the same rate.
19 They are all certified. So, the way it works is most
20 are certified in a P12 license and it could be
21 anything from common branch to Special Education to
22 the content areas and any other in that gamut.

23 When that teacher transfers and I'm talking only
24 now about the full-time teachers of which there are
25 around 170, I think. They have to – it's literally

1
2 filling out an application to now get an Adult
3 Education certification. It is not an exam but they
4 fill out an application, they then start the
5 probationary process again to move to a ten year and
6 that essentially is the process.

7 So, they are all certified by New York State,
8 they are all certified in a P12 license area, they
9 then apply for an adult education certification or
10 license, go through the probationary period
11 throughout you know, they're paid at the collective
12 bargaining rates both per session and their full-time
13 salaries.

14 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, but so I'm clear,
15 someone can be licensed to teach pre-K and they can
16 be in there by your definition are certified to teach
17 Adult Education, is that correct?

18 ROBERT ZWEIG: To my knowledge, now, I don't know
19 if we have any of that in that category but to my
20 knowledge, as long as they hold a valid New York
21 State certification, they fill out an application and
22 they are able to teach an Adult Education.

23 To my knowledge there is no Adult Education
24 certification requirement for teachers you know, with
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an exam and the other kinds of things that are required in P12.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right, and I know that because when I got a license to be an educator and they gave you only a couple of options, either elementary, middle school or the high school.

ROBERT ZWEIG: And then the content areas within the high schools, yes.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Correct and would you agree that there are certain things you should learn about Adult Education that probably is not captured in any of the preparatory programs out there right now?

ROBERT ZWEIG: So, I would say this, I think and I believe that good teaching is good teaching and there's certain practice and use of curriculum and student engagement. I think that applies throughout; however, there's a whole body of research called and I'm just learning how to pronounce it, andragogy, that is about Adult Education and so, I would say this, I think that a good teacher with a P12 certification can do a good job and I think there should be supplemental supports around what good teaching practice looks like in an adult content.

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2 And just this morning in our meeting, I gave like
3 five kind of categories of adult learners and I do
4 think more of that is required. Does it require a
5 separate certification, I think I feel like not so
6 about that at the moment but certainly, more support
7 and supplemental kind of training around an Adult
8 Learner and those differences between an adult and a
9 child.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And has any other agency
11 that administers adult education programs reached out
12 to you to say, hey, can you offer advice and guidance
13 on quality programming in my agency?

14 ROBERT ZWEIG: To this point, no.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Do you know who would ask
16 you to do that if there was a senior point person at
17 City Hall overseeing this whole program?

18 I do know that some of my colleagues have some
19 questions and I'm being mindful of time. So, I'll
20 turn it over to Council Member Grodenchik.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: In the interest of
22 time, I'm going to pass.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: That is a rare moment in
24 Council history for Council Member Grodenchik to
25 pass, so that is recorded in the record that Council

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2 Member Grodenchik has passed this time in the City
3 Council.

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5 Can folks provide a breakdown of the number of
6 staff you have working in your departments or agency
7 or programs? Total overall number and how many full-
8 time, how many part-time? Do we have that data?

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9 ROBERT ZWEIG: So, it's in the ballpark of 170
10 full-time teachers. It is 29 case managers, there
11 are 8 assessment coordinators, all of those are on
12 teacher lines. There are 8 principals, there are 14
13 assistant principals, these are all full-time.

13

14 There are a number of community titles and
15 paraprofessionals. I don't want to venture to guess
16 because I don't know those numbers and then through
17 the evening programs, there's a large number of per
18 session titles. And just to clarify what that is,
19 it's for people who generally have full time jobs in
20 the DOE in any of those titles and they work evenings
21 and/or weekends to earn what's an hourly rate per
22 collective bargaining. Those numbers I don't have.
23 I don't even have ballpark on that.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, DYCD?

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25 RONG ZHANG: I don't have specific numbers but I
can give you some ballpark. So, our programs have

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2 either part-time or full-time coordinators, all
3 program directors and I believe we have around
4 somewhere between 300 and 350 teachers, most of them
5 part-time and I believe about a third of programs
6 have counselors, mostly part-time.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Do you have retention
8 problems?

9 RONG ZHANG: Well, a retention problem is very
10 unique to the literacy programs and people come into
11 the program.

12 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Oh, no, they are not unique
13 to the program.

14 RONG ZHANG: Yes, I mean, our average stay in a
15 program is about four to six months. I'd love them
16 to stay longer than that you know, for more
17 meaningful learning but yes, retention is an issue.

18 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Do you have retention in
19 DOE with your staff?

20 ROBERT ZWEIG: With staff?

21 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yes.

22 ROBERT ZWEIG: So, I don't have retention data
23 off hand. I will say that anecdotally in my time
24 working there with Adult Ed as a Superintendent, it
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2 seems to better in staff. I don't see a retention
3 challenge with staff but that's anecdotally.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: How about with the
students?

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ROBERT ZWEIG: So, with students, so we have a
number, I can give you a number of about 65 percent
retention rate. I'm going to say that that's based
on the way the state measures retention. I do feel
that there's room for growth to retain more students;
in answer to one of your previous questions, so that
they can get to that finish line and be better
equipped.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, if well, first, I want
CUNY to answer the question on staffing and then I'll
get back to you on that.

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RONG ZHANG: Please, I just wanted to clarify, so
when you asked about retention, I was thinking about
students.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Students and staff is fine,
yeah.

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RONG ZHANG: I mean you know, because of the
nature of part-time teaching, you know, people often
have several jobs across you know, agencies.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: That's true.

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2 RONG ZHANG: Yeah, and turnover rate is higher
3 than I would like to see.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yes, sorry.

5 STACIE EVANS: That's okay, so I don't have
6 numbers of staff although I can get that for you and
7 send it to you. We do probably lose between 10 and
8 15 percent of staff over, you know at the end of each
9 year who find better paying jobs or jobs that are
10 closer to home or whatever. So, that's definitely an
11 issue, I mean, that's a pretty high percentage to
12 lose of your staff and I'm going to echo Bob's
13 comment about student retention. We can see the
14 number in the way that it gets measured by the state,
15 so our retention rate is in a given year, between 65
16 and 70 percent. What that really means on the ground
17 is probably very different and there's always room to
18 make that better.

19 ROBERT ZWEIG: And if I may add to that.

20 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yes.

21 ROBERT ZWEIG: I think that then does speak to
22 the funding flexibility and what is counted as
23 successful by the state and so, I think that that
24 does get to one of your prior questions and in
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2 fairness and I'm sorry, I don't know if I should do
3 this, but to the question about the strings attached.

4 In last Fiscal year, the state did award monies
5 called EPI Fast-track and so, as I'm learning more
6 about this it is an opportunity to be more flexible
7 and creative with the money. And so, while not
8 perfect, I think it speaks to a recognition at the
9 state level that we can provide funding without so
10 many strings and I'd be remiss if I didn't go back
11 and at least say out loud that that money now does
12 exist and at least it's a beginning to kind of lessen
13 the strings so that we can think more about what real
14 authentic goals are for students coming through the
15 door.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: But remind us again your
17 overall budget.

18 ROBERT ZWEIG: Overall is about \$51 million.

19 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: \$51 million and you
20 mentioned that a portion of that is federal and
21 state.

22 ROBERT ZWEIG: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right, so \$51 million out
24 of a \$30 billion education department budget. That
25 is a drop in the bucket in terms of the population

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2 that you are serving and the need and you're speaking
3 to the right person here, because I'm the Education
4 Chair and we're in budget season. This is grossly
5 insufficient. \$51 million is insufficient and it's
6 insufficient for the other partners here as well,
7 both in terms of DYCD and for CUNY and for the other
8 partners who are not at this table. We have a real
9 crisis.

10 Now, I'm just asking as experts in this field, if
11 you had the resources to provide full-time social
12 workers and meals and childcare for your students,
13 can you describe the impact that would have on your
14 program?

15 ROBERT ZWEIG: I mean infinitesimal in terms of
16 the impact. I mean, we see in working with our under
17 21 year old's and we've prided ourselves as a
18 district in providing social workers, psychologists,
19 guidance counselors at a very I think commendable
20 kind of rate and ratio. We see the impact that it
21 has. I mean, there's no denying in terms of how 18
22 to 21 year old's getting through to the finish line.
23 Having the supports around college career coaching,
24 around having immigrant advocacy services and in
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2 having peer social work and counseling. We see the
3 impact.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: DYCD?

5 RONG ZHANG: Well, you know, once that basic
6 human needs are addressed and of course we definitely
7 see a drop in the students dropping out rate and
8 students staying longer and more study hours and
9 better outcomes.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And you're already
11 encountering a population that is so fragile as it is
12 and when they walk through that door, we have their
13 attention and their trust for that moment. Wouldn't
14 be something to say, here is a meal for you, here is
15 a social worker that could address not just your need
16 but your child's needs and other needs. That, to use
17 Mayor de Blasio's word, that's transformative.

18 RONG ZHANG: Yes, I agree and also, we want you
19 to have a social workers. This is not just
20 addressing the individuals needs but the whole
21 family.

22 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: The family needs which is
23 what we seen in the school system, correct. Can you
24 speak to what that would look like in CUNY?
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STACIE EVANS: I mean, I'm going to echo what Bob and Rong have said, that it would make an enormous difference in students lives and also in teachers lives. Teachers wind up taking on the work of social workers in many cases because there is no one else in the program to do that work.

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I've worked in programs that have had a large counseling staff including social workers and the difference in the ways that students are able to stay in the program and the ways that the program is able to function are enormous.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Director Peterson, do you want to weigh in on this from your vantage point?

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AMY PETERSON: I mean, I think that case management services and wraparound services and access to food is incredibly transformative for any program right. And so, we would - our priority right now is to maximize the dollars that we have for Adult Education and to connect the Adult Education programs to the services that we just talked about that are being provided other places and to figure out how we can do that and maximize that.

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2 Certainly, additional funding to meet those needs
3 is welcome and necessary but we all know what sort of
4 budget season we're in this year.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Well, budgets are
6 reflections of our values and I know that both in
7 terms of my own personal life and in terms of council
8 life, I know that we don't have a trillion dollars to
9 operate with but we prioritize and I had to go
10 through the last budget cycle deciding on some items
11 to prioritize in term of social workers for our kids
12 in our school system.

13 You know, I often get asked you know, questions
14 about for example, where some folks said that I
15 conflate the number of NYPD school safety agents, the
16 social workers in our school system. Yeah, I've been
17 told that by very high ranking city officials but my
18 response is that, when a 7 year old child in school
19 is having a bad day and the school calls the cops on
20 the kid because they have no full-time social worker,
21 that's shame on us. Because a 7 year old having a
22 bad isn't a NYPD issue and there is this feeling that
23 somehow you know, if you are very young in UPK or
24 older and you're 18-29 or 39, that somehow you have
25 no more trauma in your life. You have no types of

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2 issues happening in your life. It's just the reverse
3 and I am just sharing with you that in my district,
4 whatever we're doing, it's still not sufficient but
5 it's making an impact, it's making a dent. Folks are
6 going from my program into for example, P2A which is
7 one option for apprenticeship. Also, one of the
8 graduates is not looking for work but actually is
9 interested in serving on the Community Board and she
10 might be a future Council Member, that's also a
11 success story.

12 So, I think we need to think about various goals
13 beyond just what the strings say are goals and which
14 we've made – my final questions here. In terms of
15 the effectiveness of measuring students' performance
16 with TASC. TASC has been around now for four or five
17 years, is that correct? Six years.

18 ROBERT ZWEIG: Yes, since 2014.

19 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Your professional expert
20 opinion, does a TASC exam actually measure
21 proficiency and mastery or should we be exploring
22 other ways of measuring proficiency in the High
23 School Equivalency field?

24 ROBERT ZWEIG: I think it measures proficiency to
25 a greater degree than the old GED did. So, I want to

1
2 say that. Does it measure proficiency to assess
3 whether a passer will be successful? I think it can
4 do more and I'll be specific. I feel like writing is
5 one of the most important things for us to teach and
6 arguably the hardest and obviously one of the most
7 important things to learn and arguably the hardest.

8 It requires you know, basically a single essay.
9 I don't think any single test, not to touch another
10 controversial issue but I don't think any single test
11 is the ideal assessment. I think that particular one
12 can be a little more vast.

13 I'm going to make another statement that we have
14 Spanish speakers in this city in pretty large numbers
15 that are attaining high school equivalency diplomas
16 but there is no ESL requirement and so, we're
17 graduating young people and adults that can speak
18 Spanish fluently and pass an exam and get their
19 diploma but if they're going to stay here, then we
20 now need to do a whole other round of really going
21 deep with English language.

22 So, in the end and I can go on long on this one,
23 I think the test is a little too linear and it is not
24 necessarily a measure of whether a student will be
25 successful in his or her career or college.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And I just want the public to note because we're going to move on but I want the public to note that my questions today were not really centered on exams, were they? They were not because our families are much more than just scores and numbers, they are human beings and this is why it's important to have I think educators serving in government because I do get that. I know many of my colleagues get that and we have an incredible amount of work to do but it's not just about funding and I'm going to fight like hell to get more resources for Adult Education in New York City. I'm also going to fight that we have a position that is senior point person connecting all these dots and being the go to person because this is such a crucial, critical issue that cuts across and intersects with so many other social justice economic issues in our communities but also, we need to speak clear with our state and federal partners that their strings need to be cut and their funding needs to be increased.

Give us, you know, there is this saying within federal government, you know, states know best. We know best, we know our families. Give us the resources and we will work on making sure we have a

1
2 holistic plan to meet the needs of folks but that's
3 where we need, we need help on that front.

4 If there's no other questions from my colleagues
5 - So, we're going to take a five minutes recess,
6 bathroom break for some folks and we're going to call
7 on the next panel and I thank the Administration for
8 their time today.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Excuse me, excuse me,
10 everybody's attention. If we could all take seats
11 now, just remember, no eating, no drinking,
12 cellphones on silent and vibrate, okay.

13 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, so we are restarting
14 our hearing and just make sure if anyone that wanted
15 to testify today, make sure that filled out a slip
16 with the Sergeant at Arms in the front and we have a
17 student panel, an Adult Ed student panel, which I
18 always appreciate hearing from our students.

19 Deowatie Ricknauth, Jhordana Jimenez, Ivan
20 Guzman, Jieling Huang, Mayra Mantilla, Julie Quinton,
21 Elizabeth Chavez and Natalia Wislocka.

22 The clock is set for three minutes per person and
23 whenever folks are ready, they may begin.

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2 JULIE QUINTON: Hi, good afternoon. Councilman
3 Treyger, nice to see you. I'm Julie and I'm going to
4 wait.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Folks, just, when folks are
6 testifying, just be mindful of basic courtesy and
7 folks waited very patiently to come here to testify
8 and we'll hear from everybody. I just want to make
9 sure that we give folks courtesy when they are
10 testifying and whenever they're ready, we will start.

11 Thank you.

12 JULIE QUINTON: I'm just here on behalf of
13 teachers and students from around the city who
14 couldn't be here. I direct Make the Road New York's
15 Adult Education programs. Members of the New York
16 City Coalition for Adult Literacy are going to be
17 speaking about our broader platform.

18 I just wanted to thank you on behalf of all of
19 our students for taking our issues so seriously. I
20 specifically want to say how hopeful we are given how
21 amazingly the city moved on PreK. This is a sector
22 that we're really hoping that you can help to shine
23 some light on. We have big aspirations and we really
24 desperately need it. As you know, Adult Ed is

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2 connected to every single social justice issue that
3 this Administration and Council cares about.

4 So, without language skills and literacy skills
5 and diplomas, it's impossible to navigate systems and
6 to defend yourself in this climate. So, we're really
7 happy to have this opportunity.

8 I just want to introduce Elizabeth, who is here
9 with me today from Make the Road. Thanks, it's all
10 yours.

11 ELIZABETH CHAVEZ: My name is Elizabeth Chavez; I
12 am from Peru. I have lived in New York for about
13 eight years. I started to learn English in classes
14 at Make the Road New York in January. I like to
15 continue studying at Make the Road because I'd like
16 to improve my English for many reasons. My life with
17 people in my country who speak English, like to
18 participate in community and learn more about the
19 public system in my city.

20 Also, I want to be able to talk to my lawyers and
21 follow up with my Worker Compensation case. I want
22 to have more opportunities and develop through life
23 in my U.S. to help make a better associate.

24 When I came here, I had a lot of difficulties
25 because I only spoke English... Spanish, sorry. I am

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2 taking citizenship classes and through my English
3 classes, I am able to understand the lesson better.

4 Now, I feel like I have powers. I can talk, I
5 can go to the hospital, I feel good, much better than
6 before. I need to keep more — that this country and
7 want to get a good a good job. I do not want to be
8 negative **[INAUDIBLE 2:49:36]** doesn't give anything
9 positive to the community. If there weren't free
10 English classes, it could cost me and family a lot.
11 If this happened, I could not continue to study
12 English. I could not improve my speaking, reading
13 and writing in English and get a good job.

14 Please, continue to help and give a lot more
15 money to Adult Education and keep class free. If
16 there are not free classes, no education for adults,
17 this will not just hurt individual people, but it
18 will hurt the country.

19 Thank you.

20 JULIE QUINTON: Thanks. I just want to say, I
21 know I was under three minutes. Elizabeth is here
22 from Peru; she was a lawyer in her country. In her
23 free time which she's not dealing with Workers
24 Compensation and all the other systems and trying to
25 learn English, she is giving legal advice and support

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2 to people from Peru in her free time. So, this is
3 the kind of skill and ability and passion that we
4 really want to tap into and support and I just am
5 grateful to her and for everybody else for being here
6 today.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And I'll tell you, it
8 explains her courage to come into City Hall, city
9 government and testify so beautifully and effectively
10 on not just on behalf of yourself but on behalf of
11 many New Yorkers who have this need. So, thank you
12 and thank you for your service.

13 JULIE QUINTON: Thank you.

14 IVAN GUZMAN: Good afternoon everyone. First of
15 all, I would like to express my gratitude to have the
16 opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Ivan
17 Guzman and I'm from Madrid, Spain. I'm a Network
18 Engineer and Project Manager, but also, I am an
19 English student at the University Settlement.

20 I've been here for almost six months and when I
21 arrived, I realized that my English level wasn't as
22 good as I expected.

23 This situation made me feel worried, insecure,
24 and overwhelmed. But after a few weeks with handling
25 with these feelings, by accident I found on the

1
2 internet some information about the free English
3 classes on University Settlement. Then everything
4 changed for me. University Settlement gave me the
5 opportunity to attend their College and Career
6 Readiness classes, a place where I can learn, speak
7 and practice English everyday in an international
8 environment with great teachers and a staff who is
9 always willing to help us as much as possible.
10 Thanks to that, recently I was accepted to join to
11 the Union Cooper Program for Immigrant Engineers.

12 So, the bottom line in this is these classes help
13 people like me to get better jobs with good salaries,
14 pay more taxes, be more productive in this community
15 and be able to communicate with every citizen in this
16 wonderful city. What I'm trying to say is learning
17 English is synonymous with improving our lives and
18 our community and this is possible thanks to the
19 funds of the city investing in Adult Education.

20 So, thank you very much.

21 NATALIA WISLOCKA: Good afternoon, my name is
22 Natalia Wislocka. I'm from Poland. Now, I live in
23 Bushwick, Brooklyn. I've started my free English
24 class program at the New York City College of
25 Technology this January.

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2 I want to share my story to explain how it is
3 important for an immigrant like me to have access to
4 this kind of education. This is my second year in
5 the United States, I came here with my husband. I
6 graduated from a university in Poland, where I have
7 studied urban studies and Ukrainian philology. Back
8 in my country, I worked in the fields of my interest,
9 culture and education. I don't speak English well,
10 so my experience and education means nothing here.
11 After 14 months of being stuck in my Polish and
12 Ukrainian speaking communities, I started my free
13 English program at the New York City College of
14 Technology.

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

23 I feel that I am very lucky that I came here by
24 choice. I have mates in my class who were forced
25 from their homelands. In search for a new life, they

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2 left behind corrupted states, conflicts and
3 inequality.

4 Taking a free English class and practicing
5 regularly with classmates and a committed teacher,
6 brings back confidence and allows me to dream about
7 normal life in New York City. What I hear from other
8 people's experience, speaking good English means,
9 finding a better job and graduating from college or
10 university. It also gives the community renewed
11 promise of the future for our children.

12 Starting a new live in a new country is difficult
13 and if you don't speak the language it's even harder.
14 Simple things like going shopping, talking to a
15 landlord, visiting a doctor, commuting on public
16 transportation are not simple anymore. But it's not
17 only about us newcomers, we non-English speaking
18 people, work for America and American citizens. We
19 serve food in restaurants, we take care of kids, we
20 fix electricity, we do renovations, we sell products,
21 we clean houses. We do jobs which are important and
22 it's in our common interest to help we immigrant work
23 on our English, because it opens up possibilities to
24 become professionals.

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I hope that all newcomers to New York City 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.

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Thank you.

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JHORDANA JIMENEZ: Hello, good afternoon, 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.

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I was born in 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.

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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 other responsibilities. This gives many people opportunities they would not otherwise have. A lot

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2 of us have children, it is important that my son see
3 me get my education I can be a role model for him
4 and give him the motivation to finish his education.
5 Now, I can help my son with his homework.

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

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

18 Thank you.

19 DEOWATIE RICKNAUTH: Good afternoon ladies,
20 gentleman, elected officials and distinguished
21 guests. My name is Deowatie Ricknauth; I'm a
22 daughter, a sister, a wife and favorite of all, a
23 mother. I migrated to the United States in my late
24 teens with my high school diploma. At that time, I
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1
2 was instructed to work hard and provided for my
3 family.

4 I only save my pennies for rainy days.
5 Furthering my education was not feasible.

6 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: It's okay, take your time.
7 You are doing very well.

8 DEOWATIE RICKNAUTH: Nor was it encouraged. We
9 were told not to spend money on education, so we
10 didn't. Sorry.

11 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Take your time, no worries.

12 DEOWATIE RICKNAUTH: When my youngest graduated
13 high school, I decided to enter Brooklyn Pacific
14 Library to complete my American Equivalent to High
15 School Diploma.

16 I studied for four months to earn an HSE while my
17 husband was hospitalized and passed on my first
18 attempt but I kept reminding myself of Nelson Mandela
19 "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can
20 use to change the world." Since earning my GED, I
21 have completed a 15 week intensive course of medical
22 billing and coding offered at BPL and SUNY BEOC, I
23 applied to college to pursue my undergrad as a
24 medical paralegal. I've been volunteering my
25 Saturday's at Brooklyn Public Library to assist

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2 disabled students with medical billing and coding.

3 Today, I am speaking at City Hall because before you
4 all as an immigrant, since I never was taught I would
5 able to say, with our Brooklyn Public Library, none
6 of my achievements would have been possible.

7 Every student who is enrolled in this program and
8 with a dream and left with the reality, through the
9 library I was given a chance to fall in love with
10 learning again.

11 These programs not only taught us the basic
12 standard of education but also enlightened us the
13 difference with cultures, religions, genders and
14 ethnicity that make up our community. Most
15 importantly, we learn determination, hard work and
16 the power of never giving up. Through our resilience
17 we became a model for our children and for
18 generations to come.

19 Through these programs, I have changed my future
20 and hopefully my world. My story is only one of many
21 that these programs have helped. Please continue to
22 support adult learning centers. Funding these
23 programs are investments because they are our future,
24 educators, social workers, scientists and doctors
25 that are waiting to shine.

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2 So, we adults, low-income families, high school
3 dropouts, badly need your help and we want to thank
4 you for supporting these programs.

5 Thanks very much for listening to me.

6 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: That was very powerful.
7 Thank you.

8 JIELING HUANG: Good afternoon everyone. My name
9 is Jieling Huang and I'm from Guangdong, China. I
10 have lived in the United States for four years. I am
11 a student at University Settlement. I am so happy
12 about learning English at this school.

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

22 Since I've been learning English at University
23 Settlement, I have noticed the difference in my life.
24 I can easily talk with customers at work and deal
25 with difficult situations all the time. I enjoy

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2 communicating with people politely. Speaking English
3 properly helps me to be more confident, express my
4 feelings better and get a higher salary.

5 Now, when I think about the future, if I have
6 children, I will be able to communicate with them and
7 be fully involved in their daily lives without having
8 a barrier because of the language. Learning English
9 is the key in achieving a better life and there are
10 thousands of people who need English classes in New
11 York City. I hope more people can keep learning
12 English and have a better live like me.

13 Thank you, thank you everyone.

14 MAYRA MANTILLA: Hi everyone, my name is Mayra
15 Mantilla, a Counselor at University Settlement but
16 today, I am here to share my story from both sides.
17 I was also a student at University Settlement. I'm
18 from Ecuador. I've been living here for almost five
19 years.

20 When I moved here, I thought my English level was
21 good enough to find a good job with a good salary but
22 when I started to have interviews, I realized that I
23 wasn't able to express my ideas and also talk about
24 my work experience. So, at the beginning, I had to
25 accept jobs that where only basic English was

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2 required, so I felt disappointed and also insecure
3 because I knew I could do more. I wanted to show my
4 real potential, so I was lucky to find this wonderful
5 class at University Settlement and this program
6 helped me a lot. It wasn't just about learning
7 English that helped me to build up my confidence,
8 speak English fluently and also, they gave me a job
9 that I truly enjoy.

10 So, now as a Counselor, I try to help students
11 that are in the same situation that I was a few years
12 ago. So, I see a lot of changes when they come to
13 the register, they can even say some words in
14 English, but after a few months they can say their
15 names, where they are from and after a few years,
16 when they stay in the program, they are able to
17 achieve higher levels of education, start small
18 businesses or get well paid jobs or even accomplish
19 small things such as being able to go to the doctor
20 without having to bring a friend or a family member
21 to translate for them. Or read with their children,
22 help them with homework or I think they really like
23 when they are able to communicate with their kids
24 teachers because now, they understand how can they
25 help their kids.

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2 So, it's not that they are just learning English,
3 we are helping also their families. It's a lot, so I
4 come from a country where learning another language
5 is a privilege. It's a luxury that not everybody can
6 afford. So, when I found out that here you can find
7 free English classes, I was like, no, this is not
8 possible. How is that possible. I don't believe
9 that but now I know from firsthand that learning
10 English is just the beginning. It's the start for
11 the path to success. So, I just hope the city keeps
12 investing in Adult Education because there are a lot
13 of immigrants outside looking to accomplish their
14 goals.

15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: That's very powerful
17 testimony from everyone here and I'll share with you
18 some very briefly personal to me. My family is from
19 Ukraine; I am first generation American and my
20 grandparents who are not deceased. When my
21 grandmother who was holocaust survivor came to this
22 country, one of the proudest moments she shared with
23 me was when she was able to take an adult education
24 class to learn English and for the first time, at my
25 birthday party, she ran over to me, I'll never forget

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2 this and said, here is a birthday card that I wrote
3 for you.

4 And there is no government metric for that, but
5 that's the world for me and I cherish those words and
6 those moments and that card more than anything. And
7 so, deepening family connections, being able to
8 communicate was so powerful for my family. And so,
9 we talk about education, independence, liberation,
10 social mobility. This to me is of critical, critical
11 importance. I want to thank all of you for sharing
12 your stories, so powerful, so bravely. It takes guts
13 to come down to City Hall in front of lights and
14 strangers and government and to share your story. I
15 am so proud of you.

16 So, I am going to do this and I'm going to break
17 a little bit of Council tradition and do that and
18 thank you for not just speaking on behalf of
19 yourselves but on behalf of many people that have
20 this need and this City Council has your back and we
21 will fight tooth and nail to make sure that we
22 continue and strengthen these programs to provide you
23 even more services in more communities and I think we
24 should also feed you in these classes. I think we
25 should provide you more supports because am I right?

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PANEL: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, thank you and thank you to your amazing teachers. Right, but thank the teachers and all the staff and the counselors, case managers. Thank you for your support. We need to pay them as well.

So, thank you all for your powerful testimony. I don't know if any of my colleagues have any questions or statements. Council Member Grodenchik?

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I do want to echo your remarks Mr. Chairman. It's not easy to be here, even when you're a Council Member sometimes it can be very hard but it's important that your voice is heard. I'm a second generation American; I joke that I'm the son of immigrants because I live in Queens but my parents come from the Bronx.

So, my mother used to say, with all sincerity that moving to Queens from the Bronx in the mid-50's was like moving to another country. So, I am too the son of immigrants but it is great and I know there is somebody here from Korean Community Services that I don't know if she's testifying. I visited them a few months ago Mr. Chair and the enthusiasm. There were two classes teaching English. The incredible

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2 enthusiasm that these folks, almost all of whom or
3 maybe all of whom are Korean Americans had to learn
4 English so that they could more fully enjoy the
5 benefits of living here in New York City.

6 We do speak well over two, I don't know what the
7 number is, you know, it's hundreds of different
8 languages are spoken but it's so critical that people
9 have the ability and most people want to learn
10 English and that opens the door to so many more
11 things that we have here. Not to forget our
12 heritage, next month, you know, we'll be celebrating.
13 Oh, maybe not next month, April, we'll be celebrating
14 Passover.

15 So, our heritage and our customs are still here
16 with us generations later but that doesn't mean that
17 we should not provide every single opportunity that
18 we can to people who want to learn. So, I am
19 delighted to add my voice to Chair Treyger who has
20 been just an amazing advocate as an educator. I'm
21 only married to an educator; he really is an
22 educator. I did the next best thing.

23 So, thank you Chair. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and
24 thank you all for being here today and I look forward
25 to hearing from as many of you as I can before I have

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2 to get back to Queens. If I don't get back there at
3 a certain time, I will turn into a pumpkin.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: See, thank you Council
5 Member, it's very rare for him to pass his time here
6 in the Council and he speaks very eloquently. Thank
7 you for your remarks and I thank the panel for your
8 powerful testimony.

9 Thank you so much.

10 PANEL: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, next panel, Vishwah
12 Sofat, Caroline Iosso, Anthony Tassi, Judy Garcia and
13 Stephanie Varner and Sarah Tyson.

14 Yes, and we're going to let Vishwah go first
15 because got to go back to school. I will write you
16 your late pass. Alright, Vishwah whenever you are
17 ready you may begin. Make sure the mic is on.

18 VISHWAH SOFAT: Let's try that again. Hi, good
19 afternoon. My name is Vishwah; I'm a senior at
20 Stuyvesant High School, so yeah, I need to head back
21 soon there.

22 But I just want to thank you guys before I get
23 started for your service and the commitment that you
24 guys are making to like bring these legislations to
25 improve our city whether it's adult education or what

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2 I want to speak about is making Diwali a celebration
3 in our public schools and the reason I've come out
4 here to express you know, my strong support to
5 establish Diwali as an official holiday for public
6 schools is because in the last four years, I've been
7 a part of one and more so, I've been able to engage
8 in a lot of different political engagement community
9 organizing but also, work towards educational equity.

10 So, I currently sit on the Manhattan Borough
11 Student Advisory Council, the Department of Education
12 and I'm part of one of 30 students on the
13 Chancellor's Student Advisory Council. So, working
14 alongside Chancellor Carranza, one thing that you
15 learn and you really start believing in is that
16 equity and excellence truly do matter.

17 And when we talk about equity in excellence, we
18 have to also think about what more can they translate
19 to instead of just policies that we see in terms of
20 you know, increasing access to education. And one of
21 the things that I have been working on this year in
22 the Chancellor's Student Advisory Council is culture
23 responsive and sustaining education and for me, the
24 way I look at making Diwali a celebration that is
25 recognized, is a part of that commitment that we make

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to make our classrooms more culturally responsive. What we're essentially saying and doing is that we're going to recognize another culture, another religion and give them a chance to be recognized to. The Council Member talked about Passover being celebrated in April and many Jewish holiday's there is a day given off but that's not the same for an occasion such Diwali and the importance comes. I sit on Manhattan Community Board One and one of the biggest events that we license and give permits to is **[INAUDIBLE 3:27:54]**, there's a Diwali celebration and the whole day, you know the whole streets blocked off and you have like a big festivity.

But what exactly does that mean to people beyond the South Asian Community is something that can change with given this day off and the reason I say that is because if you allow people that are not in the South Asian community, that might not know what Diwali is, you're actually giving them a chance to learn about this.

We learn about Hanukkah if you're not Jewish because that day is off and you're like, why is this day off? So, I want to be able to see my classmates, ask the same question about something that I have

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2 been celebrating for the last 17 years. What is
3 Diwali? What does that mean when I go to the temple
4 and light a deal, what is that? You know, like
5 lighting the light and what is the historical
6 background of Lord Rama beating the evil. What does
7 it mean for a Sikh person, a Jain, a Buddhist and a
8 Hindu. Four different religions all celebrating the
9 same holiday.

10 So, with that being said, this is an issue of
11 equity for me and I think if there is one thing that
12 New York City should pride itself, it's we're being a
13 sanctuary city. For being a city in which diversity
14 is showcased and we are that excellence. That
15 excellence cannot mean that we forget some while
16 looking at others.

17 So, with that being said, all I want to say is
18 that effective change starts now and starts with
19 Resolutions like Resolution 1046 and know with it
20 being passed and signed into law. That's how we can
21 see equity come in a very different way through a
22 translation on a school calendar which might seem
23 very marginal and minimal, but yet can have such a
24 big strong message in the great strides that we're
25 taking in our education equity.

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You know, so, that's all I have.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Vishwah, you got an A+.
You know, it's guts and again courage and you're a student and you sound like a Council Member.

VISHWAH SOFAT: That's the dream to be there one day.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: There you go.

VISHWAH SOFAT: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Community Board, next step that's it but thank you so much.

VISHWAH SOFAT: I won't take your seat though, promise.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I'm term limited, so in the future.

VISHWAH SOFAT: Maybe I should.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Great job and I know you have to go back to school. I just want to say thank you. Fantastic testimony, powerful testimony and thank you so much.

VISHWAH SOFAT: I don't mean to be rude but I'm going to head out.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yes, oh, Council Member Grodenchik has a few remarks.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Don't encourage him to run so fast, okay. I'm not term limited. I really want thank him. He spoke outside, we had a press conference that was organized by my dear friend Dr. Anita Jane and others today, a number of our colleagues spoke, the Borough President of Queens Sharon Lee was there as well and you're absolutely right. We celebrate a lot of holidays, sometimes the schools are closed literally like for the Easter Passover break, like Rosh Hashanah if it happens to fall on a day of the week Monday through Friday.

So, it is important and I spoke outside Mr. Chair that it's really an element of fairness. That's really what we're trying to do here. Diwali is a major, major holiday celebrated over the world by more than a billion people. In India alone there are over a billion people but it's not just an Indian holiday, it's celebrated in many countries around the world and now it's celebrated in New York City and many parts of the United States and it is time that Diwali become a holiday where the New York City schools are closed. This is not rocket science, we can figure it out, we will work it out and as Dr. Jane, I think you pointed out that over the next

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2 number of years, only I think it was 60 percent of
3 the time does the day fall on a weekday.

4 So, it's not as if every year we have to deal
5 with this. So, it's important and I fully support
6 the efforts, the Resolution by our colleague and
7 Chair of Finance Danny Dromm, who was a former Chair
8 of Education as well and like you as an educator.

9 So, thank you for being here today and now get
10 back to school young man, okay.

11 VISHWAH SOFAT: Just one thing, we wouldn't be
12 the first city to do it.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: No, we wouldn't.

14 VISHWAH SOFAT: The District in New Jersey have
15 done it, seven within New York and New York City
16 should be the one leading the way not following and
17 it's sort of saddening that we're not even able to
18 follow in the right footsteps.

19 So, thank you for being here, thank you for
20 listening.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much.
22 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Great job and if you need a
24 late pass, let me know. Thank you.

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2 STEPHANIE VARNER: Hi, I'm Stephanie Varner, I'm
3 a retired Adult Education teacher. I'm speaking for
4 the active Adult Ed members who risk retaliation.
5 Some of us teachers are free now but if they were to
6 show up, mills would know about it, the Principles
7 would know about it, next thing the teachers would
8 have is an unsatisfactory one way or the other.

9 I was a teacher who would just continue. Okay, I
10 had 29S's into my last year because I was working
11 with the union and also because I was a senior
12 teacher who earned a decent salary, received a U
13 based on, what do they call it? My class wasn't
14 wholesome. Someone please explain that to me.

15 At the time, the service and update for the dire
16 situation in the adult education, we previously
17 reported to the City Council in the fall of 2017, not
18 much has changed. At that time, 14 retired and
19 discontinued OAC teachers testified to the
20 destructive effect of former Superintendent Rosemary
21 Mills admits managing the campaign. They focused on
22 agenda and they were carried out by her cohorts, the
23 new principals. These principals had no background
24 in Adult Ed.

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2 You may say you can manage, yes, but Adult Ed,
3 there's certain things that if your going to give
4 development, you need to know something about Adult
5 Ed, most of these principals don't. Any dedicated
6 adult administer who acted with integrity by refusing
7 to follow Mills directives was forced out.
8 Superintendent Mills was reassigned at the number of
9 court cases, discrimination and complaints by
10 teachers and administrators and by a borage of
11 unfavorable press.

12 Unfortunately, her higher cohorts with no private
13 experience in Adult Education, continues to carry out
14 her agenda even though she's gone, the principals
15 that she brought in still harass the teachers. These
16 teachers have been forced to sit through hours of
17 irrelevant professional development sessions with an
18 over decreasing number of veteran teachers. What
19 they've done is they've gotten rid of any teacher who
20 came through the Adult Ed pipeline.

21 I have a master's degree in adult and secondary
22 education. I had to take courses behind course in
23 adult learning. I must say that pedagogy and
24 andragogy are not the same thing, okay. They have
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2 filed charges against veteran teachers and attempt to
3 get rid of any active and vocal members.

4 Also, in addition, we've had to work with
5 stressful work environments that hurt our students.
6 In addition to loss of support of teaching and
7 learning environment, we've also lost community based
8 sites and back to back teaching slots.

9 Administrators whose recruiting efforts are
10 severely lacking on **[INAUDIBLE 3:39:37]** system have
11 applicated their responsibility to tell teachers to
12 go out and find students themselves. We should not,
13 with all of the students in this city who do not have
14 basic skills, we should have to go out and find
15 students. There are para's, there are school aids,
16 they are not even recruiting properly, okay.

17 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: If you could just
18 summarize, wrap up statements.

19 STEPHANIE VARNER: I'll finish up.

20 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yeah, please and I'll take
21 that for the record, your whole testimony for the
22 record.

23 STEPHANIE VARNER: Okay, in general, some things
24 were not said by the superintendent. Before he came
25 along, there was an Adult Ed license. Most of the

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2 Adult Ed teachers who have licenses are either being
3 pushed out, harassed or targeted. Many times, we
4 understand our students, okay. I'm not saying that
5 my colleagues do not, my new colleagues do not but
6 they don't have the depth, they don't have the
7 training or the background to deal with adult
8 students.

9 Some of my colleagues have taken steps to improve
10 their adult education knowledge but it's not all of
11 them. In addition, we have principals who do not
12 have any Adult Ed experience and that's sad.

13 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, what I'll do is I'll
14 take your full testimony to be part of the record
15 today.

16 STEPHANIE VARNER: And I hope something is done
17 about it because there are a lot of teachers who are
18 given unsatisfactory ratings who can no longer work
19 and we can contribute to the success of the Adult Ed
20 program, thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I appreciate you, thank you
22 so much. Thank you, next.

23 CAROLINE IOSSO: Good afternoon. I want to give
24 a big thank you to Chairperson Treyger and the
25 Members of the Committee on Education for the

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2 opportunity to speak today and for lifting up with
3 such passion and dedication the importance of adult
4 literacy and the urgency of making the system work
5 better in this city. My name is Caroline Iosso, I am
6 the Director of Community and Government Affairs at
7 Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow OBT.

8 We're a workforce development nonprofit that does
9 job training, education, and employment services for
10 youth and adults in Brooklyn and Queens and since
11 2007, we've also been offering adult literacy
12 programming including ESOL classes and High School
13 Equivalency. We are a proud member of the New York
14 City Coalition for Adult Literacy NYCCAL. And while
15 we are a workforce development organization, we
16 believe in the importance of adult education not just
17 because it helps New Yorkers access higher wage jobs
18 and reap the benefits of economic development in
19 their communities. For a lot of the reasons that
20 were spoken about with such eloquence by the previous
21 panel, adult education enables people to participate
22 civically in their community and recognize that we
23 are all lifelong learners.

24 But, it's very, very important that adults
25 participate in these classes. They face a lot of

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2 challenges. They are more likely to be have been out
3 of school for a longer period of time. They face
4 competing demands on their schedules, like work and
5 childcare, food insecurity, it's harder to get around
6 and they need to pay for transportation. We track
7 the reasons for attrition in our OBT adult ed
8 programs and the biggest reasons are transportation,
9 food insecurity and childcare.

10 We are incredibly grateful for Council Member
11 Treyger working with us to develop a response to
12 those issues in our Adult High School Equivalency
13 program in Coney Island. We now offer meals, as the
14 Council Member has mentioned. We are located on the
15 west end of Coney Island, which is very convenient
16 for our participants. We also offer transportation
17 to the TASC exam for our students and we offer case
18 management which helps people find childcare
19 providers and talks them through the things that
20 might stop them from coming to class.

21 Since we've gotten that funding and been able to
22 integrate that into our program in Coney Island,
23 consistent attendance in our program has nearly
24 quadrupled. We have also seen increases in TASC
25 attainment and we're looking to continue increasing

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2 that, which is really, really exciting and we're just
3 thrilled that Council Member Treyger takes this so
4 seriously and we're really excited to continue
5 working with the Committee on Education and the rest
6 of the Council to make this program a reality for
7 more adult learners in the city.

8 Thank you so much.

9 JUDY GARCIA: Hello, good afternoon. My name is
10 Julie. I am from Bogota, Colombia. I have a
11 beautiful family; my husband Andres and my two boys,
12 Samuel is 10 years old and Ian is 3 years old. We
13 live in Staten Island.

14 I learned about Literacy Partners at the Richmond
15 Pre-K Center where my child goes to school. I joined
16 the La Fuerza de Creer program in October 2019. The
17 program was for eight days for two hours each day. I
18 remember the time went fast, very fast. When I heard
19 about this program, I didn't know what to expect. I
20 thought it was going to be similar to the other ones
21 but I was wrong. The workshop was in Spanish. I met
22 about 10-15 mothers and we all sat together to share
23 our experiences and challenges. I learned that a lot
24 of parents have different issues or the same I had at
25 home. Like now, the kids spend more time on their

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2 phones or play video games or some of these families
3 don't think they have time for their children or
4 other stories about this.

5 In this workshop, we found other kinds of ways we
6 can spend quality time and participate with our own
7 kids. Everybody has different ways to write, our
8 childrens and they have all good ways. We all have
9 each other - sorry, I'm nervous.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: You're doing great.

11 JUDY GARCIA: We all give each other tips, tricks
12 and advice for parenting.

13 The La Fuerza class was really dynamic. I loved
14 it because I could express myself and my concerns
15 with the people that were in similar situations. We
16 all care about each other. In other workshops, you
17 sit and hear what the teacher says and that's it but,
18 in this class, it is really dynamic because you can
19 say different experiences you have at home and the
20 facilitator listens and that's great because we need
21 to just breath and express ourselves and that feels
22 great.

23 With this class, I learned that my husband and I
24 have to pay attention how we speak to our children.
25 We cannot speak to the older one the same we speak to

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2 the little one because their brains work different at
3 different ages.

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

11 Thank you.

12 ANTHONY TASSI: Good afternoon Mr. Chair and
13 Members of the Committee. My name is Anthony Tassi.
14 I am from Literacy Partners and I think Judy Garcia's
15 testimony really illustrates two key points that
16 haven't been raised as of yet. The first is that
17 adult literacy programs are gathering places for the
18 grassroots community leadership in many cases and
19 what Judy didn't mention in her testimony is that
20 subsequent to graduating from our Spanish Language
21 Parent Education program, she's been hired by
22 Literacy Partners to become a facilitator and now
23 leads family reading promotion workshops at
24 elementary schools.

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2 So, adult literacy is an opportunity to build the
3 leadership skills of community leaders and in the
4 case of Literacy Partners, those are parent leaders
5 and I wanted to say the other thing is that Adult
6 Literacy is an ideal venue to focus on parents. And
7 I know you know better than most the intimate
8 connection between the skills of the parent and the
9 academic performance of the children and what we see
10 at Literacy Partners, we offer Adult Literacy classes
11 for parents in partnership with Pre-K's and Head
12 Starts and 3K's and other community organizations and
13 what find is that by focusing on the parent, you can
14 at once meet the needs of that adult for adult
15 literacy skills for English Language proficiency and
16 help them build their capacity to promote their
17 children's early learning. The social, emotional
18 growth, that's really the foundation of it all in
19 their youngsters and some of the results that you
20 could expect to see from a dual generation model like
21 this, is that family reading increases.

22 In our program, parents are reading to their
23 children double the amount compared to before they
24 enrolled in our program and as you know, as a former
25 teacher, what would you say as a teacher if I told

1
2 you there was a resource that could have families
3 reading twice as much to their children? We see it
4 even in Head Start where they have an assessment of
5 children's development called Teaching Strategies
6 Gold and many indicators and we see the children of
7 our teachers make much more progress on those
8 assessments throughout the year than their peers
9 doing the same Head Start program, whose parents
10 didn't have the opportunity.

11 So, I want to commend you Mr. Chair and Members
12 of this Committee for taking extraordinary leadership
13 for being the right person at the right time who
14 really understands this issue better than anybody
15 else in the right position to do something very
16 fundamental to change the course of history in our
17 city. I don't mean to exaggerate but that's really
18 what's at stake here is the course of history for
19 families across the city with a fully funded adult
20 literacy program that has flexibility to deliver
21 programs in language and in culture that meet the
22 immediate needs of our community and build the base
23 for the next generation to have more success in the
24 K-12 system.

25

1
2 So, I want to thank you and commend your
3 leadership and we're here to help in any way we can.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you very much and
6 I'll say this, as a former high school teacher and I
7 think many of my colleagues in education would agree.
8 I could have designed and devised some great lesson
9 plan. Nothing matches the power of parents and
10 families being effectively involved in their
11 children's education, nothing. The greatest lesson
12 plan and I had a couple good ones, does not compare
13 to the family being involved and the DOE actually or
14 providers in finding ways to actually not just listen
15 but empowering them. That is, you are absolutely
16 correct and you're also correct in pointing out that
17 there are multiple goals that should be recognized in
18 programs. I had one of the graduates out of the OBT
19 program in Coney Island is actually interested in
20 joining the Community Board right now and that to me,
21 is also very goal worthy. That's very important,
22 increasing civic participation. Knowing how to not
23 just fight for yourself or for your community is very
24 powerful but as we've learned in many of the funding
25 streams, that's not a measured metric.

1
2 And so, the city's portion, which might have some
3 more flexibility is the smallest portion in
4 contributions into these programs.

5 So, its both in terms of more resources for these
6 programs but also, speaking to our state and federal
7 partners to cut the strings. Give us more resources
8 and cut the strings and allow us to design and
9 customize programs on the needs of our families. And
10 thank you for crystalizing that point and thank you
11 also to OBT for sticking with us because OBT could
12 have picked up and left Coney after the first cohort
13 class but we sat down together. This is important.
14 We sat down together because the initial results were
15 not that great. A lot of folks did not finish the
16 class but we sat down in partnership and tried to
17 find out why and we learned about the barriers in
18 terms of childcare, food insecurity, which are human
19 needs and we increased support and attendance picked
20 up, retention picked up and that to me is so
21 important because we're building human capacity.
22 We're building communities, we're building a sense of
23 family and I think that to me is the ultimate goal
24 here as well.

1
2 So, I thank all of you for sharing your powerful
3 stories. Thank you so much. Thank you.

4 We're trying to be mindful of all the students in
5 the audience as well, so forgive us. Okay, Devrani
6 Brahmanand and Nusaiba Hossain from Forest Hills High
7 School, where my mom used to work in Forest Hills
8 High School, that's pretty cool. Sandhya Prashad
9 with very good handwriting, Richard David, Ravi Batra
10 and Dr. Neeta Jain.

11 Whenever folks are ready, they may begin. Just
12 state your name once you turn the microphone and
13 speak.

14 RICHARD DAVID: Good afternoon everyone. My name
15 is Richard David. Thank you, Chairperson Mark
16 Treyger and Members of the Education Committee, for
17 having this incredible hearing. The truth is being
18 here, it feels empowering, not only because I see so
19 many people that I know in the room but because this
20 demand for Diwali has been so pent up for such a long
21 time.

22 I know that we have a long road ahead but thank
23 you really and to Council Member Dromm for giving us
24 this opportunity to talk about why we think Diwali
25 should be a public school holiday.

1
2 Again, I'm Richard David, I'm a Professor at York
3 College and I'm also a District Leader in Assembly
4 District 31.

5 Ironically, I am born on Diwali and I'm proud to
6 be one of the organizers to help to get a super
7 majority of Council Members, which is just one up by
8 one more last night to 36 for this Resolution.

9 Communities across New York City have demanded
10 Diwali for a public school holiday for decades. It
11 was tremendously important when this Mayor came into
12 office in 2014. For the first time in my lifetime, I
13 had a Mayor who was interested in adding diverse
14 public school holidays to our school calendar. Those
15 hopes were dashed though a year later when Diwali
16 wasn't included in the list of holidays.

17 What's particularly upsetting though is just last
18 year in December, I'm sorry, last year in September,
19 the Mayor and the Chancellor announced a brand new
20 school holiday. They extended the winter holiday to
21 add one new day to the school calendar that we had
22 not previously had.

23 It's frustrating because this demand for Diwali
24 was again shelved to the back of the list. Based on
25 a 2013 report from the New York City Planning

1
2 Commission, it shows the countries of origin for
3 people who celebrate Diwali. In that report, the top
4 three countries are Trinidad, Tobago and India. These
5 countries all have Diwali as a public school holiday.

6 Now, with the census coming up, we've always had
7 a hard time counting our numbers and I think that
8 will come up repeatedly but you can echo anywhere in
9 New York City, whether it's Macy's that celebrates
10 having a sale on Diwali or anywhere in the streets of
11 Southeast Queens, we have a Diwali Motorcade. Diwali
12 is incredibly important to Hindu's Sikhs, Jains
13 Buddhists and non-Hindu's like myself because
14 culturally this is something that's incredibly
15 significant and important.

16 For school children, this is something that will
17 not just foster tolerance and combat hate crimes that
18 are at an all time high in New York City. Frankly,
19 it will allow students and families to not chose
20 between homework and their faith because that's what
21 this come down to.

22 The school calendar requires that there are 180
23 school days and currently, we have 185. We have five
24 more days than we need on school calendar and this is
25

1
2 a perfect time as our Chancellor embraces diversity
3 to have Diwali as a public school holiday.

4 Thank you Chair Treyger, Council Member
5 Grodenchik and this Committee for having today's
6 hearing. I'm honored to be here.

7 DEVRANI BRAHMANAND: Good afternoon ladies and
8 gentleman. My name is Devrani Brahmanand and this is
9 Nusaiba Hossain and we are seniors at Forest Hills
10 High School. My team is competing in a social
11 science research competition called WISE. The
12 Quality of Life Issue that we are focusing on is
13 trying to convince the New York City Department of
14 Education to implement Diwali into the public school
15 calendar of days off.

16 We think this is equitable and fair because there
17 are Jewish holidays on the calendar, such as Yom
18 Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, and Passover. Christians are
19 given off on Easter, Good Friday and Christmas. Eid
20 has also been added to the calendar for Muslims, as
21 well as Lunar New Year for those who observe. There
22 is not a single holiday on the public school calendar
23 that acknowledges Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains,
24 which is disappointing considering the Pew Research
25

1
2 Center estimates more than 250,000 people in NYC
3 observe this holiday.

4 New York City is known for its incredible
5 diversity, it's array of cultures and the vast
6 opportunities that it offers to all people. It is
7 not equitable that those who celebrate Diwali are not
8 given the same respect as the other religions
9 followed by New Yorkers.

10 NUSAIBA HOSSAIN: Hi, my name is Nusaiba; so, to
11 explore this inequity, we surveyed 675 teachers,
12 students and New York City residents. We found an
13 overwhelming support for adding Diwali to many
14 religious holidays given off by the DOE. For
15 example, 100 percent of our participants of all
16 religions agreed that major holidays of different
17 religions should be equally recognized by the New
18 York City Department of Education. Moreover, 92
19 percent of participants believe that the NYC DOE
20 should add Diwali onto the school calendar as a day
21 off for all students and employees.

22 Our research confirmed that the importance of
23 this issue and the need for change. As per
24 tradition, many individuals participate in religious
25 services at the end of the day. However, many

1
2 students are not able to do wo with the abundance
3 amount of schoolwork.

4 We have contacted the Mayor's Office and the
5 Department of Education and were told to reach out to
6 our community leaders. However, as New York City
7 students, we have learned to never quit when faced
8 with adversity but rather to keep moving forward and
9 that is why we are here today.

10 We believe this inequity should be resolved and
11 therefore, Diwali should be recognized as a day off
12 for New York City students. This City Council has
13 the power to address this. Please help us fix this
14 and make New York City public schools more fair and
15 welcoming for all of us.

16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you and I'll ask
18 questions after I hear from the first panel, but very
19 proud of our students. So, you got another applause.

20 NUSAIBA HOSSAIN: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Great, you may continue.

22 SANDHYA PRASHAD: Good afternoon Councilman. My
23 name is Sandhya Prashad; I am currently a student at
24 Pays Law School. I missed two-thirds of my classes
25 to be here because this is such an important issue to

1
2 me. So, we Hindus stand before you, sit before you
3 rather, on this seemingly casual day, speaking about
4 an issue that is actually anything but casual to our
5 community.

6 We come before you to speak about one of th
7 holiest days of the year for the Hindu community,
8 Diwali and it's a beautiful holiday where we
9 celebrate the coming of the new year according to the
10 Hindu calendar. So, we all hail from countries where
11 Diwali celebrations are the largest of the year. For
12 reference, is the Hindu equivalent of Christmas, but
13 it has so little significance in this country that we
14 made our new home.

15 We are offered suspended alternate side parking
16 for the most important holiday of our religion. We
17 are offered little recognition by the larger
18 community. We are not taught much about it in school
19 and our youths are not afforded a day off from
20 school. Again, for the most important holiday of our
21 religion.

22 We go to school and we see our Christian
23 classmates get the chance to celebrate their
24 holidays. We see our Jewish classmates get the
25 chance to celebrate their holiday but should nay of

1
2 the Hindu students want to celebrate their holidays,
3 they are effectively being asked to choose between
4 their religion and their education.

5 So, I ask you, how can you this be equality? How
6 can it be fair that we should see our classmates get
7 to celebrate their religious holidays without having
8 to sacrifice their education, while we cannot do the
9 same? We are made to feel lesser for being Hindu in
10 America. Cases like Obergefell v. Hodges which comes
11 from the highest court of our country, although they
12 contemplate and they speak about issues that are
13 distinct from the thing at issue here, they are
14 concerned with how children are affected by the
15 decisions of the government and the decisions the
16 government makes and Obergefell says, children of
17 same sex couples who aren't allowed to marry, suffer
18 the stigma of knowing their families are somehow
19 lesser.

20 Now by having kids see that their classmates
21 religious holidays are recognized as school holidays
22 while theirs aren't, we are effectively doing what
23 Obergefell was worried about. We are making Hindu
24 families feel lesser for being Hindu in America.

1
2 Some may argue that giving students time off
3 prevents them from getting a quality education, but
4 this could not be further from the truth because
5 we're asking for one day a year and studies have
6 shown that breaks from school can actually increase
7 productivity, can reintegrate students and make them
8 more creative. Again, it's just one day off of the
9 year.

10 Making Diwali a recognized school holiday
11 validates the Hindu community in ways that the
12 Christian and Jewish communities have been validated
13 for years but the minority religions have never been.
14 So, it would be especially wonderful to see in the
15 current presidential administration and the currently
16 divided state of our county, politicians and leaders
17 seeking to afford everyone the same importance and
18 validity and bring harmony for us all.

19 Thank you.

20 RAVI BATRA: Mr. Chairman, it's a pleasure to be
21 before you and acknowledge your Ukrainian ancestry.
22 Not everything has to deal with impeachments. The
23 fact is that Ukraine is very much our front line in
24 part of our national interest and as I told you
25 earlier, President Zelensky is my client as was

1
2 President Poroshenko, because I represent the Ukraine
3 mission to the UN.

4 So, I'm not going to talk about -- my wife has
5 already left because she had to go get our daughter,
6 but I'm not going to talk about why Diwali is
7 important because that's obvious. I think the deaf,
8 blind and mute would understand that. But what I am
9 going to say is, that Diwali is not just important
10 for people much more Hindu than I am because I was
11 certainly born one, but you know, I'm a New Yorker.
12 I'm at home **[INAUDIBLE 4:14:48]** or a St. Patty's or
13 whatever else. But 9-11 has changed the world. It's
14 the day the world stood still, it's the day the world
15 changed and with the recent spate of anti-Semitism
16 for example, tree of life in Pennsylvania, victory of
17 good over evil is no longer religious.

18 This is really a moral imperative that Edman
19 Burke spoke about and I want to assure my young
20 colleague to my right was worried about Hindu's not
21 being treated well in the United States. It's not
22 really true because we've attended Diwali's in the
23 White House, the Congress, the whatever and I assure
24 you America has embraced this and that's why we're
25 here. That's why you are able to testify.

1
2 So, it not about America, it's just about New
3 York City and I have to tell you before Barry leaves,
4 when Mayor Bloomberg was here, I made a mistake
5 because when Kevin Sheekey was Deputy Mayor, had gone
6 to Albany to get the Board of Education converted to
7 a Department and he tried and failed, I intervened
8 and I got the Senate then on the democratic majority
9 to change its mind.

10 Had I known that Diwali was going to become a
11 problem, I would have made it a condition. So, Mayor
12 de Blasio is a good friend, but I'm really - we came
13 in 2016 when Danny Dromm, a great guy was here in
14 your position but I'm never coming back here again,
15 neither is my wife to testify, because this is it and
16 you know, either the City - either you know, the
17 Chancellor will do what he has to do and I'm going to
18 give him six months. Okay, otherwise I will engage
19 and spend a million and a half dollars to go to the
20 Southern District of New York and force him to do
21 what the Constitution demands he does under the Equal
22 Protection Clause of the United States Constitution
23 which by the way applies to New York State and New
24 York City under the 14th Amendment.

1
2 But things should be done nicely and so, I urge
3 you to speak to Richard Carranza and get him to
4 understand that he will embarrass our good Mayor and
5 he will embarrass the City Council and he will
6 embarrass New Yorkers if that's what it takes to do
7 the right thing when 9-11 happened right across the
8 street.

9 Okay, thank you very much.

10 DR. NEETA JAIN: Good afternoon everyone. As
11 most of you know, I'm Dr . Neeta Jain, I am the
12 Founder and President of International Ahimsa
13 Foundation. I'm also District Leader for Assembly
14 District 25 Part B President of Daniel Patrick
15 Moynihan Democratic Club and I'm also the senior Vice
16 President for First Hindu Temple in New York City.

17 So, it is my pleasure and honor to be here today.
18 I would like to start saying first, thank you to our
19 prior Chair of Education Committee Council Member
20 Daniel Dromm who introduced this Bill on Diwali,
21 Resolution Number 0146. We are really grateful to
22 him for taking this step and now, this gratefulness
23 is going to you as we had first two meetings in
24 Daniel Dromm's office in 2015 with a couple of other
25 organizations for this reason and in the second

1
2 meeting we decided that we had to teach all the
3 Council Members what Diwali is.

4 So, that's where we started and celebrated Diwali
5 right here in this Chamber for last six years. We
6 celebrated Diwali under the leadership for our
7 previous speaker Martha and now Corey Johnson. We
8 are very grateful for them of doing that and Council
9 Member Rory Lancman who took the lead for that.

10 So, I'm again, also not going in detail about
11 Diwali. Diwali is known worldwide and more than
12 eight countries celebrate Diwali and I have a lot of
13 data in my hand to give to all of you and I really
14 appreciate all the students who came from the early
15 morning for our very successful press conference
16 today, which was attended by Queens Borough President
17 Sharon Lee, lots of our colleagues in Council and
18 then we had representatives from Congresswoman
19 Carolyn Maloney, Congresswoman Grace Meng's Office
20 who always supports Diwali and overall, I would say
21 that I have 25 years of Diwali calendar which is
22 right here. You will get it later.

23 So, on this calendar it shows that 40 percent of
24 the time Diwali falls on the weekends. So, you
25 really don't have to worry about that and I told the

1
2 Mayor's Office also for the last two years, that
3 listen you don't have to worry about 2019 and 2020
4 because both years Diwali is falling on Sunday. So,
5 you don't have to worry about it, just move on and do
6 it. And then I have a calendar from one of the
7 schools in Long Island, which we all know that Long
8 Island also comes under New York State Education
9 Department. If they can have 180 days on calendar
10 with including Diwali as a holiday, why can't we.

11 So, this calendar as a sample I'm going to give
12 you and I also have data on eight countries student
13 who attend New York City public school and in total
14 we have 74,000 students attend from eight different
15 descents who celebrate Diwali.

16 So, all this data is right here for you to review
17 later on and I also have data from 2012 to 2014, how
18 many teachers, how many students took off on Diwali
19 in 40 different schools.

20 So, it's time for our Mayor to give the respect
21 and love and harmony to our students, our next
22 generation as we all believe as I'm also an educator,
23 as I said that I run CPSC Evaluation Agency. We
24 believe in DASA and you of course know what DASA
25 means Dignity for all Students Act. That means that

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2 you have to give that dignity, respect and
3 equivalency to all the students and it is not fair
4 that our students are not getting that dignity.

5 Thank you so much and I'm sure that under your
6 leadership it will happen.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I want to thank students
8 and the powerful panel here today. So, to be very
9 clear, I am a former high school teacher and I
10 remember I served the student population in my part
11 of Brooklyn that had a very high number of Asian
12 American students and I remember painfully having to
13 mark them absent when they were observing the Lunar
14 New Year during that time. This was before it
15 because a school holiday and I used to speak up
16 during school meetings and community meetings to say
17 it is not right that teachers are penalizing
18 students. And also, there was staff, Asian American
19 staff that had to take off to observe and it was
20 outrageous and so, when the students talk about you
21 know, being confronted with this choice of wanting to
22 receive your education, which you have every right to
23 and observing a very important day for your family
24 and community, it is outrageous.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: It's a choice.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right and so, I am in full support of recognizing Diwali as an official school holiday. I think it is incredibly important. I want to just make sure that we clarify the process in how this works. New York State reauthorized Mayor de Blasio to receive Mayoral control in the school system.

What that means is that the City Council has the power of oversight which we're using here today. I could hold hearings in which I do. I think we do an effective job holding hearings. We can advance and as you mentioned Chair Dromm who is an outstanding leader and Council Member but notice the title of his measure is called a Resolution, it's not an introduction. Introduction would mean it's a bill, his is a Resolution which means it's a sense of the body. It's where the City Council stands and you're right, thanks to your advocacy and his leadership and others, you have a super majority of this Council and I assure you as Chair of this Committee, that Resolution will pass this Committee and with the support of the Speaker, it will pass the City Council.

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2 So, yes, I will say that but it doesn't make it
3 law. It sends a message to the Mayor, it sends a
4 message to the Chancellor, there's no question about
5 it, it doesn't make it law. The Mayor of New York
6 City does have the authority to implement this with
7 the Chancellor. Also, the state legislature has the
8 authority to pass a bill and what happened in the
9 case of Lunar New Year, I'm sure the Mayor is not
10 going to enjoy this commentary but Treyger keeps it
11 real, is that when he campaigned for Mayor, he said
12 he supported making the Lunar New Year an official
13 holiday and then he had a change of heart when he
14 became Mayor. And that happened, was that that state
15 legislature was on the verge of passing a state law
16 ordering the city to recognize it as a holiday and
17 that's when he suddenly changed his opinion again.
18 He didn't want to be embarrassed by the state.

19 So, that's kind of the story of the Lunar New
20 Year. We will do everything possible from our end to
21 push them on this issue because the students, to me,
22 it's about our kids and the staff. Because as we
23 speak, if you observe Diwali and you are missing
24 school, you are penalized. You are being punished.
25 Schools have attendance policies and even if you

1
2 write a note to the teacher, I know how it works,
3 it's still recorded as an official absence in your
4 record and the same applies for staff. And for
5 staff, you know, they give them only a certain number
6 of days to take off for the whole school year and
7 they don't care what the excuses are. Those are the
8 certain days you have off. That is outrageous that
9 you are being penalized and punished for observing
10 and as to the Speakers points, we hear equity and
11 excellence for all. We hear about this term of
12 equity and respecting folks, well, they need to make
13 sure that their actions are aligned with their words.
14 And there is a way to make this work. I know that
15 there is another issue that was raised in terms of
16 the school calendar, if they have 180 days but I
17 don't think bureaucracy should get in the way. There
18 is ways to fix this and to adjust this.

19 Now, you mentioned that you had some data, can
20 you share just on the record, what data you have as
21 far as the number? Yeah, okay, maybe you can give us
22 as far as part of the record afterwards. I
23 appreciate that. And you had something that you
24 wanted to raise.

25

1
2 Yeah I wanted to say that you know, one of the
3 people who was at the press conference that Neeta
4 organized, who works for John Lu now in Albany, who
5 was then two decades ago almost was Transportation
6 Chair and Ranju and I were with him with David Weprin
7 Finance Chair, which is now Danny Dromm and we got
8 the city parking done.

9 In fact, when Ranju took over in 2010 and she's
10 not here as I said, but in 2010 to take on the Diwali
11 stamp, which she successfully got. So, Diwali is an
12 American holiday recognized in every United States
13 post office across the country which is really more
14 important than the passport.

15 So, Diwali is already here. In fact, one of the
16 people who signed Ranju's petition is none other than
17 our good friend Mayor de Blasio. So, I really want
18 the Mayor to call the Chancellor in and read him the
19 riot act because this is, this Chancellor is
20 embarrassing all of us in New York and I really am
21 loathe to go to court because really, it's so
22 unconstitutional, it's a hole big enough for a Mac
23 truck to go through and for the City of New York,
24 which wants to be a sanctuary city, which I have some
25 issues with. There are limits to, you know I think

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2 houses of worship should be sanctuaries, I'm not sure
3 about cities but you know, that's a different
4 conversation, but not to actually give constitutional
5 rights the First Amendment which is the freedom of
6 religion and separation of church and state.

7 Well, either really the City of New York is going
8 to end up with a Hopson's choice just like they've
9 imposed upon Diwali following people which is, either
10 have Diwali as a school holiday or all religious
11 holidays will be canceled and we don't want that. I
12 don't want that separation of church and state to
13 take over equal protection.

14 So, you know, either we will have the Hopson's
15 choice or we'll end up being the Chancellor's
16 Hopson's choice.

17 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: What I will share with
18 folks and then we'll proceed is that, my
19 understanding, I have a degree in being a school
20 leader and my in my education class when this issue
21 came up about school holidays, we asked the question
22 about how does the DOE recognize certain days and not
23 others. That question came up and what I was taught
24 by my professor was that there was a time and place
25 in the Education Department where a significant

1
2 number of teachers for example were of just the
3 Jewish and Christian faith and so, what happened on
4 those days whether it was Hanukkah or Christmas,
5 everyone was absent and they couldn't even find
6 substitute teachers.

7 So, the system basically shut itself down just by
8 default and so they said that we had to find a way of
9 just, you know, so, they will argue, we're not
10 technically recognizing Hanukkah or Christmas, we're
11 just having a system default shutdown because they
12 could not find, but they've added since then. So,
13 they've added other days since then and that's why I
14 understand that community for feeling hey, what about
15 us and that's a very legitimate issue, which they
16 must gravel with.

17 RAVI BATRA: But New Yorkers are better off with
18 religion than without religion and so are New York
19 children and for them to know that victory of good
20 over evil means beating terror. Diwali is not just a
21 religious metaphor. The metaphor of Diwali covers a
22 billion people. There not a person that's excluded
23 from Diwali, the metaphor. So, New York City needs
24 to get with it.

25 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I appreciate you and I -

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2 DR. NEETA JAIN: I just want to clarify one thing
3 as I heard from my colleagues and friends in
4 government that if you have superior majority on any
5 Resolution in Council, then you can overrule the
6 Mayor's veto.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, that is when you have a
8 Bill, not a Resolution. A Resolution is just a
9 Resolution.

10 RAVI BATRA: That's what he was explaining, this
11 is not binding.

12 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right, right, this is a
13 non-binding measure because we don't have the
14 authority. Council Member Grodenchik, you had a
15 point?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much
17 Mr. Chairman. First, let me thank you because unless
18 I'm wrong, I believe that this is the very, very
19 first hearing in this term that we've had on this
20 issue and I want to thank you because I know that
21 there are many, many issues before you as Chair of
22 the Education system, Education Committee, which
23 oversees the education of approximately 1.1 million
24 children and so, I want to thank you on behalf of the
25 probably 15,000 to 20,000 people that live in my

1
2 district that celebrate Diwali and would greatly
3 appreciate not having to worry about going to school
4 and not going to school.

5 So, let me thank you for that and let me thank
6 everybody who has stayed here, the clock, it's
7 working today, look at that. It was broken the other
8 day, so the clock is working. I want to thank the
9 panel and everybody who stayed, we're close to our
10 fifth hour now. We're about to end to the fifth hour
11 of this hearing but I want to thank you for being
12 here today. Nothing just happens in government,
13 those of us who have been in government a long time
14 understand that the overnight success that some
15 issues have take place over years and years, if not
16 decades and so, we've heard some important, very
17 important issues today and certainly Diwali for me
18 and Adult Literacy and Three Kings Day. These are
19 all important issues, so I want to thank you for
20 being here today and for pressing this issue.

21 I think that the panel is absolutely right, we
22 must make this a New York City school holiday and I
23 am certain that it will happen. Whether it happens
24 now or later, I don't have a crystal ball, my crystal
25 ball cracked and hasn't come back from the repair

1
2 shop but the truth of the matter is that this is a
3 tide of pro-Diwali sentiment here in this Council and
4 I am optimistic Mr. Chair and to all the people here
5 that the tide will sweep to the other side of City
6 Hall very, very soon and I think the Mayor
7 understands that. The logistics, we'll leave for
8 other people to work out but given what I said
9 outside when I said previously, this is really about
10 fairness for all New York City residents and to
11 recognize that a substantial portion of New York City
12 residents celebrate this holiday.

13 I know that we've celebrated it here now for many
14 years in this very Chamber and I enjoy it. It's a
15 nice holiday because it doesn't just last one day, it
16 lasts many days and so, we get to celebrate not only
17 in my district, but in other parts of Queens and New
18 York City and here in the Chamber.

19 So, I will keep the faith Mr. Batra and Dr. Jain
20 and to everybody, Mr. David and to those wonderful
21 students, one of whom is my constituent. We will
22 keep the faith and we will light a candle in the hope
23 that Diwali will soon be a New York City public
24 school holiday.

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2 With that, I yield the microphone back and I've
3 got to go back to Queens. I rearranged my schedule
4 to the extent possible.

5 RAVI BATRA: Before you go Barry, I want you to
6 know we have a lot of **[INAUDIBLE 4:42:19]**.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Oh, **[INAUDIBLE**
8 **42:21]**, okay.

9 RAVI BATRA: And in Chairman Treyger, because the
10 fact that you are of the Jewish faith both of you and
11 so many others on the Council. For you to be taking
12 this up is exactly why America is that shining city
13 on the hill and I want you to know when Ranju's thing
14 with the Diwali thing, when she Chairs the Diwali
15 Foundation USA, the United Nations has taken that up
16 and the lead country is Belarus, an orthodox
17 Christian and the first time Israel was part of it
18 and 24 countries signed on.

19 So, New York City really needs to be embarrassed
20 and I don't mean really New York City, I mean the
21 Chancellor. So, you know, if we lived 50 years ago,
22 someone would take them to the woodshed and spank
23 them but you know, you'll have a nice conversation
24 with him.

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Okay, thank you very
3 much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you all, thank you
5 very much.

6 RAVI BATRA: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Absolutely. The next panel
8 we'll hear from is Ariel Savransky, Liza
9 Schwartzwald, Ira Yankwitt, Tsering Lama.

10 We're going to add a student who has night class,
11 Sumeshwar Singh who will go first because they have
12 class, so we will accommodate our students.

13 Whenever you're ready, you may begin.

14 SUMESHWAR SINGH: Good afternoon everyone.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Folks, let's just be
16 mindful and courteous to our speakers and presenters.
17 We still have to hear from more folks and I
18 appreciate that. You may start over.

19 SUMESHWAR SINGH: Good afternoon everyone. My
20 name is Sumeshwar Singh, I'm representing York
21 College when I speak. I say that Diwali should be
22 recognized as a national holiday due to the fact that
23 there has been many significant changes to our
24 nation. Different religion has been gaining
25 acceptance and many religions such as Catholics,

1
2 Judaism, Christianity has gained support of our
3 nation. In holidays such as Christmas, Yom Kippur,
4 Good Friday, Easter. However, Hinduism has not had a
5 chance to be recognized in the eye of the public, so
6 I say that there should be changes towards this.

7 As many of the folks on the panel has mentioned
8 before, there is consequences when it comes to when a
9 student doesn't attend school for one day just to
10 celebrate with friends and family.

11 Since it's a very auspicious day, for me
12 personally, on Diwali, in the morning I have to go to
13 the temple to pray with my family or we have a little
14 puja and then we move towards the later section of
15 the day, where we like Diya's and we celebrate with
16 others and we make food and distribute it around the
17 community. Mostly, in the block that I live in, we
18 would go around door by door and we would give people
19 like the sweets we made.

20 This is concerning because this takes up a lot of
21 time over my day and if you're inclined to your
22 religion and beliefs like I am, I take the day off
23 from school and when I go back to school the other
24 day, this counts as an unexcused absence, so I would
25 be penalized for this.

1

2 So, sometimes if I miss an exam, I won't be able
3 to make this up and with certain professors and
4 teachers, they have like three unexcused absences and
5 then you would be penalized like for the rest of the
6 semester. They would have some kind of rule like
7 your grade would drop from a whole grade. Like, if I
8 was an A student, I would go to a B just because I
9 missed three days and I'm not saying I missed all
10 three days because of Diwali. Stuff comes up in my
11 daily life to.

12 I am a CUNY BMI mentor, so I would leave campus
13 on certain days to go to other campuses for events
14 and stuff like that. But I would just like to say
15 this should be, Diwali should be added into the
16 calendar because this is a major issue and I've known
17 that this has been put forward before and there
18 hasn't been a solution yet. So, I am trying to take
19 stand and hopefully we can make a change.

20 Thank you.

21 TSERING LAMA: Good afternoon Chairperson Treyger
22 and Committee Members and everyone here. My name is
23 Tsering Lama and I'm a Domestic Worker in English for
24 Empowerment, Organizer of Adhikaar. We're a worker

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1
2 center and a community center based in Woodside
3 Queens.

4 We work with a Nepali speaking community.
5 Adhikaar is English for Empowerment classes supported
6 by adults of all ages to improve English to support
7 them in their daily lives and at their workplaces.
8 We have been running regular EFE classes since 20107,
9 since we opened our doors in 2005. The classes are
10 volunteer run and we provide EFE classes to an
11 estimated 2,000 individuals to date.

12 We offer testimony to help the Committee
13 understand the importance of nonprofit like us that
14 run adult literacy and education programs especially
15 for new immigrants.

16 New York City's Nepali speaking population is
17 amongst the fastest growing Asian Ethnic group. Our
18 community members are likely to be of working age
19 adults who are limited literacy proficiency and often
20 low literacy levels. Our EFE classes run through the
21 year in our community center in spring, fall and
22 summer and we host nine to twelve classes each
23 session. We have four levels beginner, basic,
24 intermediate and advanced.

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2 EFE classes are the backbone of our center and
3 one of the most popular classes. Although there are
4 other programs in adult literacy that are offered
5 throughout New York, a lot of our members like coming
6 to our organization because we have staff and
7 volunteers who are culturally and linguistically
8 competent in the Nepal and Tibetan. Our curriculum
9 follows MOIA, We Speak New York guidelines but we
10 have shaped our own curriculums that include workers
11 rights, political education, government agencies and
12 other relevant practical skills and information.

13 Our members are applying what they've learned at
14 Adhikaar in various aspects of their lives including
15 their homes, their workplace and the community. This
16 results in people negotiating higher wages,
17 navigating social services, receiving IDNYC and
18 supporting their childrens in New York City school
19 systems and navigating healthcare and much more.

20 I want to run into like giving – highlighting one
21 of our members stories. So, around 2010, I began
22 working as a full time nanny for an Indian family but
23 over time, I was doing more of domestic work making
24 food, cleaning house, while another younger, college
25 student was hired as a nanny.

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2 My boss was mean and she would criticize me all
3 the time in my work and she was abusive. It was
4 tough and I could not afford to lose my job, so I had
5 to bear it. About four years ago, I heard about
6 Adhikaar from my friend. I wanted to learn English
7 because without English, you're like a blind man in
8 America. So, she told me that Adhikaar had free
9 classes, so I started coming and I'm very thankful
10 because I learned so much. Not just English but you
11 know, survival skills; getting from place to place,
12 taking the trains, understanding rights at work. In
13 my work, it made me more confident. I was more
14 assertive about my rights, like getting breaks and
15 asking for more pay and also changed my relationship
16 with my boss.

17 In my own life, I'm very proud and happy. I have
18 a chance to give back to the community by
19 volunteering at Adhikaar. Now, I am an English class
20 facilitator myself and I am thankful because I'm able
21 to give back.

22 So, this is a testimony by Mohenia Decury[SP?]
23 who is a Queens resident and is also an EFE
24 facilitator now.

25 Thank you.

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2 IRA YANKWITT: Good evening. My name is Ira
3 Yankwitt, I'm the Executive Director of the Literacy
4 Assistance Center and I am here this evening
5 testifying on behalf of the New York City Coalition
6 for Adult Literacy which is a coalition comprised of
7 adult literacy students, teachers, program managers
8 from over 40 community based organizations, community
9 colleges and libraries throughout the city and I am
10 struck that this hearing is a testament to the power
11 and the importance of having an educator and a child
12 of immigrants leading this conversation because you
13 don't just reduce adult literacy education to
14 workforce development. What you see is that adult
15 literacy education is about human rights, human
16 dignity and to use your phrase from earlier, human
17 liberation and social justice and you are truly
18 committed to the goals, the dreams the aspirations of
19 the 2.2 million New Yorkers who lack English Language
20 proficiency or a high school diploma.

21 As a field, I think we have spent decades facing
22 a catch 22 and it's really the catch 22 that you
23 yourself saw at OBT in Coney Island, which is that
24 because of paucity of investment in adult literacy
25 programs, while we do what we can and I would say we

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2 have extraordinary outcomes given the level of
3 investment because we don't have the investment we
4 need, we're not able to provide the supports and
5 services that our students need and deserve and are
6 entitled to.

7 But unlike others who look at those limited
8 outcomes with some skepticism, you recognize the need
9 for investment, you made that investment and now
10 you've seen what that kind of investment can yield.
11 Our challenge is we need to bring others along to
12 where you are. And so, NYCCAL's request today is
13 really a very modest one which is to invest \$2
14 million additional dollars over and above the \$12
15 million that we anticipate we will receive again and
16 hope to see baselined in the upcoming budget, in a
17 pilot project and what's the pilot based on? Well,
18 at various points throughout this afternoon, people
19 have mentioned a report that my organization produced
20 in December of 2017 called Invest in Equality and
21 what this report did, is it identified 14 building
22 blocks of a high quality effective community based
23 adult literacy program. It identified the resources
24 you need to implement those building blocks and it
25 did a cost model budget and the cost model budget

1
2 yielded a result that said, it would take at least
3 four times the current level of investment per
4 student to achieve and implement these supports and
5 what are these supports and services? They are the
6 very things we've been talking about today. Full
7 time teachers, counseling, whether it's through case
8 managers or social workers. Other kinds of support
9 services like money for transportation or childcare
10 or food. Better and integrated technology and
11 programs, time for teachers to actually develop
12 culturally responsive curriculum and instruction.

13 So, our ask to you is to work with us, so that we
14 can give your colleagues and this Administration and
15 future Administrations the evidence they need,
16 evidence that you've already seen. We're calling for
17 a \$2 million investment which would enable us to
18 quadruple funding for a handful of currently funded
19 community based organizations, quadruple funding so
20 that not so that they could expand services but so
21 that they could increase the services and supports
22 that they are already providing. Let's work together
23 to identify the wider range of outcomes that reflect
24 our students goals including civic participation,
25 including engaging as parents around their children's

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2 schooling. Let's work together to identify measures
3 that can document those goals and then let's have the
4 evidence we need to come back to you, your
5 colleagues, future Administrations and really
6 advocate, not just for the \$12 million but the
7 hundreds of millions of dollars that should really be
8 invested in adult literacy education.

9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you and I'm going to
11 ask some questions afterwards but I am all in. So,
12 yes, please, thank you.

13 ARIEL SAVRANSKY: Good evening. My name is Ariel
14 Savransky and I am a Policy and Advocacy Advisor at
15 UJA-Federation of New York.

16 We are also members of NYCCAL and my testimony
17 echoes pretty much everything that my colleague Ira
18 just mentioned, so I'm just going to add a few things
19 and make this quick. I know we've been sitting here
20 for a while.

21 So, we know the need is great. Thank you so much
22 for all of the work that you have really been doing
23 this year to raise the profile of the importance of
24 adult literacy services. I think that we know these
25 services are so needed, we know we need to expand

1
2 services in New York and that's really something that
3 we're hoping to make great strides on this year.

4 NYCCAL actually conducted a survey a few years ago,
5 looking at wait lists for programs and we found that
6 about 15,000 students are on the wait list but this
7 is really an undercount because not many programs
8 actually keep wait lists because they know that they
9 are not going to be able to meet the need.

10 So, just the fact that 15,000 additional students
11 are waiting for these services, that just shows that
12 now is really the time to invest.

13 I will also add that the community based
14 organizations that NYCCAL supports are really the
15 ones who are familiar with their communities. They
16 are the one's who have culturally competent services
17 whose students feel comfortable going to which is so
18 important in this time.

19 So, we really are looking forward to working with
20 you to make sure that we can get this pilot
21 implemented and really demonstrate that once we
22 invest at the levels that are really needed to
23 provide adequate programs for our students, it really
24 makes a huge difference. I will also add, just one
25 last thing, we've really been as NYCCAL, trying to

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2 figure out creative ways to kind of raise the profile
3 of adult literacy throughout the city because it's
4 really something we know you understand it so well,
5 but it's something that we don't even have a point
6 person to go to in the city.

7 So, how do we expect the city to really
8 understand the importance of adult literacy services.
9 So, one of the ideas that we came up with is to try
10 to have all of the Deputy Mayor's that are invested
11 in these programs in some capacity, visit a program
12 and then have a very critical discussion with them
13 after seeing these programs in action about the
14 importance of investing in these services and that's
15 something that we would really like to work with you
16 Council Member, maybe in partnership with Council
17 Member Menchaca as well, who has been a really great
18 adult literacy champion. To really bring them to
19 these programs and illustrate the importance and then
20 make sure that they are onboard with investing in
21 these services.

22 So, thank you again for all of the work that
23 you've been doing and we look forward to continuing
24 to work with you.
25

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2 LIZA SCHWARTZWALD: Good afternoon, so I'm the
3 third of three NYCCAL reps. I'm Liza Schwartzwald,
4 I'm a Manager of Education Policy with the New York
5 Immigration Coalition. So, I'm going to share
6 everyone's thanks for holding this hearing. We were
7 so excited to see that adult literacy was finally up
8 here getting the spotlight.

9 So, I am going to echo what both of my colleagues
10 and many of the students have come here to say and
11 add a little bit to it. Personally, I was thrilled
12 to hear you talking particularly about parents. One
13 of the ways that we feel this funding that the City
14 Council has given us is different from all this other
15 funding is that it really does serve parents well.
16 Many of the students that we have are women and so,
17 we're talking about a lot of mothers. Statewide,
18 there are 971,000 parents of young children. 411,000
19 of them are of limited English proficiency.

20 So, when we talk about adult literacy, we are
21 really talking about those parents and I think that
22 we've covered this a little bit but it's been very
23 clear to us that the goal of these parents going to
24 these programs is not often or always about job
25 placement. It's really about supporting their

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2 families and speaking to their child's teacher and
3 taking their kids to the grocery store and really
4 being able to engage in all of these you know,
5 incredibly important life events that their children
6 are experiencing. We also know of course that
7 education level is basically the most important
8 indicator of a child's eventual success.

9 I also would just like to stress that the affect
10 of adult literacy extends beyond to a couple of
11 federal policies that have come up, most particularly
12 with the rollout of public charge this past Monday,
13 adult literacy services are even more crucial. As
14 adult language ability can count as a positive factor
15 in the overall public charge determination for
16 families who are applying for green cards.

17 I also wanted to remind everyone about the
18 census. Adequately funding adult literacy across the
19 city makes initiatives like the census outreach
20 currently being undertaken a lot more effective and
21 that's one of the ways that I think that we get you
22 know more representation and more funding and are
23 able to really properly represent the diverse
24 community that we see in the city and of course
25 statewide as well.

1
2 So, I will just echo again, the ask for \$2
3 million for the pilot and we would love to be a part
4 of working with you in scheduling some visits to our
5 wonderful programs.

6 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: First of all, I thank all
7 of you. I can't thank you enough and I mean, I am
8 all in. I think we need to even fight for more than
9 the numbers you are talking about but I hear you.

10 The DYCD official testified, talked about a \$16
11 million figure and we're talking about baselining \$12
12 million. Can you just speak to that issue please?

13 IRA YANKWITT: Yeah, we believe that what he was
14 talking about was the \$3.5 million that was baselined
15 in the RFP that goes back to FY'15, which then the
16 \$12 million annual increases have been over and above
17 but our understanding is that while that comes close
18 to \$16 million, something like \$3 to \$4 million has
19 not gone to DYCD in the past.

20 So, we were a little confused when we heard that.
21 There maybe money, that DYCD Official oversees
22 literacy and immigrant services and it maybe that
23 there is funding for immigrant services outside of
24 the 3.5 in the \$12 million that we've been talking
25 about, that's speculation.

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2 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yeah, because there's a lot
3 of glaring data out of the testimony from the
4 Administration. We heard in the case of DOE for
5 example, over 44,000 students last year down to
6 27,000 this year. I mean, that was not lost on me.

7 The figure of over 2.2 million folks without a
8 high school diploma or the equivalent of a high
9 school diploma and the fact that they all difficulty
10 figuring out who was the senior point person in the
11 entire city government responsible for this and the
12 fact that they had a workforce person testify on
13 behalf of the overall Administration was not lost on
14 me either. And Ira, I do want to recognize your
15 report was powerful and the report of your coalition
16 members and it was very informative even for my staff
17 and for my office and I just look -- because one of
18 the questions I had was about a model budget and I
19 look at my district for example, even though we
20 doubled down on investment. It's still not fully
21 sufficient because there's another area that we still
22 have to work on, the literacy readiness level. Folks
23 who are coming in reading below level of what the
24 high school equivalency course you know requires,
25 that piece, we still have to grapple with. But I

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2 like the idea of coming up with multiple goals and
3 measures and not just simply tying it to workforce. I
4 think that's absolutely spot on. Folks have
5 different reasons why they enter these programs and
6 we have to be mindful of that and funding should be
7 mindful of that.

8 But the fact that you know, I can't tell you the
9 number of times we hear from the Administration about
10 all these programs and all this and yet, the numbers
11 I heard today, 27,000 from DOE, I think they're down
12 to 11,000 or less with CUNY, 15,000, 16,000,
13 somewhere in that range for – so, we're not even
14 making a dent in that overall number and those that
15 we are serving, it's just, it's not enough.

16 And so, can the providers just give me a model
17 budget, not just in terms of numbers but what type of
18 staffing and type of services that you think every
19 adult education program should have. What services
20 do you think are non-negotiable that must be a part
21 of a program?

22 IRA YANKWITT: So, thank you for all of that.
23 So, yes, in the cost model budget that's part of the
24 report, we actually break that down and we'd be happy
25 to meet with you and kind of really go through both

1
2 how we came to those positions in staffing and how we
3 arrived at the cost.

4 So, we'd be delighted to do that and spend some
5 time talking about that in detail. I will note that
6 what I sometimes say, is what we came up with in that
7 report and in that budget is a gold standard quality
8 program but it's not a platinum standard quality
9 program. It does not include some of the additional
10 and very specific supports that programs need,
11 depending on who they serve.

12 So, you know, in many ways, even though it's
13 quadruple the current level of funding, I would say
14 it's kind of a baseline rather than a ceiling for
15 funding and we could talk through what we mean by
16 that and what are some of the other kinds of supports
17 that ideally programs would have as well.

18 I think it's worth noting, I certainly and I
19 think my colleagues appreciate it, the questions you
20 were asking about a singular point person or office
21 in government, that from the late 80's to the early
22 2000's there was a Mayor's Office of Adult Literacy
23 that did exactly what you're describing. It played a
24 coordinating role among the CBO's, the CUNY programs,
25 the libraries and DOE and an oversight role and even

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2 was responsible for developing the RFP's for funding
3 and was able to coordinate funding systematically
4 through that role. That was eliminated under the
5 Bloomberg Administration, it was then later
6 resurrected by the Bloomberg Administration as a
7 Mayor's Office of Adult Education that didn't quite
8 play the same role, which was then folded into the
9 Office of Human Capital Development, Office of
10 Workforce Development and the Executive Director
11 position was downgraded to a literacy advisor and our
12 colleague Stacie Evans played that role until she
13 went to CUNY and we heard from her earlier today.

14 So, it has been an entity within city government.
15 It's played the role that you've talked about. I
16 think we're at a loss not having it and I think it
17 quite frankly was a surprise to many of us here today
18 to hear the Office of Workforce Development claiming
19 that mantle. I think it's a concern, because like
20 you, we don't believe that adult literacy should be
21 reduced down to workforce development, that there are
22 the broader goals as Stacie said, as you echoed that
23 really reflect the full humanity of our students, the
24 wholeness of our students as human beings. And it's
25 not just about employment but also, because that

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2 office has not played role that at least we see
3 advocating for adult literacy education and programs.

4 So, it was surprising to hear that but I think
5 you know, either way it really speaks to the need to
6 have this conversation about an overarching
7 coordinator whose looking at the totality of programs
8 and the totality of services in the city.

9 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And I think you answered my
10 next question because we were going to ask about who
11 should answer to who and clearly, I think this adult
12 education point person should be the head and folks
13 should then answer to this person.

14 I couldn't agree more, even preparing for this
15 hearing it became a challenge to figure out who will
16 testify from the Administration. And I have must
17 respect for Director Peterson but she is a Workforce
18 Specialist and she has a great background in that
19 area and she was helpful to me in Coney getting the
20 Workforce One Center set up. But as I stated on the
21 record, a number of people were turned away and I
22 could have just called it a day by saying okay, let's
23 do a press release of one or two people that found
24 employment but in my learning, because I learned a
25 lot here, it was not just about jobs for people. It

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2 was just about how do I become more supportive for my
3 child in their education or how do I become more
4 involved in my community? How do I just read? How
5 do I fight for myself?

6 So, I learned, so I am a lifelong learner and now
7 I'm trying to apply what I learned to policy and to
8 budget. And so, everything that you shared has been
9 validated through what I saw in my own district and
10 so, I want to fight for more. I think we should be
11 fighting for way more than just \$12 million in
12 baselined funding. This is transformative work and
13 so, this is going to be one of our top budget
14 priorities this year.

15 So, I definitely have your back and I thank you
16 all very much.

17 Thank you.

18 PANEL: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Next panel Shivani Damera,
20 Li Hua Yang, Teresa Baik and Mary Hetteix.

21 Whenever folks are ready, yes, I'm sorry.

22 MARY HETTEIX: Chairman Treyger, Members of the
23 Committee on Education, thank you for having us and
24 our partner organizations here today. My name is
25 Mary Hetteix and I am the Adult Education Program

1
2 Coordinator for the Arab American Association of New
3 York.

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

22 Every year hundreds of students attend our
23 classes but our current level of designated ESL
24 funding only provides enough support to educate about
25 half of the students we serve. We have been able to

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2 make up the difference by reallocating funds from
3 other projects, but this is obviously unsustainable.
4 Without the city's help hundreds of students are at
5 risk of losing their access to free ESL education.

6 We serve a uniquely vulnerable community which
7 includes refugees and adults with limited education.

8 The English language skills they gain through our
9 classes open up immeasurable opportunities, to work
10 as they please, to study as they like and to
11 participate in society in a way they never could
12 before. This impact is arguably most profoundly felt
13 by the women we serve. The majority of our students
14 are women who may not have had the chance to work or
15 go to school in their home countries.

16 AAANY's ESL programs open the door to a level of
17 independence which may have been previously denied to
18 them on account of their gender. Our program equips
19 them with English language skills in a way which is
20 convenient for them, responsive to their culture and
21 respectful of their family obligations.

22 These classes don't just teach them, they empower
23 our students to become active, independent and
24 productive in ways they never could before and our
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2 current level of funding risks this empowerment being
3 taken from them.

4 AAANY's prerogative is to always expand the reach
5 and impact of our programming, an increase investment
6 from the city would allow us to do just that.

7 Expanded funding would allow us to hire more
8 teachers, decrease class sizes and expand our class
9 offerings to include night courses giving hundreds
10 more new Americans the chance to learn.

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

18 TERESA BAIK: Good evening, Chairman Treyger.
19 Thank you so much for your support and all the words
20 that you said. I think it really echoed a lot of
21 what I'm trying to talk about and my name is Teresa
22 Baik, I'm the Director of Education at KCS. We are a
23 social service nonprofit located in Queens and it's
24 the organization that Council Member Grodenchik
25 visited for ESL classes.

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2 KCS is short for Korean Community Services of
3 Metropolitan New York. We have been founded since
4 1973 and we serve primarily the Korean American
5 community. We also see Asian community and who ever
6 walks into our doors and we have six different
7 programs that consists of aging, education,
8 immigration, workforce, mental health clinic and also
9 a public health and research center.

10 Our ESL classes have been going on for over 20
11 years and we serve approximately 200 students, the
12 most that we've ever served and we have morning,
13 afternoon, evening classes, just to best accommodate
14 our students schedule. And the students that walk
15 in, they feel energetic, invigorated and they are
16 able to talk to their child's teacher and to talk to,
17 and their grandparents who are currently in our
18 schools, in our classes are able to talk to their
19 grandchildren in English. And just the amazing story
20 that I've heard from clients and one of the stories I
21 want to share with you is from a client who as I was
22 helping her fill out her intake form, she was telling
23 me her personal story on why she decided to take
24 English and it started off with the fact that she
25 always wanted to learn English when she was a young

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2 girl and she started to attend elementary school in
3 her native country but she was actually stopped. She
4 was forced to stop because of family circumstances
5 and for her, that was always just a draw back for
6 her.

7 And so, when this opportunity to attend a free
8 English class was given to her, she was definitely
9 excited and very eager and all of our students are
10 very eager and excited and we just once again want to
11 reiterate the support and I think multi-year funding
12 is just extremely important and also to recognize
13 that a one-fit solution doesn't fit everything. And
14 that we just want to continue to ask for your support
15 in this important initiative.

16 CHRISTINA: Good evening everyone, I am
17 Christina, I come from China and I have been here in
18 New York for six months. I was a Business Manager in
19 China. I was confident in everything I did.

20 I had a very difficult time when I first came
21 here. I didn't have a job. I couldn't speak English
22 and I didn't understand what others said. My husband
23 had to accompany me when I wanted to go somewhere. I
24 felt like a baby, I was sad because I could not do
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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 make many mistakes, she keeps encouraging me. She says, I like mistakes, mistakes are good. I am so proud of you. You always can 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 and now, I can express more complex ideas about many topics.

I am 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 a short conversation with them and I feel everything is beginning to get better. In the future, I hope to get a promotion at my job.

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2 I still come to CPC to learn English. English is
3 very important to me. I can speak English when I am
4 working. In the future, I want to use English to
5 communicate with my child's teacher. English will
6 appear in every corner of my life. I will learn it
7 for my whole life and I believe anyone who has the
8 will can do it.

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

13 Thank you.

14 SHIVANI DAMERA: Thank you, Chair Mark Treyger
15 and the Members of the Committee on Education, for
16 convening this hearing. My name is Shivani Damera
17 and I am the Program Assistant at the Asian American
18 Federation.

19 We are a leadership organization that presents
20 nearly 70 member and partner agencies like our
21 organizations here through our research policy
22 advocacy, public awareness and organizational
23 development. We are here today to highlight the need
24 for community based adult literacy programming or to
25 urge the city to invest in this critical service.

1
2 The Asian community is in great need of adequate
3 funding for adult literacy programs in ESL classes.
4 A state funding for robust ESL programming has really
5 been significantly reduced in 2019. City funding is
6 needed now more than ever to bridge that gap.

7 With limited funding, community based
8 organizations are less equipped to meet the soaring
9 demand for adult literacy classes. Particularly
10 during a time when Asian New Yorkers are seeking to
11 resource themselves with English skills. To navigate
12 the many challenges being rocked by the federal
13 administration such as public charge.

14 The need for these services in the Pan Asian
15 Community is irrefutable. Asians are the fastest
16 growing group in New York City. We're over now 16
17 percent of New York City's population. We also have
18 the highest poverty levels in New York City, with one
19 in four Asians living in poverty. Of that
20 population, 70 percent have limited English speaking
21 proficiency or LEP. For these individuals, adult
22 literacy classes are essential to pursuing employment
23 opportunities, obtaining citizenship, navigating
24 their childrens education system and being fully
25 equipped to navigate complex systems like housing,

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2 healthcare and transportation, to support themselves
3 and their families.

4 We spoke about one model does not fit all, this
5 does not work for many of the clients, for our
6 members and partners or CBO's, particularly as Asian
7 languages, their CBO servant are not readily
8 available elsewhere. I believe we have about 24
9 Asian speaking language here just in New York City.

10 So, as a result, this leaves a lot of children or
11 LEP parents are forced to carry the burden of
12 translating for their parents. Often their matters
13 are really difficult for children to understand, such
14 as domestic violence and this is a burden that no
15 child should have to bear.

16 In the past, investment that New York State has
17 made in immigration integration is critical to
18 helping Asian led and Asian serving organizations
19 with deep community roots, build the capacity to
20 provide ESL classes, Immigration legal services and
21 community education workshops to get immigrants on
22 the path to citizenship and socioeconomic stability.

23 Through our partnership with the Council of
24 peoples organization, one of our member organization
25 in Brooklyn, we're actually able to serve

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2 approximately 5,000 new Americans and their families
3 through these state funded services over the course
4 of three and a half years.

5 These ESL programs can be an essential gateway to
6 one not only to assimilate information about the ever
7 changing immigration policy landscape to this
8 community, as well as issues like mental health.
9 Again, providing information about domestic violence
10 but also, it was a way for us to get a pulse on the
11 needs of the community.

12 So, we were able to get information about you
13 know, children facing youth bullying in schools and
14 then be able to address those issues.

15 Since that funding has ended, we have not been
16 able to sustain ESL programming. Meeting that
17 gateway to important immigration other wraparound
18 services has effectively **[INAUDIBLE 5:38:43]**.

19 So, as a result, we really urge the City Council
20 to prioritize the funding of adult literacy programs
21 by one, and as NYCCAL has mentioned, funding
22 community based adult literacy programming at the
23 baseline investment of \$12 million but also, it's
24 important to allow for Asian led and Asian serving
25 community organizations to compete for a multi-year

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2 ESL funding by designing contracts that recognize
3 their language and cultural competency through a
4 point system.

5 So, thank you so much for this opportunity and we
6 really look forward to working with you. Trust the
7 urging needs of Immigrant Integration Needs
8 Foundation New Yorkers.

9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I thank you all very, very
11 much for your powerful testimony and the questions
12 that we need to answer as a city is, what would it
13 cost to serve those non-served people? Not just to
14 maintain current service, what's the increase service
15 to reach all those who are not being served and how
16 do we reach over 2 million people and if you have any
17 thoughts? Please.

18 SHIVANI DAMERA: So, one of the things I would
19 comment is like on my last point. So, one, the
20 importance of increasing funding is important but
21 also, for smaller Asian organizations like ours,
22 where we don't actually have that track record, it's
23 hard to compete for funding. So, this funding often
24 goes to more larger mainstream organizations and
25 these organizations like ours, not being able to

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2 compete for that funding and as a result, not being
3 able to provide these important services.

4 So, it's again, recognizing that our groups do
5 provide really valuable services in the community,
6 even if they don't necessarily have that same track
7 record as the larger organizations. So, I think
8 that's really important to recognize.

9 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you for that and I
10 agree and would you agree that having adequate
11 funding levels to provide obviously adequate pay for
12 staff but also funding for meals and social supports
13 and childcare. Can you speak to the need on that
14 from the ground level?

15 MARY HETTEIX: Certainly, childcare is a huge and
16 probably the largest need that I hear from my clients
17 that they need childcare and it's probably the
18 biggest barrier in the community we serve.

19 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Anyone else want to speak?

20 TERESA BAIK: Yeah, I definitely echo those
21 sentiments and also just meals, having three hours
22 classes or we do give breaks but having that meal and
23 having that extra like, giving them that push and
24 that confidence booster would definitely be great and
25 especially with these parents that work long hours or

1
2 don't have the money to have adequate childcare, that
3 would mean the world to them.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you.

5 SHIVANI DAMERA: So, actually the group that I
6 mentioned and that I work really closely with, the
7 Council Peoples Organization, they are kind of a one
8 stop shop in terms of they provide all these
9 different services and actually, after they lost ESL
10 funding through the state, they were no longer able
11 to provide ESL classes. It tried to be volunteer
12 based and then it kind of dwindled out because it's
13 not sustainable but one of the really great things
14 but also, is a difficult thing is they provided
15 through the organization, through ESL classes, they
16 provided access information about their food pantry
17 that they have every week, access to getting public
18 benefits. They have a pre-K and childcare and senior
19 service.

20 So, they're able to through their ESL classes,
21 give information about their other services that are
22 available. And so, that was really important. It
23 was also a way I think conversely you know, they have
24 a pre-k program, so I do a lot of programming with
25 their pre-k program as well with their parents and

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2 so, I was able to when I did workshops with them, be
3 able to tell them. Before it was you know, a lot of
4 them didn't speak English. A lot of the mothers felt
5 really socially isolated. A lot of their concerns we
6 not being able to like really interact with their
7 children or really talk to their teachers and that
8 created a lot mental health problems. But one of the
9 things as I was able to say offer as a service, you
10 know, they provide ESL classes, you should join.

11 They didn't have wait lists but they were able to
12 at least offer, eventually offer ESL classes to a lot
13 of these mothers and that was a way for them to then
14 become more involved in their children's lives. So,
15 that is really important to have those wrap around
16 services that come with adult literacy.

17 I think also it is important to mention is that
18 while a lot of these programs are really important,
19 they are also incredibly underfunded. And so, that
20 leads to a lot of difficulty in maintaining those
21 programs and keeping them sustainable as well.

22 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: and can you speak to how do
23 you address an adult that is reading below let's say
24 8th grade, 5th grade, 6th grade level, what's the best

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2 way for us to deal in that situation, which I found
3 in my district as well.

4 MARY HETTEIX: I think it's really hard because I
5 definitely have clients that have come in that can't
6 even read basic alphabet like A,B,C and so, and there
7 aren't enough, and we've been seeing more of the
8 need. And so, we're hoping to, if we funding, to
9 create a class specifically that teaches all the way
10 from the basic of the alphabet.

11 Because we're seeing more of that need growing
12 and so, I don't think there is a perfect solution for
13 it but it's starting somewhere.

14 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yeah.

15 MARY HETTEIX: And it's recognizing that need and
16 being like, you're still valued as a person and you
17 know, a lot of them come, like, for them that's like
18 a stigma. The fact that they can't read and write
19 and they don't tell anyone that they can't read and
20 write and so, the fact that we are able or like
21 community based organizations or you know, libraries
22 or wherever are able to provide that support and
23 saying hey, like even if this is not the perfect
24 solution, this is a solution. A one stop for you to
25 learn something; I think that would be great.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And to wrap up this panel, it's not just immigrants that are coming in with challenges with English language. There are folks who have also been here a number of years who are reading below basic grade level and no fault of their own. Many societal economic pressures which forced them to leave the education system early but we have to deal with this and also, it's not difficult to get food for classes. We fund for example, meals on wheels programs, millions of dollars. Like this is not reinventing the wheel, we know how to prepare food in New York City in the year 2020. This is not complicated.

So, thank you. We hear you, I am all in. Thank you all very much. I appreciate it, thank you so much.

Next panel and I really thank everyone for being so patient with this, a number of topics being heard here today. So, I appreciate everyone's patients and understanding. Diana Ramsamooj, I believe, Annette Seecharran, Sonia Bhuta Sisodia, Hallie Yee, Ashook Ramsaran and Frances Meyers.

Whenever folks are ready, they may begin please.

1
2 HALLIE YEE: Alright, so thank you Chair Treyger
3 and the Committee on Education for convening this
4 hearing my name is Hallie Yee, A Policy Coordinator
5 for the Coalition for Asian American Children and
6 Families, here today on behalf of the Asian Pacific
7 American community of New York City.

8 We represent over 40 ethnicities, tens of
9 languages and religions and a multitude of culture
10 and immigration experiences, working with almost 50
11 member organizations to identify and speak out on
12 common challenges and needs across the APA community.
13 One of which that has come up recently is in our
14 education equity work is recognizing Diwali as a
15 school holiday.

16 So, currently there are over 200,000 New Yorkers
17 of South Asian descent, many of whom celebrate
18 Diwali. The most important festival not only the
19 Hindu calendar but as has been mentioned many other
20 religions and just as a cultural day as well. And
21 despite the growing number of South Asians who
22 observe the holiday, it's still not recognized by the
23 New York City public school system. Although
24 students of all faiths and ethnicities are allowed to
25 request to excused absence for religious cultural

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2 holidays, many parents are still reluctant to do so.
3 When it comes to applying to middle and high schools,
4 attendance is a huge part of that equation outside of
5 specialized schools and it counts towards whether a
6 child gets excepted at his or first choice
7 institution. Those who celebrate are at a
8 disadvantage by having to chose between celebrating
9 an important day with their family and the community
10 and their culture or being absent from school, which
11 can result in students falling behind their peers,
12 missing lessons and tests. Having lower attendance
13 records and something worth noting, is that the DOE
14 actually offers a resource for teachers called,
15 learning about Diwali which includes sample lessons,
16 activities, websites and books.

17 So, if they can inform students about the
18 holiday, showing that it creates a space in which all
19 students can learn about cultural and religious
20 importance of this holiday to the communities we
21 serve and would promote inclusivity and understanding
22 within the classroom and amongst peers. But what we
23 want to emphasize in the support of this Resolution
24 comes with a kind of requests that resources such as
25 learning about Diwali are actually used in all

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2 classrooms, so that students not celebrating this
3 wholly day understand its cultural and religious
4 significance to their classmates and neighbors. In
5 the same way that they understand the history of even
6 like Columbus Day or the cultural and religious
7 importance of Yom Kippur, they should be taught to
8 understand Diwali.

9 The establishment of this resource also indicates
10 the City already recognizes and has begun to
11 understand the extent to which this is significant
12 but we can take it a step further by establishing it
13 as an official holiday. And, is there any logical
14 reason not to respect all religious holidays? No
15 widely celebrated religious or cultural holiday holds
16 any kind of more superiority over another and there
17 shouldn't be a magic number of participating students
18 before this festival is seen as a significant holiday
19 for Hindu's Buddhists, Sikhs and more.

20 ANNETTA SEECHARRAN: Good afternoon or should I
21 say good evening Chair Treyger. Thank you for your
22 patience and interest. My name is Annetta Seecharran
23 and I am the Executive Director of Chhaya Community
24 Development Corporation and the former Director of
25 South Asian Youth Action and the title that I'm most

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2 proud of is mom to a 6 year old growing up in the
3 city. So, therefore, Diwali has a personal and
4 professional significance to me.

5 I want to thank you for holding this hearing and
6 I especially want to thank Council Member Dromm, my
7 Council Member who is not here but for his visionary
8 and steadfast leadership to get us to what is a
9 historic moment in this multiple decade long fight
10 for recognition of this important holiday for my
11 community.

12 I also want to thank the other Council Members
13 who support this Resolution and I believe that
14 support suggests that you Chair Treyger and your
15 colleagues recognize the presence of Hindu's Sikhs
16 and Jains as an important constituent in this city
17 and important to the civic, the cultural and economic
18 life of this City.

19 As a Hindu, I have personally felt the
20 invisibility, the sting of invisibility on a day that
21 is most sacred to me when everything goes on as
22 usual.

23 But as a mother and as a New Yorker who spent two
24 decades of my life serving my community, I envisioned
25 a different experience for my daughter and for the

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2 hundreds of thousands of children in our school
3 system for whom Diwali is important. I envisioned
4 that they grow up in an educational system where they
5 do not suffer that kind of invisibility. Where they
6 can proudly celebrate their culture and where their
7 parents never have to chose between their education
8 and their religion. And as a parent, yourself I
9 think, oh, not yet, okay but I'm sure you can imagine
10 that no parent wants to be put in that position.

11 Everyday immigrants and young people of color in
12 this city, get messages that they do not matter.
13 Excluding Diwali from the public school calendar is
14 another message, saying that young people who
15 celebrate this holiday, they do not matter.

16 I believe that recognizing Diwali as a public
17 school holiday would allow a significant, we
18 obviously don't have the exact numbers because of
19 other issues of our inability to accurately count our
20 community but I believe that recognizing this
21 important holiday would allow a significant portion
22 of our student body to be fully who they are and to
23 strengthen their sense of self, which is the very
24 foundation of academic excellence. I also believe
25 that this excellence would have an infectious effect

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2 across our educational system and you know, as a
3 global city, I believe that the ultimate measure of
4 our school systems success should be whether our
5 students are prepared to function in the global
6 economy. And every child beyond the ones who
7 celebrate Diwali, every child whose exposed to this
8 important holiday would be better prepared to
9 function in the modern world.

10 Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts.

11 SONIA BHUTA SISODIA: Good evening, my name is
12 Sonia Bhuta Sisodia and I'm the Executive Director of
13 South Asian Youth Action.

14 For the past 24 years, SAYA has been committed to
15 creating a safe and affirming space that centers the
16 experiences and perspectives of South Asian youth.
17 We are proud that in addition to our South Asian
18 participants, our programs are attended by youth from
19 all backgrounds. Through our Queens and Brooklyn
20 based programs, located in one community center and
21 nine schools, we support over 1,500 youth annually.

22 SAYA commends the City for making Eid and Lunar
23 New Year public school holidays five years ago. As a
24 City, we need to continue on this path and recognize
25 and celebrate communities that are so often on the

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2 margins of visibility and public discourse. SAYA
3 strongly supports the Resolution calling upon the New
4 York City Department of Education to establish Diwali
5 as an official holiday for New York City public
6 school students.

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

18 I went to New York City public schools in the
19 80's and 90's and I was one of very few South Asian
20 students at the time in my schools. I always hid my
21 cultural traditions from my peers and was embarrassed
22 of them. That changed when I met my 9th grade
23 biology teacher, who I will name because he is so
24 significant to me and I never had the opportunity to
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1
2 tell him before he passed, Mr. Keven Sheehy; a
3 different Sheehy than was referenced earlier.

4 Mr. Sheehy wanted every student to feel that they
5 belonged and went above and beyond to do that. He
6 was the advisor to our Indian Pakistani Club and
7 arranged school events and assemblies to exchange
8 information and traditions on various cultures. I
9 wish for all New York City students, there would be
10 more teachers like Mr. Sheehy. There are other
11 measures the City can take to help students feel like
12 they belong but naming a holiday is definitely an
13 important step.

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

24 I thank the Council Members who are in support of
25 this Resolution. I am hopeful that we can together

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2 build a City that continues to work towards being a
3 place where everyone belongs.

4 DIANA RAMSAMOOJ: Namaste and good evening.
5 Thank you Council Member Treyger and all the other
6 Council Members for providing this opportunity so
7 that voices of our Hindu community could be heard. I
8 am honored to represent my fellow Hindu brothers and
9 sisters.

10 My name is Diana Ramsamooj and I have worked for
11 the Department of Education and non-profit
12 organizations for over 17 years. So, as an Indo-
13 Caribbean American leader in my community, I teach
14 and manage at the East Indian Music Academy, where we
15 strive to promote Indian culture and spiritual
16 awareness through music. Not only do I do that but I
17 am also the President of Arya Spiritual Center, which
18 has been in existence for over 32 years and it's one
19 of the first Hindu temples that promotes Hinduism in
20 the New York tristate area.

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

23 New York City values diversity as portrayed in
24 the school calendar. However, how is it that one of
25 the world's oldest and the third leading religion in

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2 the world is not being recognized? New York City
3 itself has the highest Indian American population of
4 any, any individual city in North America.

5 According to data from 2015, American Community
6 Survey, approximately 250,000 Indian Americans are in
7 Staten Island 4 percent Hindus, Bronx 8 percent,
8 Brooklyn 13, Manhattan 14 and my borough of Queens,
9 guess how much? 62 percent. Those numbers alone
10 speak for itself.

11 By 2030 the Indian American population will
12 increase. This number does not include the Indo-
13 Caribbean community which is the second largest
14 immigrant group and it's going to continue to grow.
15 So, what message is our education system sending to
16 our Hindu youths? Are we not of value? Are we not
17 part of the community? Families as you've heard
18 before are challenged between promoting and
19 preserving their culture versus sending their
20 children to school for an education. Isn't cultural
21 education just as important? Indians have been
22 coming to America since the 19th century, we have
23 been invisible for far too long. As previously
24 mentioned, since 2005, New Jersey has recognized
25 Diwali as a holiday on their school calendar.

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2 How is it that New York City has only had
3 suspended alternate side parking. My sister Sandhya
4 earlier mentioned that, and she's 100 percent
5 correct, that Diwali is like our Christmas.

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

9 Thank you, Namaste.

10 FRAN MEYERS: My name is Fran Meyers, I've been
11 an adult education teacher for the last 23 years
12 teaching immigrants ESL including mainly women
13 immigrants who never had a chance to read or write,
14 learn how to read or write or get any education in
15 their countries and all four of my grandparents are
16 immigrants and totally empathize with the need for
17 immigrants to feel totally respected in this culture
18 and also from a Jewish family, I know what it feels
19 like to be in a minority culture in the majority and
20 not to feel like you're getting equal respect and
21 especially what's happening in today's world.

22 My concern for adding two more holidays, I am for
23 adding two more holidays if nothing else has changed
24 but I think the City needs to also reexamine all the
25 days off, including Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, which

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2 most children don't know why the school is closed on
3 those days, they just are happy that it's closed.

4 Or don't know why some of these religious
5 holidays, the Muslim holidays have no idea or Chinese
6 New Year that's more of a cultural holiday usually,
7 but the problem is with all of these holidays getting
8 days off from all the minority cultures and the
9 Jewish culture and Judaism is still only two percent
10 of this country, even though it's more of a percent
11 in New York City, you know, we understand very well
12 the desire and need for all you know, cultures to be
13 respected equally and for their children to feel good
14 about their cultures and not just that they're
15 different and not in the majority.

16 But what I'm concerned about is, and people have
17 spoken to my daughter and son in law, are both full
18 time working parents, and whenever there's a holiday
19 that they don't get off from work, they have to - and
20 if I'm not available, I usually am as the
21 grandmother, but for many working parents of the
22 City, they are getting penalized for all of these
23 holidays by often having to take an unpaid days off
24 from work, including people who celebrate the
25 holidays or who want to celebrate the holidays. Or

1
2 they have to pay babysitters and I don't know how to
3 resolve that issue that creates hardship on working
4 class families from all cultures of what provision
5 will be made for the children if they can't stay
6 home. If they can't afford to do that or don't have
7 the opportunity from their jobs.

8 So, I just raise this as an issue, should these
9 other holidays be choices of - and that they be
10 excused absences that nobody gets penalized for
11 having an absence on any holiday they take that their
12 family deems important you know, for their culture
13 and religion. That no one should get penalized for
14 that. I don't know how to mix all the different
15 holidays of all the minority religions you know, like
16 Mr. Treyger said, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur became
17 holidays in New York City, only because such a larger
18 percentage of teachers were Jewish at that time. The
19 demographics have changed since then, that's not the
20 case anymore.

21 So, I'm sure most of the teachers are not Jewish
22 but you know, getting the day off because it was
23 established but I don't know if there's a way to
24 revise the whole system, so that all groups are
25 treated equally and equally respected. Maybe there

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2 could be some teaching in the curriculum also about
3 what are these holidays, who celebrates them, what's
4 the spiritual meaning because all the holidays have a
5 spiritual meaning that the children should know about
6 the different cultures in New York City. Which they
7 don't just get if there is a day off from school, but
8 I just, I don't have all the answers but I'm just
9 presenting this as problems that have to be looked
10 into.

11 How do you help the working families who it's a
12 hardship to take days off from work or what do you do
13 about that?

14 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, I appreciate your
15 testimony and what I'll explain is that New York
16 State Education Law requires the City to provide 180
17 instructional days. So, the City creates their
18 school calendars factoring in 180 days must provide
19 full instruction.

20 They built into the school calendar days
21 potentially for snow days, because for example, if
22 the Mayor has to close schools if there's a snow
23 emergency. So, some people might ask, oh, are you
24 taking away from that 180? No, because they factor

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1
2 in those days by adding more days than 180 into the
3 school calendar.

4 The issue that many folks here are testifying
5 here today are saying that historically and you're
6 right, my recollection of history is that, the City
7 of New York never, through the school system, never
8 officially recognized let's say Hanukkah or
9 Christmas. What they recognized was that many staff
10 were just absent and they could not find substitutes
11 and they by default shut school down. But they've
12 added days since the days of Hanukkah and Christmas.

13 FRAN MEYERS: Hanukkah is not a day off from
14 schools. Sometimes it is because it falls on
15 Christmas break.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right, I'm sorry, I
17 referred to it as Christmas break but yes, you are
18 correct, so Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, those days are
19 typically off.

20 The issue is, what you've raised as far as
21 childcare, that's an issue with or without the issue
22 of Diwali. That is a valid issues that I think the
23 government has a responsibility to help folks with
24 childcare in general. What we now have is a
25 structure where, and as a former teacher, I'm sharing

1
2 with you my personal experience where in my high
3 school where I taught, I had a significant number of
4 Asian American students, this was before Lunar New
5 Year was an official holiday.

6 I had to legally on my card and on my attendance
7 sheet, mark kids absent for observing a day very
8 important to them. Even though what you just said,
9 oh, you could have an excused absence, that is still
10 reported as an absence in the official DOE register
11 and that is punitive when it comes to college
12 applications. When it comes to other types of
13 government forms, I can't lie and say, oh, don't
14 worry about that absence and you can't put an
15 asterisk, oh, that absence was because of this.

16 It still hurts them, when it comes to staff,
17 teachers and I'm a union delegate, so I know this
18 very well. You could say it was Diwali but they
19 still give you only ten days in your bank per year.
20 So, if you get sick or if something happens to you,
21 if you observe that day, that is still marked as an
22 absence where that can be used against your work
23 performance.

24 So, we have to resolve this. This is an issue
25 that a significant number of students are being

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2 marked absent for simply observing a very important
3 day. Staff are being marked absent, which can cost
4 them their employment and so, we do have to resolve
5 this and I do think that there is a way for the state
6 and the city to work – imagine, the State and City
7 working together, what a novel idea. To work
8 together to resolve this to officially recognize this
9 as a day for students and staff while at the same
10 time, government doing its job and providing
11 childcare for everyone who needs it in the City of
12 New York.

13 So, I do think that there is a way to have a win-
14 win for the folks here and for the working families
15 of New York City and I thank you for your testimony.

16 DIANA RAMSAMOOJ: Right, thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you. Sure, please
18 sir.

19 ASHOOK RAMSARAN: Honorable Chairman, you have a
20 lot of patience, you are there alone now. When we
21 started out, there were many members and many in the
22 audience as well.

23 My wife just sent me a message, it says, this has
24 got to be very important, you are there stuck almost
25 all day because it's my birthday.

1
2 So, this is important. I represent the Indian
3 Diaspora Council and we are for this Resolution.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Your name for the record.

5 ASHOOK RAMSARAN: Ashook Ramsaran and this is my
6 presentation. I will take excerpts from page 3 of
7 this presentation which was distributed to your
8 memory.

9 Following this long tradition of embracing
10 diversity and responding positively to the
11 aspirations of its citizens in a diverse population,
12 the City of New York has an unmatched and a unique
13 history of responding favorably to be inclusive by
14 bringing more opportunities, recognition, awareness,
15 understanding and education to make this city the
16 welcome home for millions.

17 It's another historic opportunity to officially
18 educate all its students in public schools to learn
19 about Diwali and join in celebrating a universal
20 declaration of light over darkness, good over evil
21 and to dispel ignorance.

22 Diwali is publicly recognize and routinely
23 celebrated in several US federal, state and City
24 venues and with prominent ceremonies including this
25

1
2 building, Gracie Mansion, US Capital, the White
3 House.

4 It is to be noted that people with origins in
5 South Asia, in New York account for both 21 percent
6 of recent immigrants in 2016, as one of our panelist
7 just said, New York City Department Planning
8 Statistics. New York City public schools are
9 incubators where young minds are nurtured. By
10 establishing Diwali as an official public school
11 holiday, this body will certainly enhance the
12 learning experience of New York City children.
13 Approval by New York City would not be without New
14 York precedence. Among others, six New York schools
15 in Long Island have declared Diwali a school holiday.

16 Indian Diaspora Council International urges
17 approval of this and this Resolution is a fitting and
18 family tribute to the City and to our children
19 especially at this time of US history. It's social,
20 just as social equity.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Our next panel, Vijah
23 Ramjattan, Kavita Shah, Albert Baldeo, Deri Abigail,
24 Ravindra Gavali[SP?] and Kushmani Doobay.

1
2 VIJAH RAMJATTAN: Good afternoon Members of the
3 Education Committee. My name is Vijah Ramjattan,
4 President of United Madrassi Association and also,
5 President of the New York City District 28 Community
6 Education Council where we are discussing diversity.

7 I am the great grandson of an indentured slave,
8 who was brought to the Caribbean, specifically
9 Trinidad to work in Sugar Plantations and I am
10 delivering this message today on behalf of the United
11 Madrassi Association.

12 I first want to thank the Education Committee for
13 seriously considering to establish Diwali as a
14 celebration of triumph of good over evil, of truth or
15 untruth and of light over darkness.

16 Customs, values and traditions are some of the
17 core anchors that keep a community alive and vibrant.
18 After all it is what grounds us. My ancestors
19 brought with them their values and traditions and I,
20 a member of the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora brought it
21 with me to my new home, the United States of
22 American, a land where I have and I will continue to
23 stand shoulder to shoulder with my brothers and
24 sisters and say with conviction that, "I pledge
25 allegiance to the Flag of the United States of

1
2 America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one
3 Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and
4 justice for all."

5 As the father of three wonderful children who
6 attends PS 121 of Queens New York, I ask you to
7 consider Resolution 0146 as an opportunity for you to
8 impact the lives of hundreds and thousands of
9 children and to know that your actions will have the
10 power to make a direct life altering difference in
11 their lives. Each child deserves to know their
12 cultural background and to understand the real
13 significance behind their customs and traditions.
14 Against their wishes, I have had to force my children
15 to attend school on Diwali to be present in class and
16 not be marked absent. They've had to go to school on
17 empty stomachs, because we fast without water and
18 food on Diwali.

19 I'm a vibrant advocate for strong academic
20 education and I believe in diversity and tolerance,
21 but I also believe in a well balanced foundation. A
22 foundation that is built with strong civic values,
23 integrity and inclusion. For the past 8 years, my
24 children went to school each day and I watched them
25 go to school hungry, because I understand that each

1
2 day, they are off, it impacts the application to go
3 to school to the next level.

4 I know you all understand and value family and
5 traditions, as you have displayed this to us via
6 previously passed Resolutions in recent years and we
7 admire that.

8 As a law abiding citizen, I also want to continue
9 to have mine and all other children know, love and
10 respect their culture and values. We the Indo-
11 Caribbean parents and students of New York City are
12 asking you to establish Diwali as a public school
13 holiday. Diwali, as you all know is about peace,
14 love and unity.

15 I thank the Members of the Education Committee in
16 advance for your unwavering dedication in supporting
17 Diwali as a public school holiday.

18 Thank you.

19 PRATIMA KUSHMANI DOBAY: Namaste and good evening
20 everyone here. My name is Pratima Kushmani Doobay,
21 I'm a Brooklyn New York born and raised Guyanese
22 American Hindu identified woman.

23 Growing up in a primarily Black populated
24 elementary school in Brooklyn and even in a large
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2 Punjabi and West Indian populated middle school and
3 high school in Queens New York.

4 We often learned and celebrated holidays like
5 Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Christmas, Yom Kippur, Easter
6 Christmas etc., but I've only heard textbook
7 references or art project references to holidays that
8 represent me.

9 My parents along with the majority of other
10 people that migrate to the USA came here with the
11 idea of it being the land of the free, or more
12 specifically, New York City to be the City of dreams.
13 Part of that dream is to raise their children in a
14 place that can also reflect and validate who they
15 are. With that being said, I strongly advocate for
16 the recognition of this holiday to be recognized on a
17 school and on a national level.

18 Diwali means literally a row of lights. In
19 general. Diwali signifies the triumph of good over
20 evil, of righteousness over treachery, of truth of
21 falsehood and of light over darkness. As we're here
22 advocating for Diwali to be a public holiday in honor
23 of the goddess of light, we also, on behalf of
24 Sadhana, a coalition of progressive Hindu's want to
25 offer a message in solidarity to what is taking place

1
2 in the birthplace of Diwali. More specifically in
3 Deli, at this very moment where Muslims are living in
4 fear of losing their lives simply for believing in
5 their faith. This is not a representation of what it
6 means to be Hindu. Exclusivity is not to be Hindu.

7 What it means to Hindu is to perpetuate acts of
8 unity and oneness, Ashima, nonviolence and SAVA
9 Service to Humanity and education for all.

10 Thank you.

11 KAVITA SHAH: Good evening everyone. My name is
12 Kavita Shah, I work for Indian Home. We are a
13 nonprofit organization that runs senior centers. We
14 have several senior centers around Queens.

15 I really thank Dr. Neeta Jain to give this
16 opportunity for me to testify to have Diwali as an
17 official holiday. So, I'm going to be a little
18 lighter on all the big words. I'm just going to be a
19 mom. So, I would say anyone who leaves their roots,
20 you know, leave their country and go to another
21 country the only thing they take with them is their
22 tradition and their culture and they want to make
23 sure that they preserve the tradition and culture,
24 that they pass it on to their children, so that their
25 children you know, pass it on to their children.

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2 So, Diwali is one of the traditions that we have
3 because I remember as a child, my mom used to wake us
4 up at three in the morning on a Diwali day and we
5 would have to get dressed and go to the temple. And
6 eat all of the sweets, we have clean the whole house,
7 I think all of us. So, we have all these great
8 memories.

9 So, I want to create memories for my children.
10 You know, and they live in US, we also want to follow
11 that same tradition and how can we do that if they
12 are in school and we are at home? And we always
13 accommodate, everyone will agree with me, every time
14 we have any festival, we celebrate on a weekend. You
15 know, because we have to compromise and you won't
16 believe in Hindu culture, we have so many festivals,
17 we would have 180 days off. So, we are only asking
18 for one.

19 So, for me, I think we have to create memories
20 for our children and also, our children can feel
21 comfortable because my children know everything about
22 you know, other cultures because there are days off.
23 So, my kids know everything about – they've gone to
24 all the bar mitzvah and everything, so if we have a
25 Diwali day off, then their peers would know that

1
2 okay, there is a religion named you know Hindu and
3 they have this festival named Diwali.

4 So, it's a good thing for children to have, so
5 that they can feel proud of that we have culture, we
6 have things that we follow and I really commend
7 because I live in a predominantly Jewish community
8 and I really commend that they all really go hard and
9 have all the children go do the bar mitzvah for that.
10 They have to go to synagogue to learn the TORA on the
11 day of bar mitzvah, they have to read that and they
12 go through all that pain but they follow that. And
13 how would you do that when you follow your tradition
14 and that's what we want to do for our children, you
15 know, resolve our tradition.

16 Thank you.

17 ALBERT BALDEO: Honorable Chairman, my name is
18 Albert Baldeo, I've been a community activist, I'm
19 the first elected District Leader in Richmond Hill.
20 There are four of us now including Dr. Jain and
21 Richard David and **[INAUDIBLE 6:38:32]** and then in
22 2008, we almost won a state senate seat. I give it a
23 picture with over 17,000 votes to let you know that
24 we do exist. That we have a firm basis in America.
25 That we are not the unknown people or people, most of

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2 those were Hindu's that voted or worked together with
3 us.

4 There is something fundamentally wrong sitting
5 here in this room with all great respect to you. I
6 see alone person in yourself and I compliment you for
7 being perhaps a lone warrior in a storm but deep down
8 inside I feel as if I'm in a different country, not
9 America and it's not a personal insult on you. But I
10 do believe there is a disconnect between our elected
11 officials. Perhaps that comes from the fact that we
12 don't have anyone looking or someone like us elected
13 to federal, state or city government. Politicians
14 come every cycle to our community, they take
15 thousands and millions of dollars from us and they
16 always kick the can down the road and they hardly
17 ever do anything for us.

18 We are not asking for money, like \$2 million as I
19 heard before or \$20 million. We are just asking for
20 a basic fundamental right, the right to celebrate our
21 religious freedoms. The same rights that brought the
22 pilgrims to America. The same rights that is in
23 Shrine in America. The same rights that has made
24 this country great. And if Diwali is celebrated in
25 the White House, and we've always criticized number

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2 45. We don't even call his name but he's leaps and
3 bounds ahead of us in this basic endeavor of
4 celebrating our most basic culture.

5 Just two weeks ago, we celebrated International
6 Language Day, we supposed to preserve all the 600
7 languages across the world and 43 percent of those
8 language equal to all, are in danger of being wiped
9 out. And you as an educator will appreciate this,
10 that everyday these Bengali language and all these
11 other languages are being wiped out and it's the same
12 marginalization and a partied system we face as
13 Hindu's in this country. And more particularly, not
14 this country, sorry, but in New York City and I'm
15 here to argue with that.

16 And there was another before me, Dr. Ravi Batra,
17 if we have to go federal court to ensure that our
18 fundamental right is recognized, then we will do so.
19 It is not for the one's who are trying. In 2008, we
20 had democrats and I know this body is democratic, to
21 win the democratic majority since 1965 and yeah, the
22 majority of votes would help us get the Hindu's have
23 been stagnated. They have been deprived.

24 Like I said, it's not for a handout but it's for
25 the basic right to have religious freedom. Where our

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2 kids can grow up feeling equal to everyone else.
3 That is a fundamental promise of America. That is a
4 fundamental hope that we all cherish and yet this
5 body is so deserted and this bill has been done, it's
6 not even an Intro. and the Mayor himself come to
7 Richmond on his benefit campaign, promises and yet,
8 he doesn't deliver.

9 So, we've got a problem here Mr. Chairman. We've
10 got to expedite this, we have got to give people due
11 process, we've got to give them our equal rights and
12 if you're going to recognize **[INAUDIBLE 6:43:12]** and
13 Lunar New Year and the Rosh Hashanah, we have no
14 problems with that. God Bless that, that's our
15 brothers and sisters. We're not asking to take
16 holidays or vacations from anyone else, we're just
17 asking for ours, as of right as taxpayers, not as
18 beggar's, not as non-Americans. We gave up
19 citizenship to embrace this country. We can no
20 longer go back and say, hey give me some of that -
21 the first thing they tell us is no, you're American,
22 join the line.

23 So, what are we, we don't belong, is that what's
24 going on here? Is this a partied? This is New York
25 City. This is a land of immigrants. This is a

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2 nation of immigrants. So, if you have to do the
3 Intro. and get it done, I want to compliment you,
4 don't get me wrong, you've been doing a fantastic job
5 but to kick the can down the road or to hold empty
6 promises to us, I believe is wrong. I believe
7 important action needs to be taken and taken now
8 because we've earned it and it needs to be done as
9 quickly as possible and like Dr. Jain said, 60
10 percent of those holidays, we are almost there. We
11 are just asking for like half when you look at it and
12 hence, we have to fight for district and we have to
13 fight for voting rights, we have to fight for every
14 pinnacle of recognition and that's not America.
15 That's not New York City and I'm certainly telling
16 you that this is not the route we're going take.

17 If you can come to Diwali next week, it's a
18 beautiful parade, you will see millions. The last
19 person I took that parade see the official, they were
20 amazed and then they ran back and said, we've got to
21 keep these people out, don't let them get in because
22 there is plenty of them.

23 Please, that's not America, we need to get a
24 proper seat at the table and please ensure that
25 happens by forwarding this Bill up to the Mayor and

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2 have such a tremendous override majority that he
3 cannot veto it and don't worry with the state, you
4 know the state and the city don't get along, so don't
5 bundle with them. We can take care of our children,
6 let's do this first. No money, holiday or school
7 recognition, Diwali, like tomorrow. I'm sure if you
8 had the pen, you would have signed it by
9 proclamation.

10 We can't expect number 45 to do that. He will be
11 holding Diwali there at the right time. And as I
12 look above you, every time we come into this Chamber,
13 please look at what Lincoln said there. Government
14 of the people, by the people and for the people can
15 stand.

16 We come here to you to make sure that we can get
17 it our fundamental right. Thank you, sir, and please
18 push this bill to the recognition, so we can get it
19 passed.

20 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yeah, so very powerful
21 testimony and I think we are in agreement that this
22 should be a school holiday. Just to clarify again,
23 the reason why Council Member Dromm introduced a
24 Resolution and not an Introduction is because we
25 don't have the legal authority in this body to push a

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2 law on this issue. That is because, and by the way,
3 just for the public to know, I was the only member of
4 the City Council to testify to Albany to give the
5 City Council power in the school system.

6 Yeah, I was the only one. So, because right now,
7 we have a full Mayoral control system. The City
8 Council does not control the school system but I do
9 have the power of oversight. This is an oversight
10 hearing; I have the power to ask questions and to try
11 to elevate issues.

12 So, that's why Council Member Dromm has been a
13 champion on this issue but he himself and we don't
14 have the legal authority to mandate this; however,
15 what I do have the ability to do is to articulate the
16 truth and to elevate the conversation. The Mayor and
17 the Chancellor have the power to do this tomorrow.
18 Just to be clear, the Mayor and the Chancellor have
19 the power to do this tomorrow.

20 What they have to resolve, I'm giving you the lay
21 of the land, is that, we are a creature of the state.
22 Cities, whether it's New York City, whether it's you
23 know, Rockland or other, we are creatures of New York
24 State. New York State law mandates that we provide
25 180 days of full instruction of school days. So, the

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2 way, when they create the school calendar, they make
3 sure that they factor in 180 days of school days and
4 then they factor in some of the holidays which are
5 off and they factor in snow days, because for
6 example, if there is a snow storm, the Mayor has the
7 power to close schools and they don't take from the
8 180, they add.

9 So, they have the power. When I say work with
10 the state, they have the power to tell Albany, maybe
11 we don't need six or seven snow days this year.
12 Right, I'm not even sure how many snow days they
13 factored in this current year.

14 UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah, we had zero.

15 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right, so for example, they
16 can go Albany and say, we don't need six, seven snow
17 days this year, maybe we could use four or five and
18 use one of those days to make Diwali an official
19 holiday. That's what I mean. They could solve this
20 issue in two seconds. It's not complicated and they
21 should have done this years ago, not wait.

22 Now, I do have a quick question, when is Diwali?

23 UNIDENTIFIED: It's in November.

24 UNIDENTIFIED: It changes every year.

25 UNIDENTIFIED: It's on October, November.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay,

UNIDENTIFIED: It's November 14th.

UNIDENTIFIED: It's 60 percent, you know, most of it is on the weekend.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right, so, is it usually in November?

UNIDENTIFIED: It's at the end of October and it runs up until, not up until, but it runs into November.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, so, but generally speaking, it's around the same time period every year, late October, November?

PANEL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Alright, so it's predictable. So, this is not rocket science. They know how to do this, that's my point.

Yeah, and I just want to clarify, I'm in support of it. We do have a super majority but it's not a legal bill because we don't have the power. I do want to have the power for us to do this but I do think that it's important that we know all the facts, so when we advocate to the Mayor, if the Mayor says to the community or says to us, well, we have 180 days we have to provide instruction. Yes, Mr. Mayor,

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2 we're not violating the law. How many snow days do
3 you have factored in? Do you need all those snow
4 days? Maybe you don't need six or seven, maybe you
5 need four or five. There are ways of getting around
6 it. So, that's the point but thank you sir for your
7 testimony. I appreciate it.

8

Yes ma'am, you're next.

9

DEVI ARJUNE: As luck would have it, my

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colleagues over here and the previous speakers have

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already emphasized the points that I wanted to say,

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so instead I will just establish my credibility.

13

My name Devi Arjune and I'm from Valley Stream on

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Long Island and I started the Diwali Coalition of

15

Valley Stream about three years ago and that was when

16

I made my appearances in front of the Board of

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Education. So, my appearance here right now, is not

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the first time I'm making an appearance in front of a

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Council or a Board. This is the fourth time I am

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appearing in front of a board. So, I do have a

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little bit of credibility here.

22

I would just like to mention that our coalition

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is backed by our Diwali movement focusing mainly on

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Long Island, like I said in Valley Stream. Our

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movement has proven that there at least ten school

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2 districts on Long Island that have passed Diwali as
3 an official holiday.

4 So, I'll be focusing on statistics here. So,
5 those districts do include East Williston, East
6 Meadow, Half Hollow Hills, Hicksville, Zoisite,
7 Jericho, Mineola and other considerable school
8 districts as well. I just wanted to put that out
9 there.

10 Of the first six districts mentioned, that you
11 can see on the pass that I have, the defining marker
12 is the percentage of the Asian population. According
13 to data.nyscd.gov, the Asian population of Half
14 Hollow Hills, when they passed Diwali as an official
15 school holiday in 2017 was 15 percent.

16 The Asian population, which includes a large
17 number of students that still have Diwali in Valley
18 Stream in 2017, was 20 percent. I along with my
19 Diwali coalition in Valley Stream, began our mission
20 in 2016 and it baffled us as to why our school
21 district could not adopt the same equality as Half
22 Hollow Hills being that it was lower than our
23 percentage. Not only was that percentage lower in
24 Half Hollow Hills, but also the Asian percentage
25 increased in Valley Stream school districts as years

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2 went by. And what I'm talking about is as of 2018,
3 which is the most recent year of enrollment data that
4 the website has collected, the percentage of Asian
5 students attending the Valley Stream Central High
6 School district is 21 percent. So, it has increased
7 about four percent in the past six years.

8 Aside from statistics, there are clearer reasons
9 for this resolution and reasons being that these
10 speakers here, along with speakers before me, have
11 presented including that students like me and other
12 high school students value our education.

13 So, it's very scary to us when we have to
14 sacrifice school for our religion. It's not that
15 easy to make up a test or an exam, because everybody
16 has been there before, it's a tough ride in high
17 school.

18 So, I would just like to close by saying that
19 other cultures and religions have the blessed
20 opportunity to recognize their holidays like EID,
21 Christmas, Easter, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, like we
22 all have said before but the inequality lays in the
23 lack of recognition of Diwali for the Hindu's, Sikhs,
24 and Jains and the other religions that celebrate it.

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It is also significant to note that the Hindu religion is the most ancient religion in the world. According to – just for statistics, Hinduism has attracted 1.2 billion followers. So, it's the third largest religion in the world and certainly, like he said before, we can look up here. Lincoln said that government of the people, by the people for the people. Certainly, with all this popularity and diversity in our country of freedom, we can continue to make changes that will benefit the people.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Very powerful testimony and Hinduism is a very beautiful, peaceful religion and I certainly commend and what we're going to have to work on is at the end of the day, not a religious argument to make this work but a practical argument. In the sense where, as you mentioned in your data, there is a significant number of students and staff that observe this very important holiday and it is wrong to punish them, to mark them absent where it effects their academic performance and it effects staff's job performance and it's that practical argument of the number of students, the number of staff. That is what's going to get this done because technically, the government is not allowed to pass a

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2 law recognizing a religion but it was because of the
3 practical issues with the other religions. That's
4 why they have certain days off. Now, it's not 1950
5 anymore and so, right, times have changed and they've
6 added other days. For example, with the Lunar New
7 Year, I think over 15 percent of students in our
8 school system identify as Asian American and so, from
9 a practical sense, they said, they are marking a
10 significant number of kids absent and staff and so
11 here, you are spot on to say that the number of
12 students and staff observing this very important
13 holiday is also rising and it is not practical and it
14 is not right to mark everyone absent on this day,
15 which effects their academic performance and their
16 job performance.

17 So, keep the data and I have your testimony, make
18 sure I get it. The number of students and staff
19 observing this day and how it's rising every single
20 year that the City of New York is punishing people.
21 That is what's going to win this argument at the end
22 of the day.

23 You've already, you've won the Council. We are
24 with you. Now, it's the Mayor and the Chancellor
25 that now have to implement the policy and I commend

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you and I thank you for your testimony here today.
Thank you.

ALBERT BALDEO: Chairman Treyger, I just wanted to end with this, just a point that you can argue to. It isn't the deprivation of the right to public education in that sense. If you don't want to put it on the fundamental right of breach of religious freedom, you can come back with a right of a breach of a fundamental public education and you can use that to show that at amongst of that and hence it is unconstitutional.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: The most powerful testimony today is certainly, I admire everyone here, the most powerful testimony today is when young people, students testified that they are being marked absent for observing one of the most holist days in their family and they are being punished. That is the most powerful and outrageous thing that we should not be allowing in New York City.

So, thank you very much for your testimony. I appreciate you.

PANEL: Thank you Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you.

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2 Koshi[SP?] Thomas, Benanato Miser[sp?], I've been
3 working for New York City for 30 years., Usha Meehan,
4 Dilip Nath, Karen Sunnyval[SP?].

5 Alright, we just want to see if folks are still
6 in attendance. So, if I call your name, just raise
7 your hand so I know if you are here.

8 Radica Mohan[sp?], is Radica here, Mohan.

9 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, okay, Ramaswamy
11 Mohan, left, okay. The last name is Bhuta, left,
12 okay. Kishor Bhuta, okay, so you can come up because
13 we have room for you and Ashish? Ashish
14 Gathoria[SP?], okay, so Ashish might have left.

15 Alright, so that is all we have remaining and
16 this is the final panel and whenever folks are, yes,
17 absolutely. I said every voice will be heard,
18 absolutely.

19 So, whenever folks are ready, you may begin.

20 DILIP NATH: Good evening Chairman Treyger and
21 Members of the Committee, those who left and
22 campaigning for the next office. We all should
23 remember those.

24 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Your name for the record.
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2 DILIP NATH: My name is Dilip Nath, I am
3 representing on behalf of New American Voters
4 Association.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you.

6 DILIP NATH: I'm testifying here before you today,
7 not as a democrat, not as republican but as a father
8 of two sons and member of the Community Education
9 Council and a member of the Community Board and also,
10 more importantly representing 1.1 million children
11 that attend public school.

12 As we all know, New York City is the most diverse
13 city. We speak 190 different languages from 20
14 different nations. We celebrate all kinds of
15 different culture that makes us strong. Our
16 diversity or a strong unity and for that, we also
17 celebrate religion and many of our children get to
18 take the day off on the day of the major holiday.
19 And recently Mayor de Blasio has added another
20 holiday, which is commendable but when he speak of
21 the diversity, inclusion and equity, I think he has
22 forgotten a community.

23 In fact, far too long South Asian and Indo-
24 Caribbean Hindu has been forgotten and it's time that
25 we recognize it. I know that Intro. 146 is just a

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2 pathway to the long road and I wish this would have
3 been and Intro., not a Reso. Many years ago, Council
4 Member Daniel Dromm has introduced a bill in this
5 Chamber and I hope some of your colleague including
6 you can reintroduce that bill since we have a super
7 majority now and I hope that can be hard, so that the
8 Mayor will be much more enlightened or forced to
9 recognize Diwali as a school holiday.

10 Now, similarly in the state, Senior leader
11 **[INAUDIBLE 7:09:25]** had introduced a similar kind of
12 bill, and I think there is hope that this can happen
13 but this body, this Council needs to push this
14 agenda.

15 You know, in 2020, we're not asking for a holiday
16 only. This is basic fair equity. We are supposed to
17 be the most liberal city in American but where many
18 other conservative city and borough has recognized
19 Diwali as a holiday. Here in New York City, we have
20 to testify at seven o'clock at night, asking for
21 Diwali, recognizing Diwali as a school holiday.

22 You know, there has been a long discussion, you
23 know, there's a five snow day, six snow day, 180
24 days. We have proposed to the Mayor a very simple
25 solution. So, you don't have to go back to the union

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2 to renegotiate the deal. You don't have to cut any
3 snow day, there is a day called Brooklyn Queens Day.
4 Nobody know what that day is, we simply just get the
5 day off. So, why not take the Brooklyn Queens Day
6 and substitute for Diwali holiday?

7 And many of your colleagues think it's a
8 fantastic idea but I don't understand why we cannot
9 make this the reality. I think there's a lack of
10 willingness and there is a lack of sincerity. So, I
11 do hope that after you hearing the testimony today,
12 you will go back to your colleague and say, you know
13 what, this matter is serious. This is unjust and we
14 are going to make it right.

15 So, thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And I thank you and again,
17 just to clarify, the body does not have the legal
18 authority to make Diwali an official school holiday
19 but the body is advancing a sense of the body, a
20 message to the Mayor and to the Chancellor that the
21 New York City Council supports making Diwali an
22 official school holiday. The chance for us to
23 actually override the Mayor was when Albany
24 reauthorized the Mayoral control.

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2 As I mentioned to you before, I was the only
3 member of the City Council to testify that the City
4 Council should have more power over the school
5 system.

6 Right now, Albany gave the power to Mayor de
7 Blasio to completely control the school system,
8 including the school calendar. So, this is a perfect
9 example of why I testified to give the Council more
10 power to in affect, give communities more say in
11 power over the school system.

12 What I am saying also is that when the Mayor and
13 the Chancellor hear from the Council about making
14 this a school holiday, they are going to respond, if
15 not already, that well, the state requires us to have
16 a certain number of days and my response, I'm a
17 former teacher, so they can't really spin me to much
18 is that, I know what the state says, but you embed in
19 the school year a certain number of extra days in the
20 event of emergencies, weather, other things.

21 You know, maybe you don't need all those other
22 days. You could take one day and the state and the
23 city could do that tomorrow. They could do it in two
24 seconds. It's not complicated. I agree with you, it
25 shouldn't take folks testifying seven o'clock at

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2 night, I agree with you and this is not the first
3 year you've been working on this issue. This has
4 been going on year after year and the number of kids
5 and staff is rising who observe this day. That's why
6 it is shameful. It is shameful that how much energy
7 and time is being spent and we have – and as a former
8 teacher, it pains me to hear our young people.
9 That's why again, it hit me a lot for young students
10 to say that they want to observe a very important day
11 for their family and for their culture and yet they
12 will be marked absent on a test day. They will be
13 marked absent on a critical day and staff, just so
14 you know, teachers and staff only have a certain
15 number of days to be absent in the year. They don't
16 care if you're sick or what. There is only a certain
17 number of days, the fact that they have to use that
18 day to observe is outrageous.

19 And so, we have to convince the Mayor and the
20 Chancellor to match their actions with their words
21 because I hear equity and excellence all the time,
22 but the actions don't always exemplify equity and
23 excellence. And I thank you very much for your
24 testimony.

25 DILIP NATH: Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Absolutely sir. Yes, sir
your next.

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KISHOR BHUTA: Chairman Mark Treyger, good
evening. My name is Kishor Bhuta living in Staten
Island for the last 30 years, 39 years and living in
New York for the last 50 years. I am the President
of Golden Age Community Incorporated of Staten
Island.

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As of today, we have more than 260 seniors. For
the last 14 years, we have organized several as you
guessed now, social, cultural and community such as
Diwali celebration, medical and financial seminar,
entertain seniors in that nursing home and volunteers
in kitchens and more. Almost all children in our
community attended New York City public school. And
now, our grandchildren are doing the same.

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Diwali is very significant and more popular than
festivals because of its family values and cultural
importance and it is celebrated worldwide. We feel
it is important for us and our children and our
grandchildren to save and celebrate Diwali with
family members and friends not from Indian ethnic but
also from other ethnics background.

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2 Celebrating Diwali with children, grandchildren
3 and parents of other ethnics and cultural group will
4 enhance the knowledge and understanding of each
5 other's culture and festivals and in turn will help
6 children listen better, learn respect. Different
7 culture which will create a friendly environment.
8 With this reason, 260 members, senior members of
9 Golden Age Community of Staten Island strongly
10 support the Resolution number 0146.

11 Thank you very much sir.

12 BENANATO MISER: Good evening Mr. Chairman and
13 honored guests. It is indeed a pleasure to be here
14 today to be testifying. My name is Benanato
15 Miser[sp?], I've been working for New York City for
16 30 years. I am hosting the Diwali program at HPD for
17 20 years continuously.

18 Diwali is a very auspicious and sacred day for
19 Hindu's. It's with knowledge and devotion and fate
20 and as such the students and children need to be
21 preparations for that holy day by fasting. That is
22 what we're looking for, why we want it. We want for
23 them to grow up and to act in efficient manner. We
24 have to have preparation and that was done by fasting
25 and that is being robbed from my children going to

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2 school today. They prepare the mind, body and
3 senses. So, it's the light, the light system and to
4 seek the blessings for guidance, for protections and
5 inspiration. That is my message and I'm looking
6 forward for that at all times.

7 So, again, I'm appearing to all of us to look at
8 this very carefully, as I know, as you have said, it
9 depends on our Mayor and the Chancellor and I
10 appreciate that but I know the driving force is from
11 the City from the Council and we are looking forward
12 for that and I just gave you the reason why we want
13 Diwali to be a holiday.

14 So, I want to say thank you for that.

15 KAREN SUNNYVAL: Hi, I would say goodnight at
16 this point. My name is Karen Sunnyval[SP?] and I am
17 the Organizing Fellow for Sadhana, Coalition of
18 Progressive Hindu's. A nonprofit organization
19 working to empower our Hindu American communities to
20 live out the values of their fate through service,
21 community transformation and targeted advocacy. I'm
22 also a Co-Chair of the Grassroots Action Team at
23 **[INAUDIBLE 7:23:40]** but most importantly a student.

24 I am here to testify in support of Resolution 146
25 and to call on the New York City Department of

1
2 Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday
3 for the New York City public school students. Diwali
4 has always been of great importance to my family and
5 Hindu's and other faiths all over the world. It is a
6 holiday that holds such importance like Christmas for
7 the Christian faith or Hanukkah for the Jewish faith.

8 I remember growing up and preparing my mind for
9 Diwali a month before it's celebrated. Excited to
10 not only celebrate the festival of lights but spend
11 the entire day with my family in prayer and union.
12 Where I come from namely Trinidad and Tobago. There
13 was no question as to if my parents and I would be
14 home on such a grand religious holiday. There was
15 absolutely no worry about who would perfume puja, our
16 religious ceremony. There was no question in my mind
17 that the goddess of wealth and light that's
18 celebrated on that day should be celebrated or if she
19 would visit my home and heart on Diwali.

20 As I grew older and moved to New York City, a
21 land revered for the free and a place where all
22 religions and backgrounds come together, I saw a
23 division in what freedom of religion meant. I saw
24 that while I was given many days off from school
25 because of other faiths, I had to repress my own

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2 religious practice. I saw that the parents who were
3 of other faiths were able to get time off of work to
4 celebrate with their children who are also at home
5 while my family and I had to choose between our faith
6 or providing for our family almost every year.

7 On a day that I was supposed to be celebrating
8 the goddess of light, darkness grew every year that I
9 couldn't be home to do something simple as praying
10 with my family, adorning our goddess or emanating
11 positivity wellness and productivity into our lives.

12 As we take a look at what feels like an option
13 for some, as we advocate for Diwali as a New York
14 City public school holiday, may we remember the last
15 time we asked children to go to school on the
16 Christmas holiday. May we remember the last time we
17 had to work on a religious holiday and the reason
18 why differentiate the importance of one grand
19 religious holiday over another.

20 No child should ever feel as if they need to
21 choose between their education and their religion and
22 may we stop continuing to ask them to do so.

23 Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And it's very fitting to
25 have a student end this very, very important hearing

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2 because that's exactly the situation that the
3 government must address. The fact that a significant
4 number of students and rising every year are being
5 confronted with this unjust situation and being
6 marked absent and being punished. Because despite
7 whatever they tell you, that oh, well, maybe we'll
8 excuse the absence, no, it still goes on your final
9 transcript. That still is submitted to all the
10 colleges or to the highest levels. That's still
11 marked against you for the rest of your academic
12 career and that is unjust and unfair.

13 And the same thing goes to staff, teachers or
14 support staff, principals that observe this day also.
15 So, that's why we have to solve this issue and I do
16 call upon the Mayor to do it and I thank all of you
17 for your powerful testimony and your patience and the
18 amazing staff of the City Council as well.

19 Thank you all very much. This hearing is
20 adjourned. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 1, 2018