

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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November 22, 2106

Start: 1:19 p.m.

Recess: 3:36 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: DANIEL DROMM  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Vincent J. Gentile  
Daniel R. Garodnick  
Margaret S. Chin  
Stephen T. Levin  
Deborah L. Rose  
Ben Kallos  
Andy L. King  
Inez D. Barron  
Chaim M. Deutsch  
Mark Levine  
Alan N. Maisel  
Antonio Reynoso  
Ydanis A. Rodriguez  
Helen K. Rosenthal  
Mark Treyger  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Ranju Batra, Chair  
Diwali Stamp Project

Hava Jean Singh, President  
Sikh-American Center Foundation

Ravi Batra

Bhuta Kishor, President  
Golden Age Community, Inc.  
Staten Island

Cesar Cabanas  
Arab-American Family Support Center

Mia Thomas, Student  
Asante Dixon, Student

Julisema Vickers, Student  
Bronx High School for Better Learning

Donna Coffee, Student  
Bronx Charter School

Anya McCain, Student  
Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School

Zoey Trent, Student  
Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School

Marcus Carinas, Student  
Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School

Barry Franklin, Student  
Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School

Laura Francis, Middle School Science Teacher  
Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School

Sidney Brooks, Student  
Cornerstone Academy for Social Action  
PATH Middle School

Maria Penny, Student  
Casa Middle School

Leanne Rufi, Student  
Casa Middle School

Colleen Samoto. Student  
Academy for Scholarship and Entrepreneurship

Dehuta Rajas, Student  
Faith Christian Academy

DeAngelo Ennis, Student  
Faith Christian Academy

Zaria White-Davis, Student  
Faith Christian Academy

Keshan Kypal, Student  
Faith Christian Academy

Manuel Casanova, CEC3

Lucas Liu, CEC3, Chair  
Multi-Lingual Committee

John Carlino, Executive Director  
New York Association of Foreign Language Teachers  
Executive Director of the Northeast Conference on  
the Teaching of Foreign Languages

Fotmots Wagay, Civic Organizer  
African Communities Together, ACT

Fabrice Junot, Education Attache  
French Embassy and Program Officer  
French-American Cultural Exchange Foundation

Sabrina Lamb, CEO  
World of Money.org

Chris Caltibiano, Chief Program  
Council for Economic Education

2 [sound check, pause]

3 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please. [gavel]

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Good afternoon and

5 welcome to today's Education Committee hearing on

6 four resolutions. My name is Council Member Daniel

7 Dromm, and I'm chair of the Education Committee.

8 Today, we're going to hearing Resolution 451

9 sponsored by Council Member Andy King; Resolution 845

10 sponsored by Council Member Rafael Espinal;

11 Resolution 890 sponsored by Council Member Mark

12 Levine; and Resolution 568, which I sponsored. I

13 just want to take—make a few opening remarks about

14 Resolution 568 and then we'll move on to hearing

15 statements from my colleagues, the leads sponsors of

16 the other three resolutions. Resolution 568 calls on

17 the New York City Department of Education to

18 establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York

19 City public school students. Diwali is the most

20 important festival on the Hindu calendar celebrating

21 the triumph of good over evil and marking the new

22 year. Diwali's is beginning on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the

23 Hindu month of Kartik, which is Novem—October and

24 November. It's commonly known as the Festival of

25 Lights with celebrants lighting millions of lanterns,

2 symbols of knowledge and inner light to dispel  
3 ignorance and darkness. In addition to Hindus,  
4 Diwali is celebrated Sikhs, Jains and many Buddhists.  
5 Currently, New York City public schools are closed on  
6 several religious holidays for Christians, Jews and  
7 Muslims. However, despite the large number of  
8 Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists in New York City,  
9 Diwali is not currently recognized as a school  
10 holiday in the city's public school system. While  
11 chancellors' regulations allow excused absences for  
12 religious observances, many parents, schools and  
13 advocates have expressed concern that students who  
14 celebrate Diwali are still left at a disadvantage  
15 having to choose between celebrating an important  
16 holiday or being absent from school, which can result  
17 in these students falling behind their peers missing  
18 lessons and tests and having lower attendance  
19 records. Other communities with growing Hindu, Sikh,  
20 Jain and Buddhist populations have incorporated  
21 Diwali into their school calendars including Passaic  
22 and South Brunswick in New Jersey. On Long Island  
23 the Syosset School Board voted just last month to  
24 make Diwali a school holiday, and other districts  
25 including Herricks and Mineola are also considering

2 making this change. In New York the diverse, the  
3 most diverse city in the United States inclusion  
4 acceptance of all cultures are central barriers, and  
5 the incorporation of Diwali as a public school  
6 holiday would serve as an important embodiment of  
7 this include—of this inclusion. This—this issues  
8 really hits home for me because I represent one of  
9 the most diverse communities in the city, Jackson  
10 Heights in Queens, which has large Hindu, Sikh, Jain  
11 and Buddhist populations, and one of the liveliest  
12 Diwali celebrations in the country on 74<sup>th</sup> Street.  
13 In the current climate an increasing bigotry and bias  
14 based harassment, bullying and violence against  
15 immigrants and others it is more important than ever  
16 to celebrate diversity, and to show respect for other  
17 cultures and religions. I know that some people are  
18 concerned about losing another instructional day, but  
19 it's possible to reconfigure the calendar so that  
20 that doesn't happen. All districts are required to  
21 make provisions for snow days, but many districts  
22 that don't use their snow days will end the school  
23 year earlier while New York City does not. City  
24 schools will go all the way through to June 28<sup>th</sup> this  
25 year regardless of whether or not snow days are used.

2 I think that now is the time for us to work together  
3 to demonstrate inclusivity and make this a reality.

4 As I stated earlier, we'll also hear  
5 testimony on Resolution 451, Resolution 845 and  
6 Resolution 890 today. Resolution 451 calls on the  
7 New York City Department of Education to mandate  
8 school uniforms. Resolution 845 calls on the New  
9 York State Education Department to expand the state's  
10 financial literacy and personal finance education  
11 curriculum to all grades K through 12. And  
12 Resolution 890 calls on the New York State  
13 Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign Assembly  
14 Bill 329, Senate 554 to implement more foreign  
15 language instruction in elementary schools. Today,  
16 we'd like to get feedback on the resolutions. The  
17 Committee usually hears testimony from the Department  
18 of Education at the beginning of each hearing.  
19 However, the Administration has a policy of not  
20 commenting on resolutions. So we will go directly to  
21 testimony from divided witnesses and members of the  
22 public. Everyone who wishes to testify today must  
23 fill out a witness slip, which is located on the desk  
24 of the sergeant-at-arms in front of the room. Please  
25 indicate on the witness slip which resolutions you



2 wish to testify on, and whether you are here to  
3 testify in favor of or in opposition to those  
4 resolutions. I want to point out, however, that  
5 today we will not be voting on the resolutions as  
6 this is just the first hearing, and I want to clarify  
7 that these are resolutions, not bills so they can't  
8 mandate action. To allow as many people to testify,  
9 testimony will be limited to three minutes per  
10 person, and please note that all witnesses will be  
11 sworn in before testifying. Now, I'd like to turn  
12 the floor over to my colleague Andy King for his  
13 remarks regarding Resolution 451 followed by Council  
14 Member Rafael Espinal on 845 and Mark Levine on  
15 Resolution 890, but before I do that, let me just say  
16 who is here. We've been joined by Council Member Ben  
17 Kallos. We've been joined by Council Member Chaim  
18 Deutsch. We've been joined by Council Member Ydanis  
19 Rodriguez, Council Member Andy King, Council Member  
20 Mark Levine, Council Member Alan Maisel, Council  
21 Member Ellen (sic) Chin, Council Member Antonio  
22 Reynoso, Council Member Mark Treyger, and Council  
23 Member Helen Rosenthal, and with that I'm going to  
24 turn it over now to Council Member Andy King.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you, Mr.  
3 Chair and good afternoon to my colleagues and to all  
4 who are here in attendance today on these important  
5 resolutions, but before I give my remarks, I just  
6 want to thank and acknowledge the students that are  
7 here from my district, from Cornerstone Academy of  
8 Social Action, the Future Leaders of Tomorrow, Bronx  
9 Charter School for Better Learning, Academy for  
10 Scholarship and Entrepreneurship, the Learning Tree  
11 Culture Preparatory School, and Faith-Faith Christian  
12 Academy, and I also want to give a shout out to MS  
13 582 in Brooklyn who watching streamlining, streaming  
14 this live in Brooklyn. I'm proud to say as a member  
15 of this committee I have listened and to-listened and  
16 to support both legislations and budget initiatives  
17 that enable the Department of Education to live up to  
18 its mission of improving student achievement and  
19 ensuring that every student is prepared for the  
20 future as a productive, critically-critically  
21 thinking adult. From an academy stand-academic  
22 standpoint, this goal is-is coming into fruition  
23 because out graduation rates are at 70% citywide, and  
24 the number of students receiving an advance regents-  
25 and regent's diploma has steadily increased over

2 time. I applaud the efforts of the Council and the  
3 DOE because their joint efforts along with committed  
4 faculty and staff at every public school, we are  
5 clearly making an impact on the quality of education  
6 being administered to our students, and their future  
7 success. Although the academics success of our  
8 students is a top priority for our ed—for our  
9 education system, it should not only be—it should not  
10 only be the only factor we use to measure a student's  
11 preparedness for the future. I believe and hope that  
12 you will agree with me that most exemplary students  
13 are the ones that not only excel in academics but  
14 also fully embrace all other aspects of student life  
15 such as playing sports, joining a club or it's even  
16 going as far as making a point of dressing  
17 appropriately for each day before they leave their  
18 homes headed to school. My high school alma mater of  
19 Evander Childs High School, which is just down the  
20 block from my office, and I'm always glad to see the  
21 energetic kids, the students walking up and down,  
22 and, you know being proud. But I also know that there  
23 are times that I've watched dress wear that leaves us  
24 the question what were they thinking when they left  
25 the house this morning. What displeases me when I

2 see some of our young men with their pants sagging  
3 below their waist or having the nerve to call it a  
4 fashion style. I don't know about all of that, but  
5 even more, sometimes just watching the girls taking  
6 an opportunity to dress like a favored diva that they  
7 might see on TV as opposed to a respectable young  
8 lady. While it's our job as parents and educators to  
9 figure out what we do offer—offer that discipline and  
10 education for our children, and make sure that  
11 they're ready for tomorrow's society. That is one of  
12 the reasons why I've sponsored and urging the DOE to  
13 mandate that public uniforms or adopt it as a policy  
14 just as it was prior to changing the voluntary  
15 process in 2012. A mandatory uniform policy will  
16 undoubtedly make it clear that all students at the  
17 end of the day no matter how smart you are, will  
18 eventually—will become your parent, and the  
19 impressions that you make on other people will last  
20 that much more longer. So while—why are we not—so  
21 why not instill all of this in our young people when  
22 they're growing up and while they're younger.  
23 Additionally, you know, this legislation came to mind  
24 not because I said hey I just want to figure out how  
25 to put kids in a uniform or uniformity. But, the

2 last two years I've had a number of conversations  
3 with parents, principals, teachers and even students  
4 and one of the number one things that was a  
5 distraction for learning was apparel. So I said  
6 well, what do we do with that? Well, how about  
7 creating an environment that we take away that part  
8 of distraction in the classroom. Kids should be  
9 focused on semicolons, fractions, learning different  
10 languages. These are the things that we want our  
11 kids to be prepared for, for reading and taking SATs  
12 and regents. However, apparel has become an issue  
13 because kids are finding themselves focused on  
14 whether or not they have the latest Jordan or the  
15 right True Religion jeans, or what belt buckle  
16 they're wearing today. These have become some of the  
17 distractions that our kids pay attention to as  
18 opposed to learning what's going on in the classroom.  
19 Well, how do we eliminate that by creating some form  
20 of uniformity? One of the things that has become a  
21 problem that we've talked about with the students  
22 that I've sat down with is bullying, being bullied  
23 because I don't have the latest fashion or the  
24 cliques I get excluded from because I'm not wearing  
25 the proper clothing, not to mention what often that

2 hey the burden—the financial burden of me stressing  
3 out trying to make sure that my kids is up with the  
4 Joneses as opposed to understanding what the Joneses  
5 actually are. So I'm saying to us today, I'm asking  
6 my colleagues to take a look at and—and everyone to  
7 understand that the cost of this uniform that people  
8 keep questioning me about uniforms, is not  
9 necessarily that you're going to go buy a new  
10 uniform, but it's all about uniformity that I should  
11 be able—you should be able to identify a child that's  
12 going to Evander or Truman as opposed to not knowing  
13 what school the child is going to. For safety  
14 reasons as well, identifying if a child is not in  
15 school and identifying a child that might mention—you  
16 might say hey you should be at this school by your  
17 uniform or your uniformly. And when we talk about  
18 uniforms, we're asking schools to take a look at how  
19 do you create your own uniform whether it's a polo  
20 shirt and a pair of slacks or whether it's a tie and  
21 white shirt and striped and a striped dress, it's up  
22 to the school. But we want to figure out a way to  
23 take out some of these distractions that have caused  
24 so many children heartache before they event into the  
25 school to start their day. So with that all being

2 said, I want to say thank you Mr. Chair and all my  
3 colleagues. I looking forward to experience a date,  
4 but I'm asking all of our advocates to stay strong  
5 and united. And all those who are in opposition of  
6 this resolution, I want you be mindful that we have a  
7 responsibility to help our kids learn, and—and if  
8 you're not in classroom, if you're not in a school  
9 building each and every day, you may not understand  
10 what the children and what the faculty are going  
11 through trying to educate our children. The  
12 resolution is designed to find a solution, not create  
13 a problem. So I thank everyone of my colleagues  
14 today, and look forward to today's conversation, and  
15 thank you, Mr. Chair.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much,  
17 and now we will be followed by Council Member Mark  
18 Levine.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you much,  
20 Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to say a few words in support  
21 of Intro—excuse me, Reso 890 on the topic of dual  
22 language education in New York City. I counted  
23 around the table here, and I think amongst the  
24 members of this committee there are now fewer than  
25 six foreign languages that are spoken. There's

2 Spanish, French, Russian, Yiddish, Cantonese, Hebrew,  
3 Mandarin and I think all of us could testify to the  
4 impact that being bilingual has had on our lives. And  
5 that is true for everyone especially for a young  
6 person for whom learning a second language can change  
7 my life. It can open up career opportunities and  
8 international business or diplomacy, government, non-  
9 profits, the geo sector, tourism. I can tear down  
10 cultural barriers to allow for person-to-person  
11 communication across the lines that often divide us.  
12 It just opens up vast new opportunities for cultural  
13 understanding for young people, but too few of the  
14 children in New York City schools are getting that  
15 gift today. Only about 5% of elementary school  
16 students have any kind of robust foreign language  
17 education, and that is the age at which young people  
18 can absorb foreign languages almost effortlessly.  
19 We're lucky to have a chancellor in Carmen Farina who  
20 is herself a product of bilingual education, and was  
21 deeply committed to this kind of instruction, and to  
22 her credit has ramped up the number of dual language  
23 programs in our schools significantly in her almost  
24 three years in the role. But we're facing  
25 limitations, and the number one challenge we have is



2 finding teachers who are qualified to offer intensive  
3 bilingual instruction including delivering subject  
4 matter in languages other than English. And so it's  
5 great news that in Albany, our partners there have  
6 introduced legislation, which would help tackle the  
7 shortage of teachers. There's a bill in the Assembly  
8 and it's by Assembly Member Nily Rozic, Assembly Bill  
9 329. It has a companion in the State Senate, Senate  
10 Bill 554 whose lead sponsor is Senator Kelly Parker,  
11 which will provide financial incentives to districts  
12 to ramp up foreign language instruction, and to  
13 individual future teachers to earn the credentials  
14 they need to help provide this 21<sup>st</sup> Century skillset  
15 to the young people in the future. So, I'm pleased  
16 that we're considering this resolution today in  
17 support of the State Legislation that would expand  
18 this opportunity to what we hope would ultimately be  
19 every child in New York City schools. Thank you, Mr.  
20 Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
22 I want to say we've been joined by Council Member Dan  
23 Garodnick and I just saw another council member walk  
24 in the door. Gentile? Vincent Gentile right over  
25 there. Thank you, Council Member Gentile. Vincent

2 Gentile is with us also, and I was proud to co-author  
3 an op-ed with Council Member Levine, and—and I thank  
4 you for that opportunity as well, and when Council  
5 Member Espinal gets here, we'll allow him to make his  
6 statement on his legislation also. So, I also want  
7 to announce that we've been joined by my friend from  
8 the Granny Peace Brigade. They're always here, and I  
9 support their efforts strongly, and it's good to see  
10 that you're here again, and I'm going to call up our  
11 first panel. Ranju Batra, Ravi Batra, Paverton Sting  
12 (sp?), Kisha Buta (sp?), and Cesar Cabanas, and come  
13 right over here and Sergeant, we're going to need  
14 another chair. [background comments, pause] So--and  
15 before I swear you in, I want to say that Ranju Batra  
16 is the head of the organization, the Chair of the  
17 Diwali Stamp Project that recently got this Diwali  
18 stamp passed. So that's why I'm putting this here in  
19 your honor today. So thank you for joining us. Yes,  
20 we can give her a round of applause for sure.

21 [applause] It was many years of work, and I'm going  
22 to ask all of the witnesses to raise your right hand,  
23 please. Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the  
24 whole truth, and nothing but the truth and to answer  
25 council member questions honestly?

2 PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] [in unison] I  
3 do.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, and Ran-Ranju,  
5 would you like to start? [background comments, pause]

6 RANJU BATRA: Thank you, Chairman Daniel  
7 Dromm. I'm happy to personally acknowledge each  
8 council member present here today. Most are our  
9 friends, and all friends' of the community at large.  
10 Let me start by acknowledging how grateful I am that  
11 New York City Council' Education Committee has taken  
12 up Resolution 568 so that Hindu, Sikh, Jain and  
13 Buddhist school kids no longer have to choose whether  
14 to go to school or—and ignore their faith, or stay at  
15 home to observe their faith and miss school. This is  
16 an improper and unfair choice forced upon our  
17 attendees. Diwali, as you know, is universally  
18 acknowledged and celebrated. We have attended Diwali  
19 celebrations at the White House, Congress and among  
20 others right here in New York City Council Chamber  
21 from Speaker Peter Vallone, and most recently last  
22 week an event led by Council Member Rory Lancman who  
23 I thank and I thank you to the organizers for the  
24 citation presented to me for getting the Diwali stamp  
25 issued by the United States Postal Service. While my

2 kids were in school, we celebrated Christmas,  
3 Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and East (sic), but there was no  
4 school holiday for Diwali. So I made the choice to  
5 send my kids to school at the cost of celebrating  
6 Diwali, our most religious holiday. This is wrong  
7 even if another family made the opposite choice.  
8 Having to choose between learning and religion is an  
9 unfair and harmful choice as other faith's most  
10 important holidays are observed in schools. A  
11 benefit of—of observing Diwali as a school holiday is  
12 that all other students will learn and appreciate  
13 what Pope Francis has presented to the world, treat  
14 every religion with respect. In a world full of much  
15 too much hate, respect for another human being's  
16 faith especially when there are kids is an important  
17 lesson to be learned in schools with a benefit of  
18 such teachings flowing to society forever in reduced  
19 hate crimes and more civil society. I can share with  
20 you that we have personally supported New York City  
21 Diwali Parking Holiday led by then cancer patient  
22 (sic) Chairman John Liu, and then Finance Chairman  
23 David Weprin. In 2010, I embarked on my journey to  
24 our Diwali stamp, which so critical (sic) almost  
25 seven years, with USDS unveiling the Diwali stamp on

2 October 5, 2015, at the Indian Conclave with an  
3 official an elaborate ceremony. In that effort, I  
4 got tens of thousands of paper positions in support  
5 of the Diwali stamp. While celebrating the other  
6 religious—other religions who had their own stamps.  
7 I partnered with Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, and  
8 helped get support from other members of Congress  
9 including Eliot Engle, Greg Meeks, Yvette Clark,  
10 Jerry Nadler, Lisa Lloyd and Civil Rights giants John  
11 Lewis for House Resolution 47 in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress  
12 and then House Resolution 32 in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.  
13 Each calling for the Diwali stamp. My journey to our  
14 Diwali stamp is successfully completed thanks to  
15 Postmaster General Megan Brennan. Now, Hindus,  
16 Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists have an American stamp to  
17 call their own. While my journey may have taken  
18 seven years, the Diwali stamp is here forever. With  
19 support of Air India and its Regional Manager Vandana  
20 Sharma, who backed up my dream of making a Diwali  
21 stamp, enjoyed the biggest first year sales ever in  
22 the USDS' history, and it did. And I personally sold  
23 through the Diwali Stamp Project over 170,000 stamps,  
24 and as a result, our Diwali stamp is now the number  
25 one best seller in USDS' history. [applause] While

2 Diwali is known for lights over darkness or good over  
3 evil, nobody every said that to make it so was going  
4 to be easy. Our Diwali stamp will be a matter of  
5 pride for generations to come. In fact, I can share  
6 with you that there is—there will be a celebration of  
7 the Diwali stamp, and of my journey at the—at the  
8 United Nations on December 5, 2016 at 6:30 p.m., an  
9 event led by the Country Missions of Belarus and  
10 India with support of other member states. I have  
11 with me copies of the first day cover and stamp  
12 dedication program, which I would like to include as  
13 part of my testimony. I note that Resolution 558  
14 calling for a Diwali school holiday understands the  
15 affected population in the United States. There are  
16 over three million Indian Americans in the United  
17 States, and close to 500,000 Asian-Indians and many,  
18 many more from the Caribbean countries and the West  
19 Indies. The time has come for New York City voter for  
20 education to make Diwali a school holiday and end its  
21 improper opposition for the sake of all states that  
22 splits their use from either school or their faith.  
23 I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to  
24 share with you my views of why Diwali school holiday  
25 must become a reality now. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
3 Mr. Hava Jean Singh. (sp?)

4 HAVA JEAN SINGH: Hava Jean Singh (sp?)  
5 President of the Sikh American Center Foundation.  
6 Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, Council Member Daniel  
7 Dromm and committee members for an opportunity to  
8 support the Council Resolution 568 calling upon the  
9 New York City Department of Education to establish  
10 Diwali as an official holiday for New York City  
11 public school students. Besides being a civic  
12 activist—activist for the Sikh community and the  
13 Secretary-General for the Indian National Religious  
14 Congress, I am also a member of the Queens Borough  
15 President's General Assembly, which deals with—deals  
16 principally with matters relating to communities and  
17 cultures in the worst borough of Queens. Diwali  
18 means rows of light or lens. Diwali is known as the  
19 Festival of lights because of the oil lamps and  
20 electric lights that people use to decorate homes,  
21 businesses and public places as celebration of  
22 directly of good over evil and light over darkness,  
23 light is an important physical and central symbol of  
24 the holiday. Christianity has churches. Judaism has  
25 synagogues. Islam has mosques, and Hinduism has

2 mandels (sic) and shikhism has good waters. On Diwali  
3 Hindus and Sikhs living abroad together gather in  
4 their places of worship for community celebrations,  
5 enjoy fireworks displays. As you know, sir, in  
6 addition to Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs, also  
7 celebrate Diwali in such countries as Nepal,  
8 Bangladesh, Malaysia and Singapore. Legend and  
9 customs accompany—accompany Diwali—accompany Diwali  
10 really among religions and regions. In India it—the  
11 bigger—in India I think the biggest and the brightest  
12 national holiday. We, sir, applaud you for so  
13 eloquently numerating the—the sound and solid and  
14 convincing justification for the approval of this  
15 resolution. In New York City a very large South  
16 Asian population celebrates this day with processions  
17 and festivals such as at the South Street Seaport,  
18 Jackson Heights, Citi Field (sic), and Times Square.  
19 We sincerely appreciate the Council's efforts, and  
20 prevail upon our legislators to move City Hall to  
21 accelerate more community festivities. The proposal  
22 to declare Diwali as one of the school's holiday is  
23 in harmony with the existing communities, properly  
24 fair an merits your strong support. I thank you,  
25 sir.



2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
3 Mr. Ravi Batra.

4 RAVI BATRA: [off mic] Thank you, Mr.  
5 Chairman. [on mic] Can we turn that on? Thank you,  
6 Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be here again, and  
7 so wonderful to see so many capable and wonderful  
8 representatives that serve the people of the State of  
9 New York and New York City in particular some of who  
10 were served in the Assembly, and I guess may go to  
11 the Assembly. Mr. Chairman, I am very happy to see,  
12 as I said, great public servants all here and I want—  
13 and I also want to single out Margaret Chin, and I  
14 hope that she gets her Rivington Deed back because  
15 all of you here are here to promote a better—better  
16 angels in here, and so while I'm speaking focused on  
17 Resolution No. 568, I see the—the merit of all of the  
18 resolutions that are on your agenda. I'm proud of  
19 you, Mr. Chairman, Chairman Dromm and members of the  
20 City Council Education Committee for taking—having  
21 taken up Resolution No. 568 as it is in the finest  
22 tradition of American values that have made our  
23 nation a beacon in human existence so that Hindus,  
24 Sikhs, Jains and school kids no longer have to choose  
25 whether to go to school and ignore their faith or

2 stay at home and observe their faith in the school.  
3 This is unfair and unjust forced upon our families.  
4 For purposes of brevity, I incorporated testimony and  
5 my dear and hardworking wife Ranja Batra shared the  
6 Diwali Stamp Project who recently made the noble and  
7 peaceful American history with the issuance of USBS  
8 Diwali forever stamp, history that was felt across  
9 the world, such that ever Prime Minister Moby leading  
10 a nation of a billion people his Diwali message had a  
11 video clip of the Diwali's stamp's unveiling in New  
12 York, which included Ranju among others including  
13 yours truly. Diwali, as you know, is universally  
14 celebrated, as Ranju said, and—and I did tag along  
15 with her to the White House and various parts whether  
16 the Senate or the House or different state houses or  
17 local county houses. But I do want to take a moment  
18 and recall with some affection my very dear friend  
19 the former Speaker Peter Vallone who started this  
20 tradition way back when, and it is—it speaks to the  
21 best in us. We hear a lot about gender equality in  
22 our family the Ranja rules. She chose to—to send the  
23 kids to school, and get an education rather than stay  
24 at home and learn about their faith. This choice  
25 forced upon families is both illegal as it is

2 unconstitutional. She is the peaceful one in the  
3 family. I'm not known for that. I only inform  
4 people and tell them what-what's wrong. If they  
5 don't take care of it, then let the chips fall where  
6 they may. As New Yorkers we love everybody, which is  
7 why we are the greatest city in the world. We  
8 celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kawanzaa, Eid. We're  
9 happy to be in St. Patty. We're happy to march-march  
10 in St. Patty's Day Parade or-or Israel Day parade or  
11 any other parade. We're happy to any shul, got to a  
12 mosque or gyer (sic) or Hindu center or Hindu temple.  
13 Here in this city and in Chairman Dromm's district  
14 Jackson Heights, Indian-Americans, Pakistani-  
15 Americans, Bangladeshi-Americans, and every other  
16 kind of American live happily in harmony working the  
17 American dream, which requires a lot of grit and a  
18 lot of true grit, as Wayne-as our wonderful actor had  
19 said. This is true of all religions and all faiths  
20 here in New York. This is why America is a shining  
21 city on the hill, and we are stronger together. In  
22 New York, we are equal of this union. In fact,  
23 there's not a mode-a model. We are, in fact, that.  
24 But New York City Board of Education, which came with  
25 the Mayoral control during Mayor Mike Bloomberg's

2 campaign for his second term is because I intervened  
3 in that decision by the State Senate. I then  
4 convinced the State Senate Majority Leader to drop  
5 their objection to mayoral control, and allow Mayor  
6 Mike Bloomberg, although that was the heart of his  
7 campaign, an unfair electoral advantage, but I  
8 suggested to the Senate that to able to hold the  
9 mayor liable, accountable, somebody accountable for  
10 the state of schools was a worthy goal worth of then  
11 playing politics. And the Senate dropped its  
12 objection, and it became law and now Mike Bloomberg  
13 went on to become elected, and mayoral control became  
14 a reality, which is now on a one-year extension.  
15 Well, I hope Mayor de Blasio accountable for not  
16 having a Diwali holiday in DOE schools, and I'm not  
17 happy about it. This is disturbing to me as other  
18 ongoing disturbing matters are such as Rivington. In  
19 addition. In addition, DOE's position is  
20 unconstitutional. Let me explain. It took a certain  
21 amount of lobbying (sic) over a bunch of decades.  
22 They don't do Dabany over a bunch of decades. They  
23 don't do Dabany in law school. You got to do it in  
24 real life. The Constitution has two competing  
25 clauses, and really don't understand which one is on

2 top and which is on bottom, and which comes first and  
3 which really controls. The Constitution is nice to  
4 you if you wish to honor it, or the Constitution is  
5 not nice to you if you wish to dishonor it. And  
6 those two competing clauses are such. The first is  
7 the equal protection clause and the second is the  
8 separation of church and state. In thinking of  
9 separation of church and state I must acknowledge the  
10 invaluable lesson taught to humanity by Thomas  
11 Beckett in 1163 when he stood guard to protect the  
12 church from then Henry II, the Norman King of  
13 England. New York City has two options mandated by  
14 our service constitution. Either, one, honor the  
15 equal protection clause and acknowledge that Diwali  
16 school holiday with all speed; or face a lawsuit in  
17 court, which will eliminate all school holidays for  
18 the mandate of separation of church and state. Since  
19 in God we Trust and we love Christmas and Hanukkah  
20 and Kwanzaa and Eid, the better and single option, as  
21 Mayor de Blasio is looking through the webcast this  
22 straight to you, is to honor the equal protection  
23 clause rather than face-face the harsh mandate of  
24 separation of church and state. I urge you, this  
25 committee and this Council, to pass a bill for the

2 support with the support of the Speaker in the event  
3 of a mayoral veto, as Mayor Bloomberg once did, when  
4 the City Council the Diwali Parking Holiday, I expect  
5 this Council to override that veto unanimously. It  
6 is beneath the DOE, and New York City mayor to play  
7 politics with our Constitution, and force upon our  
8 families an unconstitutional Hobson's Choice, ignore  
9 school or ignore religion. Thank you, Mr. Chairman  
10 and may God bless—continue to bless these United  
11 States of America.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
13 Next, please. [pause]

14 BHUTA KISHOR: Committee Council member  
15 Daniel Dromm and all respected council members. Good  
16 afternoon. My name is Bhuta Kishor. I'm living in  
17 State Island for the last 36 years. Before I used to  
18 live on Jackson Heights for ten years from 1970 to  
19 1980 when that's Daniel Dromm's district. Currently I  
20 am the President of Golden Age Community,  
21 Incorporated of Staten Island, a non-profit  
22 organization since July 6, 2006. It is incorporated  
23 in the New York State, and also in the federal  
24 government on June 17, 2008. We have 180 members.  
25 We organize educational, social, cultural and

2 community things such as Diwali celebrations, medical  
3 and financial seminars, interconnect senior citizen  
4 nursing homes, volunteer at soup kitchens and inform  
5 to neighbors these are their communities for the last  
6 ten years. All the—all children in our communities  
7 attended New York public school, and now our  
8 grandchildren are doing the same. We feel it is  
9 important for us, our children and grandchildren  
10 share and celebrate the Diwali, the very significant  
11 Indian festival popular globally with their friends  
12 from the different cultures. By celebrating Diwali  
13 with children and parents of other ethnic groups,  
14 will then innate the knowledge and understanding of  
15 each other's culture and factual and so that children  
16 accumulate better, insulated their children in one  
17 winter. (sic) With this reason, Golden Age Community  
18 of Staten Island strongly supports Resolution No. 568  
19 to declare Diwali as social holiday. Thank you very  
20 much.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
22 Next up. I would just say we've been joined by  
23 Council Member Barron as well. Thank you.

24 CESAR CABANAS: Good afternoon, Mr.  
25 Chair, and distinguished committee members. My name

2 is Cesar Cabanas and I'm here for the Arab-American  
3 Family Support Center. The Arab American Family  
4 Support Center is the oldest and largest Arabic  
5 speaking social service agency in New York City. As  
6 settlement house, the organization provides  
7 culturally and linguistically competent services to  
8 Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian within  
9 our communities. Our organization celebrates how  
10 vast and vibrant our communities are in their  
11 diversity, and we strive to build unity and strength  
12 among them. This is why we firmly support Resolution  
13 568 to establish Diwiali as an official holiday for  
14 New York City Public Schools. Our doors—our doors  
15 are open to observers of all religions and that  
16 includes Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists. New  
17 York City is home to a significant and increasing  
18 Dharma community particularly in Queens where one of  
19 our offices is located. From 1990 to 2010, the  
20 Indian population in New York City increased by 103%.  
21 According to the Census Bureau's 2012 American  
22 Community Survey, there were over 200,000 New York  
23 City residents who identify who as Asian-Indian. The  
24 vast majority of whom identify as Hindu, Sikh, Jain  
25 or Buddhist. These communities are an integral and



2 growing part of our city. For many years, we also  
3 fought for Eid to be established as a public holiday  
4 in New York City, and last year our efforts paid off.  
5 Our children were finally able to spend these  
6 important holidays at home with their families  
7 without worrying about missing school. We not only  
8 uphold the concept of the collective Mensa (sic) and  
9 our language and services, we are—we uphold it in our  
10 advocacy and actions. Children of all religions  
11 should not have to shoulder the burden of this  
12 decision. For this reason, we continue to take a  
13 stand here today. Diwali signifies the victory of  
14 light over darkness. It reminds us that knowledge  
15 will overcome ignorance, compassion over hate, and  
16 hope over despair. Without a doubt, during such  
17 trying times of intensified xenophobia, we all need  
18 more light in our lives. The meaning of Diwali rings  
19 true for everyone. New York City has always stood as  
20 a beacon of acceptance, tolerance and respect for  
21 others. As proud members of the Mensa community in  
22 New York City, we fully support Resolution 568 and I  
23 thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, thank you very  
25 much, and I want to thank the panel [applause] for

2 coming in and just before I let you go, does anybody  
3 have an estimate on the number of students in New  
4 York City that would celebrate the holiday?

5 RAVI BATRA: About 100,000 or more.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: A 100,000 out of a  
7 1.1 million.

8 RAVI BATRA: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Very, very good.  
10 Okay, thank you, and we will be seeing each other  
11 more as we move forward down the path to ensuring  
12 that this resolution is passed. I want to thank you  
13 all for coming in. Thank you.

14 RAVI BATRA: It's really—I just want to  
15 take a moment especially--

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So just put the mic  
17 on, Mr. Batra.

18 RAVI BATRA: Yeah, I did. I just want to  
19 especially thank the Speaker who just—well, as an  
20 Arab-American so that is why we are the greatest  
21 nation on earth.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Absolutely.

23 RAVI BATRA: Thank you very much.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Absolutely. Thank  
25 you. [background comments, pause] Alright, our next

2 panel is going to consist of some students, and I  
3 hope I say your name right, but if I don't, please  
4 correct. Juliasema Vickers. Did I say it right?  
5 Okay. Donna Coffee Valdu, Donna Coffee. Okay, and  
6 by he way, these students are from the Bronx Charter  
7 School for Better Learning, and then I have Nia  
8 Thomas from Leaders of Tomorrow and I have Ashante  
9 Dickson or Dixon, I'm sorry, of Leaders of Tomorrow.  
10 [background comments] And so we're going to put that  
11 on the time clock two minutes. Okay. [pause] Okay,  
12 I have to swear you in. Would you raise your right  
13 hand? Do you solemnly swear or affirm to tell the  
14 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth and  
15 to answer council member questions honestly?

16 PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] I do.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, and let's start  
18 with this lady over here, and just make sure the red  
19 light is on, on your microphone.

20 MIA THOMAS: Yes. Good afternoon. My  
21 name is Mia Thomas I'm from Leaders of Tomorrow.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Will you pull the mic  
23 a little closer? Just pull it. Yes. That's it.

24 MIA THOMAS: School uniforms with the  
25 clothes code that is required for students to wear in

2 school it makes life easier for you. It prevents  
3 bullying and helps teachers in the process. It also  
4 shows the community who we are, and that we are one.  
5 When getting dressed in the morning, students tend to  
6 come late because they are too busy trying to figure  
7 out what they're going to wear. With uniforms, it  
8 helps students in the morning when getting dressed.  
9 It's very good to wear uniforms because places that  
10 are huge such as City Hall, it's easy to get lost.  
11 Wearing uniforms might be easier for teachers or  
12 staff who watching students to find them and vice  
13 versa. Nowadays bullying is a social issue, and it  
14 has always been, people bullying and judging people  
15 based off of what they wear. With uniforms, nobody  
16 should be bullied because really why is someone going  
17 to be bullying another person when they're wearing  
18 the same school uniform? For example, my school  
19 Leaders of Tomorrows who are sitting over there it's  
20 easy to spot because they're all wearing the same  
21 bright red shirts. Our school is the college prep.  
22 We are required to wear uniform red shirt, pants, and  
23 black pants and black sneakers. With those who think  
24 I matters what you—what you wear, now you're going to  
25 look back and you're going to think, wow, it really

2 didn't matter what we wore. But from today with all  
3 the people I talk to and that talk to me, I learned  
4 that they are right. When you're at your first job  
5 interview nobody is going to be wearing it--worrying  
6 about if you're wearing the new Jordans. No, they're  
7 going to want to hear from you. In conclusion, the  
8 uniform codes is best for us. Thank you and enjoy  
9 the rest of your day. [applause]

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Very good. Next  
11 please.

12 ASHANTE DIXON: Good evening.  
13 [background comments] Good evening.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Pull it closer, even  
15 closer and speak right into it and speak up. Don't  
16 be afraid because I don't bite.

17 ASHANTE DIXON: Good evening members of  
18 staff. My name is Ashante Dixon. The student  
19 uniform is beneficial because-- [pause] Good evening  
20 members of staff. My name is Ashante Dixon, and  
21 school uniform is bene--beneficial because a lot--a lot  
22 of kids is being on their choice and what they wear,  
23 and the school uniforms, the uniform being the  
24 demonstrator of what the others are wearing. So they

2 will be more focused on their school work, and they  
3 wouldn't get distracted.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Very good.  
5 [applause] And our next student. [pause]

6 JULISEMA VICKERS: Good afternoon. My  
7 name is Julisema Vickers (sp?) and I'm fifth grade  
8 student at the Bronx High School for Better Learning.  
9 Just last week I was elected to the Student Council  
10 where I will serve in a leadership role this year.  
11 Wearing a school uniform is a topic that is debated  
12 constantly in the education system. We, the students  
13 at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning  
14 support wearing uniforms. We have pride in our  
15 school, and we express that pride through dressing  
16 our school uniforms. When we put on our DBL uniforms,  
17 we are telling the world that we are proud to attend  
18 this school. We also like to look-be presentable and  
19 professional what we come as. (sic) We believe that  
20 dressing in a professional manner now will help us in  
21 the future when we are applying for jobs. We feel  
22 that wearing school uniforms is how students dress  
23 appropriately for school. If we wear what the school  
24 asks us to, there is less of a-less of a chance that  
25 we will put on something inappropriate. I would like

2 to introduce you to my classmate and fellow student  
3 council member Dana Coffee who will tell you tell you  
4 a bit more about the school uniform.

5 DONNA COFFEE: Good afternoon. My name  
6 is Donna Coffee, and I am also a fifth grade student  
7 in the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning. As  
8 a fifth grader, I, too, also serve in leadership—in  
9 the leadership role of—for Student Council. This is  
10 my second year as a member of the Student Council.  
11 As my classmate, Julisema said, we do support wearing  
12 school uniforms. We realize that clothing can be  
13 very big distractions in the classroom, and when we  
14 wear those same things to school, this distraction is  
15 no longer present. We also—we also support the  
16 school uniform process because we realize that  
17 everyone—that not everyone has access to expensive or  
18 trendy clothing, and we're sure that uniform might  
19 minimize student chances to be made fun of for what  
20 they have—wear to school. As I think—as we like to  
21 think of our schools as one big family, we support  
22 uniforms because—because we feel no one gets left out  
23 if we wear the same thing. Thank you very much for  
24 an opportunity to come to City Hall today and speak  
25 to you about school uniforms. We look forward to

2 being able to discuss more issues like this and model  
3 what we see here today during our Student Council  
4 meetings. [applause]

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, thank you very  
6 much and I want to thank Council Member Andy King for  
7 bringing in this group of experts, but I also want to  
8 caution the Council Member because some of these  
9 children may run against you in the future, Council  
10 Member, and I hope that they don't. [laughs] I want  
11 to keep you around for a long time. Any questions we  
12 have? Council Member Reynoso.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Hello, panel.  
14 Thank you so much for your testimony. I also want to  
15 give a shout-out MS582 in Brooklyn. Their student  
16 council is currently sitting and watching this live.  
17 I can't wait to hear your comments on what you think  
18 about school uniform, and that I hope you're hearing  
19 the argument for four or five of the young student  
20 sitting before us. I want to just to say that every  
21 argument that I was going to make has already been  
22 said in just this first panel. So thank you for  
23 thoughtful approach, and—and comments as to why you  
24 think it would be positive. I went to school. In  
25 high school I had to wear a uniform, and it was my



2 best academic years when I was wearing that uniform  
3 because I had my parents who had little means did not  
4 have to worry about what I was wearing every single  
5 day, and I was able to focus on what mattered, which  
6 was my education. And it is because of my personal  
7 experience that I am supporting this resolution, and  
8 hoping that we can see it done citywide. But again,  
9 I want to thank you, and you guys did an amazing job  
10 today, and you representing the schools very well.  
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you.  
13 [applause] Council Member—okay, I—I just want to say  
14 also is that MSQ High School?

15 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: No, it's not but  
16 MSQ High School also has uniforms, yes and I would  
17 have to get them.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Like the idea a  
19 debate also around this topic, I think is one which  
20 is very good because often times when I was a  
21 teacher, because I used to be a teacher for 25 years  
22 before I got elected to the City Council. This was  
23 one issue that used to always get the kids all riled  
24 up. Some were in favor and others were not, but  
25 you've represented yourselves very, very well here,

2 and I thank you for coming in. Thank you, very, very  
3 much. [applause] Alright, we're going to bring up  
4 our next panel, and these are students also I  
5 believe. [background comments] Oh, she did want to  
6 ask a question. Yes, okay. Council Member I'm  
7 sorry. Students would you just take a seat again  
8 because Council Member Barron did want to ask a  
9 question.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you, Mr.  
11 Chair. Thank you for having this hearing. I didn't  
12 really want to ask a question. I just wanted to  
13 commend the panel for their presentation. I also was  
14 an elementary school teacher as well as principal and  
15 I support the concepts of school uniforms because it  
16 diffused a lot of the tension and problems that might  
17 have occurred had not everyone in the school been  
18 similarly dressed, and I was telling my colleague  
19 that I also wore the actual school uniform or the  
20 colors of the school. So thank you again for coming  
21 with your presentation. [applause]

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Oh, yeah,  
23 Council Member Chaim Deutsch.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you,  
25 Chair, and I want to thank Council Member Andy King

2 for introducing this bill. I do support school  
3 uniform, and you all did a great job, and I wish  
4 sometimes council members wear uniforms because I  
5 have to compete with Andy king. [laughs] So I  
6 commend you for coming down here and voicing your  
7 opinion. Thank you. [applause]

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
9 You are dismissed. Thank you, and I'm going bring up  
10 our next panel Zoey Trent from the Learning Tree  
11 Cultural Preparatory School; Laura Frances, the  
12 Learning Tree Cultural Prep School; Alberie Franklin  
13 from Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School;  
14 Marcus Carinas. I think from the Learning Tree  
15 Cultural Preparatory School; and Anya McCain also  
16 from the Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School.  
17 [background comments, pause] Okay, before we begin  
18 I-I need to swear you all in. I'm going to ask if  
19 you'd raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear  
20 or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
21 nothing but the truth and to answer council member  
22 questions honestly?

23 PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] Yes, I do.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: You do, okay. Where  
25 should we start, over here?

2 ANYA MCCAIN: Uh-huh. Hi, my name is Anya  
3 McCain. I'm an eight grader, and I attend the  
4 Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School. It's time  
5 to eliminate from schools the status and respect many  
6 students give to clothing labels and price tags.  
7 Student attention needs to return to learning in the  
8 classroom rather than having to look when they're in  
9 the classroom. Mandated uniforms can serve to shift  
10 the emphasis from competition back to academic  
11 performance and personal achievement. Uniforms also  
12 raise student's expectations of themselves. When  
13 dressed neatly and professional students tend to be  
14 more focused and willing to learn. Although people  
15 may think while wearing uniforms you can't show your  
16 creativity or individuality, there are other ways you  
17 can show it. There's socially, personally and  
18 academically. For example, I know many schools that  
19 wear uniforms. They are dressed down. Since it's  
20 rare-rare that they do that, it's more fun and  
21 abiding experience for students and it's more  
22 interactive and they're bonding in a different social  
23 way. Sorry. [coughs] In fact, in our society, it  
24 has been proven that people who wear uniforms such as  
25 military personnel, police officers, firemen, and

2 more show a great level of discipline, which can  
3 transcend to the school environment once uniforms are  
4 fully implemented.

5           ZOEY TRENT: My name is Zoey Trent. I'm  
6 in seventh grade, and I attend the Learning Tree  
7 Cultural Preparatory School. Uniforms make students  
8 look distinguishes, scholarly, unified and  
9 sophisticated. Students with uniforms are known to  
10 have better learning environments because nobody is  
11 worried about clothing, but focused on their  
12 learning. When students without uniforms walk into  
13 their classrooms, they often talk about hair color,  
14 hair styles, the message on someone's shirt, blue  
15 jeans or even shows. Whereas, in students with  
16 uniforms walk in, they focus on the lessons.  
17 Uniforms eliminate distractions in the classroom.  
18 They eliminate materialist conversations, and help us  
19 focus on our learning.

20           MARCUS CARINAS: Hi, my name is Marcus  
21 Carinas. I am an eighth graded and I attend the  
22 Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory School. Having  
23 school uniforms help with family money issues because  
24 don't have to pay large amounts of money for named  
25 brand clothing several times over the year. They can

2 just buy a few sets of the school uniform that will  
3 fit for the entire year. Also, with uniforms  
4 families don't have to go to several looking for  
5 fancy looking clothing. Instead, most or all of the  
6 uniform pieces are available to be bought at a single  
7 store. In addition, uniform schools—uniform  
8 companies, primary schools (sic) and give back a  
9 percent of the money to the school.

10           BARRY FRANKLIN: Hello, my name is Barry  
11 Franklin and I attend the Learning Tree Cultural  
12 Preparatory School. I am a seventh grader, and I  
13 believe that wearing uniforms make all students as  
14 though they are part of the unified group, which mean  
15 that all students are more alike and that you can't  
16 be singled out because of what you're wearing because  
17 technically you're wearing the same thing as well.  
18 And then say if you were to go out on the street or  
19 on the bus to go home by yourself, you would show  
20 yourself disciplined with what you're wearing by your  
21 attitude representing where you come from and what  
22 you learn at school. Thank you.

23           LAURA FRANCIS: Good afternoon. My name  
24 is Laura Francis. I am a middle school science  
25 teacher at the Learning Tree Cultural Preparatory

2 School. I have had the experience of teaching for  
3 over 15 years. So I've taught in a school without  
4 uniforms, and I've also taught in a school currently  
5 with school uniforms. It's an extremely different  
6 tone in a school with uniforms, and I think we're all  
7 in agreement that the focus is on maximizing teaching  
8 and learning opportunities, and school uniforms are  
9 going to do that. My scholars, who you can see are  
10 so handsomely and beautifully dressed today, they  
11 just carry themselves with a difference sense of  
12 pride and confidence when they're dressed in their  
13 uniform. They enter the classroom ready to learn our  
14 lessons. Our environment is more engaging. When we  
15 have group activities—I'm a science teacher so during  
16 lab time cooperative learning, it's an even playing  
17 field. So there isn't any distinguished—there's no  
18 distinguishing between who's who. Everyone is there  
19 to enter the activity, to share in the task or focus  
20 on the task, and I just find the discussions are  
21 going to be more about academics and more  
22 intellectually stimulating. School uniforms are  
23 minimized exclusions. They encourage and promote  
24 more inclusion. They also promote leadership as well  
25 as just personal accountability. Our students are

2 not only carrying their family name, they're also  
3 carrying their school name, and I just think that  
4 that raises the bar altogether. So we have our  
5 ambassadors and represent--representatives here for  
6 Learning Tree today, and I think they are a perfect  
7 example of what school uniforms promote and  
8 encourage. So thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
10 Now, let me ask have any of these students been to  
11 the City Council before or is this your first time?  
12 First time?

13 BARRY FRANKLIN: Yeah.

14 MARCUS CARINAS: Yes, this is our first  
15 time.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, that's  
17 fantastic. I'm really happy to--to know that, and  
18 that you've come down and experienced democracy in  
19 action because I want to--I think that that's a very  
20 important thing for students to see and to learn  
21 about. So thank you for coming. I really appreciate  
22 it. Thank you for giving your testimony, and a  
23 special thank to the teacher as well. Yes, Council  
24 Member King.



2 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: I don't have per  
3 se, but se a question, but I—I guess I will as  
4 question. I've heard your—your testimony in regards  
5 to the behavior amongst the same environment, the  
6 school environment. This is to you. Have you found  
7 from the schools that you are teaching in without  
8 uniforms as opposed to where you are now, what is the  
9 tone throughout the school building, the comparison?

10 LAURA FRANCIS: [pause] Schools without  
11 a uniform the buildings are noisier. They tend to be  
12 noisier, and I'm sure we can do formal studies of  
13 that. I think that schools with uniforms there is  
14 just a more settled tone in the morning, and I think  
15 what comes with that is the whole school culture, a  
16 whole school ritual of how we enter the building, how  
17 we start out day. We have a lot more rituals that go  
18 along. I know some of the other schools have rituals  
19 in their morning that goes along with their school  
20 uniform whether it be a pledge. Students can settle  
21 into their lesson a lot quicker and easier.  
22 Transitioning from class to class happens a lot more  
23 smoothly. So you're just maximizing time within your  
24 buildings because you can minimize and eliminate a  
25 lot of other issues that will come from just not

2 wearing your inform. We're unified. We're all in  
3 the same place. We're ready to start out day, and we  
4 can get started with our lessons.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: I thank you and I  
6 want to thank you all for your testimony, and I did  
7 get a correspondence on the lack of creativity that's  
8 being suppressed if you were to wear a uniform. I  
9 don't subscribe to that because I don't think any—as  
10 a matter of fact, do any of you think you're not  
11 creative?

12 STUDENTS: No.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Do you think you  
14 get an opportunity to express your creativity wearing  
15 a uniform?

16 STUDENTS: [in unison] Yes, sir.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Okay, so that  
18 dispels that comment, but I just wanted to put it on  
19 the record because there has been some concern about  
20 the lack of creativity if students have to wear  
21 uniforms to school, and I think you guys are  
22 testimony that that—that is a false statement, but  
23 thank. Thank you for your testimony here.

24 LAURA FRANCIS: Yeah, okay.

2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, but before we  
3 let you go, I do have two other council members that  
4 have questions, Council Member Treyger followed by  
5 Council Member Chin.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you, Chair  
7 Dromm, and I—I just want to say I think a number of  
8 these panelists will be sitting on this panel in the  
9 future. Really, really impressive, and we really  
10 commend you for-- You know, public speaking is not  
11 easy, and you're all doing a phenomenal job.

12 LAURA FRANCIS: Thank you.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And so really  
14 kudos to—to the students, the educators, families,  
15 great job. Just a—a couple of quick questions, and  
16 it will be that—and I was a former public school  
17 teacher and I appreciate your—your service. Is there  
18 a—a cost and, if there is associated with the  
19 uniforms and—and, if so, what—how much do they cost.  
20 And the second question I had was if there is a  
21 student for whatever reason chooses not to  
22 participate I the uniform policy let's say for  
23 cultural reasons, religious reasons, what happens in  
24 those cases? I'd be just curious to hear—to hear  
25 that personally.

2 FEMALE SPEAKER: [off mic] You might want  
3 to comment on that.

4 LAURA FRANCIS: I mean I think each  
5 school has a relationship with a uniform company, and  
6 I think that more and more companies are becoming  
7 more socially conscious and socially responsible  
8 where they want to partner with schools. So there  
9 are now programs where there are rewards. The  
10 companies will give back a percentage back to the  
11 school. So it helps the school raise money. So I  
12 think that that's very important to acknowledge. I  
13 don't think that a lot of the other retail stores  
14 are giving back to their customer base. The range of  
15 school uniform I mean it can be pieced together.  
16 There can also be—I mean khaki pants can be bought in  
17 several different places. So I think that the cost  
18 ranges and it varies.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Okay.

20 LAURA FRANCIS: In terms of individual  
21 situations, I think each school is very open to  
22 accommodating any student that may have specific  
23 needs regarding their uniform. In our school we are  
24 accepting of all. So we make those accommodations.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you very  
3 much.

4 LAURA FRANCIS: Uh-huh.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Council Member Chin.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you, Chair.

7 I'm also supportive of the resolution about school  
8 uniform. When I was growing up, I—I had to wear  
9 uniforms but it was in Hong Kong. [laughs] It wasn't  
10 here, and being a teacher, I do recognize that kids,  
11 you know, they choose to avoid different clothes, but  
12 having a uniform does make a difference I terms of  
13 unity and school identify. The school that I  
14 graduated from in Chinatown actually had uniforms,  
15 and it's just a polo shirt with the school name on  
16 it. So the question I want to ask the students, and  
17 I'm very impressed with all the students who came  
18 today to testify that you guys really got to the  
19 point. Now, do you have friends that don't have to  
20 wear uniforms to school, and have you had any  
21 discussion with them about school uniforms with some  
22 of your friends? Anyone want to answer that?

23 DONNA COFFEE: Yes, I have a lot friends  
24 that don't have to wear school uniforms, and they  
25 want to switch schools because their grades are not

2 what they—where they want them to because they have a  
3 lot of distractions. So they don't really get to  
4 learn a lot, and so they want to switch schools  
5 because their grades really aren't up to par.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay, and also how  
7 much time do you spend in the morning or getting  
8 ready for school? Is there a difference in terms of  
9 trying to pick an outfit or just know that you got to  
10 wear a uniform? [[background comments, pause] How  
11 about some of the young men, huh?

12 MARCUS CARINAS: It's very smooth, and  
13 simple. It only takes a couple of minutes—minutes  
14 because you know what you need to put on, and you  
15 know everything that is necessary instead of having  
16 to search in your closet for something that fits and  
17 looks nice and goes with your style.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Good. Well, thank  
19 you. I'm sure you could also wear whatever you want  
20 on the weekend, right, when school is not in session.  
21 Thank you so much for being here today.

22 DONNA COFFEE: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you to this  
24 panel, [applause] and I'm gong to call up the next  
25 panel. Maria Penny from Casa Middle School; Sidney

2 Brooks from Path Middle School; Leanne Ruffi(sp?) from  
3 Casa Middle School; Colleen Samoto, Academies of  
4 Scholarships and Entrepreneurship; Camilla Rogue,  
5 Academies of Scholarships and Entrepreneurship.  
6 [background comments, pause] Okay, I'm going to ask  
7 you to raise your right hand, please. [background  
8 comments] Do you solemnly swear or affirm to tell the  
9 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth and  
10 to answer council member questions honestly?

11 PANEL MEMBERS: I do.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yeah, I do. Okay,  
13 would you like to start?

14 PANEL MEMBER: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, and just push  
16 that mic. There's a little red light on. Yeah, and  
17 pull it closer to you.

18 SIDNEY BROOKS: Okay. I many Sidney  
19 Brooks, and a student at Cornerstone Academy for  
20 Social Action also known as PATH Middle School. I'm  
21 a student, and wearing school uniforms are effective  
22 because no one cares, and parents cannot afford to  
23 buy the clothes for—and shoes each time the school  
24 year starts. Hence, uniform saves parents regarded  
25 as money each year because parents saves money

2 because they are—they aren't spending money on new  
3 expensive trendy such Rucker and Nike shoes as in  
4 Jordan if you do—and such a—which range between \$80  
5 to \$200, and they don't have to spend that, you know,  
6 each time the school year starts because the uniform  
7 you're already wearing every day what someone else is  
8 wearing, and it's not as expensive as wearing kind of  
9 our new trends for each student every time the school  
10 year starts. And when wearing a uniform it keeps you  
11 from wearing, having less distraction because you are  
12 not worrying about someone judging you or if you  
13 outfit is going to stay clean because you have to  
14 wear uniforms. You know, it's just wearing the same  
15 thing as everyone does so you can't really judge them  
16 because you're wearing the same thing as everybody  
17 else is. Thank you for your time.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,  
19 please. Let's go. Let's have the lady in the  
20 middle. [background comments] Yep.

21 MARIA PENNY: Hello. I'm Maria. Good  
22 afternoon and thank you for having me. Today I will  
23 be discussing why uniforms are effective. So the  
24 first reason I have is that it eliminates worry. So  
25 not all parents can afford to make the monthly trip



2 to Anna Pastel or Nikes, and when they can't afford  
3 it, the student suffers socially. Many students  
4 worry about we're getting bullied, and there's many  
5 percentages and cases where students are getting  
6 brutal. Uniform it just does—it ensures that no  
7 bullying is going because everybody is wearing the  
8 same thing. So, I mean you can't really worry about  
9 oh, that somebody may be wearing different types of  
10 clothes, and you don't really wearing it so you might  
11 bullied, but since everybody is wearing the same  
12 thing so you feel-- And another reason why uniforms  
13 are effective is because it ensures safety—safety.  
14 For example, if an intruder was to walk into the  
15 school, they would immediately be able to spot a  
16 target because that—that specific student would be  
17 the only one not wearing a uniform, and thank you for  
18 your time.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, next,  
20 please.

21 LEANNE RUFİ: Hello, good afternoon, my  
22 name is Leanne Rufi (sp?) and I am from Casa Middle  
23 School. I'm an eighth grader, and I would like to  
24 explain why school [coughs] uniforms should be  
25 implemented in schools. When students are focused on

2 being socially accepted coping wise, they can set  
3 their attention to gravitate more toward-toward their  
4 education. Uniforms won't only improve grades on  
5 their own, but they will help in addressing these  
6 issues. When youth and policies are planed to effect  
7 in school, students have less pressure upon them to  
8 dress accordingly to the latest trends, and when  
9 these distractions are removed, education can become  
10 a priority. And another look-another reason I'd like  
11 to bring up is the fact-is how uniforms make our  
12 school look. When visitors enter our school and see  
13 everyone donning same logo, they get a sense of  
14 unity-unity within the school. It keeps the school  
15 looking in sync and orderly as well as when leaving  
16 the building, everyone can be identified by the crest  
17 on their shirts is sporting. We represent our school  
18 and what we stand for. Thank you for your time.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you.

20 Next please.

21 COLLEEN SAMOTO: Good afternoon. My name  
22 is Colleen Samoto. On the behalf-on the behalf of  
23 our Academy for Scholarship and Entrepreneurship,  
24 today I'm here to discuss the importance of uniform  
25 and why it should be implemented in all NYC public

2 schools. The question we'll be answering today is  
3 why should uniforms should be implemented. Bullying  
4 is a good—is a really big issue in high school.  
5 School uniforms should be implemented due to students  
6 being subject or ridiculed in mockery for not having  
7 the expensive or nice clothing. It has been shown  
8 that students who don't wear uniforms to school are—  
9 are more dissected and meek for—for a learning  
10 environment. Studies have shown that school uniforms  
11 have prevented and lowered bullying, encouraged  
12 discipline, improved dependence, help students resist  
13 their pressures. These are some positions impacts  
14 that have been afforded.

15 CAMILLA KAY: Hi, good afternoon. My  
16 name is Camilla Kay (sic) and I'm also here on the  
17 behalf of the Academy for Scholarship and  
18 Entrepreneurship. I'd like to pledge also on the  
19 subject of bullying. When kids are bullied for not  
20 having the right clothing because they're—it's not  
21 expensive, it's not Jordans or whatever it is, they  
22 tend to want to stay home. So they—they dismiss  
23 their education due to these social barriers with the  
24 clothing. Also, kids who aren't bullied, but just  
25 feel that they don't have the right clothing to go to

2 school, will tell their parents I don't want to go to  
3 school because I don't have anything nice to wear, or  
4 I don't know what to wear, and they also dismiss  
5 their education. Both my-my classmate and I have  
6 been attending school since kindergarten that follow  
7 a uniform policy, and we witnessed low counting due  
8 to apparel. So I'd also like to just say-touch back  
9 on a personal-personal experience when I used to go  
10 to middle school, and the elementary school prior.  
11 There was a uniform policy. However, it wasn't  
12 strict. So most kids got to wear it, and the kids  
13 that didn't wear it, got bullied for wearing certain  
14 clothing. I'd also like to say that our school when  
15 a kid shows up to school without their uniform, there  
16 is someone who provides a shirt or shoes or a sweater  
17 or a tie, whatever it is they need. And I'd also  
18 like to say that implementing a uniform policy for  
19 every New York City public school will create a sense  
20 of unity within the students, and lessen the amount  
21 of bullying based off on how students dress.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank-thank you very  
23 much, [applause] and I'm sorry to hear of your  
24 experience, but--

25 CAMILLA KAY: Well, the-my-the, yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: That person that you  
3 said you have counseled, right. (sic) Anyway, you  
4 presented very, very well, and I thank you for coming  
5 in. Thank you very, very much. Okay. I'm going to  
6 call the next panel. Thank you. The next one will  
7 be Zaria White-Davis from Faith Christian Academy;  
8 DeAngelo Ennis from Faith Christian Academy; Dehuta  
9 Rajas from Faith Christian Academy; and Keshan Kypal  
10 from Faith Christian Academy. [background comments]  
11 Okay, alright. Okay, if you would wear your right  
12 hand, I have to swear you in. Do you solemnly swear  
13 or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
14 nothing but the truth and to answer council member  
15 questions honestly?

16 PANEL MEMBER: I do, sir.

17 PANEL MEMBER: Yes, sir.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Would this  
19 lady like to start over here?

20 ZARIA WHITE: Okay. Good afternoon--

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] And you  
22 can pull the mic a little down to you, yes. And then  
23 pull it over the base, pull the bottom. Both.  
24 That's it.

2                   KESHAN KYPAL: Good afternoon, ladies and  
3 gentlemen, boys and girls and the staff members of  
4 this great house. We are gathered here today to tell  
5 the importance of uniforms. Have you ever wondered  
6 why a uniform is important? Well, it is simply  
7 because uniforms—wearing uniforms to school causes  
8 less stress on the parent's pockets because nowadays  
9 kids like to be in the latest fashion like nice  
10 Jordans with jeans, crop tops, you name it. Wearing  
11 uniforms to school prevents this from—eliminates that  
12 problem from happening. It puts less stress on the  
13 parents from going all out and buying these clothes  
14 for their children to wear to school. Two, it  
15 provides a sense of order and unity [pause]—it  
16 provides a sense of order and unity, too. When  
17 children are dressed the same and can be easily  
18 identified by both teachers and principals,  
19 therefore, it can be concluded that wearing uniforms  
20 to school both puts less stress on the parents and  
21 the provides a strength—a sense of order and unity.  
22 Thank you.

23                   CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next  
24 please.

2 DEHUTA RAJAS: Good afternoon. My name  
3 is Dehuta (sp?) Rajas, and this is my opinion on why  
4 I think that school uniforms should be worn by every  
5 student. A uniform is a distinctive outtake to show  
6 unity between students. It forms a community and  
7 makes them feel like they're in a second family.  
8 Usually today, kids want to wear their up-to-date  
9 clothes entering—entering the clothes, but if they  
10 wear a uniform, they feel like a community and  
11 wouldn't need to worry about that, and would not need  
12 to worry about the groups they are in or the  
13 popularity they have—have by the clothes they wear.  
14 Vandalism, fighting, gangs and break-ins were  
15 significantly decreased by some school districts  
16 because laws were passed that--that made it mandatory  
17 for students to wear uniforms. Now, by looking at  
18 these results, and what uniforms to help them  
19 achieve, I think that uniforms should be worn by  
20 every student. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,  
22 please.

23 DEANGELO ENNIS: Good afternoon,  
24 everyone. My name DeAngelo Ennis, and I currently  
25 attend Faith Christian Academy. Today, I will be

2 giving my input on the importance of uniforms. Yes,  
3 I like the newest fashion, the newest style, and  
4 everything that's trending, but I strongly believe  
5 students should not use school as a fashion show to  
6 express ourselves. School is a center for learning,  
7 and obtaining knowledge, and we should not take it  
8 for granted and use it as a fashion show. We look  
9 forward to our standardized programs for regular  
10 school assignments. Uniforms can take their toll on  
11 when students' lives are changing for the better. It  
12 provides a sense of concentration. Students do not  
13 have to focus on what they are wearing on their  
14 apparel in class and focus on what the others are  
15 thinking about them and their apparel. They will  
16 rather spend time on the task in hand and focus more  
17 on school. Uniforms also improve attendance and  
18 punctuality. In the morning, students will not have  
19 to be constantly wasting time to find and match their  
20 newest pair of clothes they have just to ensure their  
21 friends and build their self-esteem. If we do this  
22 and implement uniforms, we will—we will dodge a huge  
23 bullet and save less time and save more time for the  
24 students causing the attendance for the schools to  
25 improve by a very far point. Recent students in Long



2 Beach, California have shown that when uniforms are  
3 implemented, vandalism, robbery and sexual offenses  
4 are decreased by uniforms. In conclusion, uniforms  
5 can take a huge toll for the better path of a  
6 student, and increase—and increase further  
7 educational around that. (sic) Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you also.

9 Next, please.

10 ZARIA WHITE-DAVIS: Good afternoon,  
11 ladies and gentlemen, students and the members of the  
12 Supreme Court. My name is Zaria White-Davis, and I  
13 represent Faith Christian Academy. I think that  
14 school uniforms should be placed in every school.  
15 Why, you ask? Because school uniforms make the  
16 student and the school look more professional and  
17 unified. The first ever school to wear uniforms was  
18 in England, but the first ever public school to wear  
19 uniforms was Cherry Hill Elementary. The school  
20 uniforms in England were a large dark blue trench  
21 coat with the name of the school engraved onto it, a  
22 gray pants or a white or blue shirt. It is proven  
23 that the bullying rate and suicide rates have been  
24 decreased by wearing uniforms. For example, say a  
25 student has not been able to afford the latest trends

2 that are in right now, and somebody else who is able  
3 to, bullies them. It gets so bad to a point that  
4 that—the child that's not able to afford the  
5 uniforms, gets bullied and feels like they want to  
6 kill themselves. It is also proven that wearing  
7 uniforms keeps the students focused in class, and  
8 provides an open environment for learning. For  
9 example, this—a child want to fit in with their  
10 classmates, and this specific clique that that goes  
11 around and has more fate on the whole school. They  
12 don't have to worry about that because they are  
13 unified and in one uniform. I would also like to  
14 state that uniforms stop the gang members and stops  
15 the insignias that go around in schools. Thank you.  
16 [bell]

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, thank you very  
18 much, and you have presented very forceful arguments.  
19 I appreciate the fact that you came down, that you  
20 stayed so long, and I wish you luck. There are no  
21 questions, but we're going to move now with our next  
22 up panel. Thank you for coming in today, and by the  
23 way, for all of the educators that were here—I'm  
24 sorry. Council Member King you had a question.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Not a question.

3 This is our last panel-panel on this.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: On school uniforms.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: But I want to  
6 thank all the students who came and all the educators  
7 who have sent comments, communications to express  
8 their support to help us figure out how we come to  
9 resolving the issue when it come to power in the  
10 school system. And for all naysayers out there, I  
11 say to you, understand what our children are going  
12 through. Because you're an advocate, because you  
13 feel freedom of speech and expression, you should be  
14 always at the forefront of the conversation.  
15 Remember, our 9-year-olds, our 10-year-olds, our 15-  
16 year-olds are in need of guidance at that age. Not  
17 given the-the adult thinking while they're trying to  
18 figure out how they manage life to become adults,  
19 because like adults. So I want to thank all of you  
20 for your testimony today, and for those who don't  
21 worry about the cost of it, because the cost of it  
22 will remind everyone parents every September or  
23 August go school shopping for their children. As  
24 opposed to trying to spend \$200 for a pair of  
25 Jordans, you could find yourself four pair of khakis

2 and three shirts, and no one would know the  
3 difference of what your child is wearing everyday.  
4 So it has so many benefits for the parent and the  
5 child as we heard today, and I thank you for  
6 educating us all of your everyday and the benefits of  
7 you all wearing uniforms. What great messages other  
8 than the student and the child itself. Thank you,  
9 Mr. Chair and thanks for today's hearing.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, Council  
11 Member King and just for the educators a video of  
12 this will be available on the Council website within  
13 a few days as well. So, you'll be able to—to get a  
14 hold of that if you want to play it again for use in  
15 the schools. Thank you for coming in. Thank you,  
16 kids.

17 PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Our next panel Manuel  
19 Casanova, John Carlino from New York Association of  
20 Foreign Language Teachers. Lucas Liu from CEC 3  
21 Multilingual Committee; Fatu Matada Wagan (sp?) or  
22 Wagon. I'm sorry. Wagen. Okay, thank you. African  
23 Communities together, and Fabrice Junot. I hope I  
24 said it right. Yeah, okay. [background comments,  
25 pause] Okay, I will swear all of you. If you would

2 please raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear  
3 or affirm to tell the truth the whole truth and  
4 nothing but the truth and to answer council member  
5 questions honestly? Okay, should we start over here?

6           MANUEL CASANOVA: Yep. Thank you. Good  
7 afternoon. Thank you very much for the opportunity  
8 to speak in front of you today. Dual language  
9 programs give our students the ability to learn and  
10 communicate with us in more than one language. In  
11 addition to that, they give students the ability from  
12 early on they can expand their vocabulary twofold for  
13 each concept and its variation. But to me there is  
14 an added plus element that is often talked about.  
15 When you learn in the standard two languages and the  
16 cultures around those two languages we help those  
17 student develop a stronger emotional intelligence.  
18 It is very rare or non-existent that leaders do not  
19 have high levels of emotional intelligence. Some may  
20 decide to use it their own way, as we have seen  
21 lately sadly. But for the majority of those  
22 individuals that grow up learning in a dual language  
23 environment, the gains are many. At home, when they  
24 decide between gifted—sorry. When parents are  
25 deciding between gifted and talented programs in dual

2 language at home, we decided to do a dual language,  
3 because realize there was no comparison. In my  
4 personal view, dual language programs are a kind of  
5 gifted and talented program that—that they can reach  
6 all groups of students to attempt more inclusionary  
7 programs. As some of you mentioned earlier, it's  
8 also a program that requires people that are prepared  
9 to give those programs in those two languages or  
10 three in some cases. So I commend on this resolution  
11 in order to help Albany to pass this law in order to  
12 expand the dual programs throughout the city to make  
13 our students not only more fluent in different  
14 languages, but also capable of learning and having  
15 higher degrees of emotional challenges that will make  
16 our society a better place. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
18 Next, please. Oh, and I'm sorry, would you state  
19 your name for the record because I don't believe that  
20 you did.

21 MANUEL CASANOVA: Manuel Casanova from  
22 CEC3. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes, okay, thank you  
24 and the same thing for everybody on the panel. If  
25 you would state your name when you start. Thank you.

2 LUCAS LIU: Hi, thank you. It's Lucas  
3 Liu from CEC3, and I want to thank the committee for  
4 the opportunity to speak. I speak to you today as  
5 the Chair of the CEC3 Multi-Lingual Committee. I  
6 assume everybody up there knows what the CEC is, and  
7 I'm here to support Resolution 890 and the call for  
8 the New York State Legislature and the Governor to  
9 pass and sign A.329/554 to support high needs  
10 districts to start foreign language construction, but  
11 I think what this is missing here is that we also  
12 have high need schools that aren't in high need  
13 district that already have dual language programs  
14 that need funding for their continued success. We  
15 are just starting a Russian dual language program at  
16 PS 145 on West 105<sup>th</sup> Street that will start in the  
17 2017-18 school year. That program is now looking for  
18 funding to help support its start. We have numerous  
19 schools in Harlem, which is a high needs area that  
20 could strengthen the dual language programs they have  
21 in their neighborhoods. We have in dual language  
22 programs many of—much of the funding only comes from  
23 the English language learner students who are in that  
24 class. Other students who are English language  
25 speakers do not bring extra funding with them to

2 support that class beyond the funding that they are  
3 guaranteed under the Fair Student Funding Act. So,  
4 those English speaking students all their materials,  
5 the library books that they require in the target  
6 language, the teaching materials, the class materials  
7 in the target language all need to be funded out of  
8 the school's general budget. I think we have a great  
9 opportunity here to mix native speakers with English  
10 language speakers. It's a win-win situation for all,  
11 and it's also a much more economical way just to  
12 teach these kids a second language. I've been part  
13 of CEC3 for just over a year and a half, and now that  
14 I'm figuring out how everything works, and who  
15 everyone on the Education Committee here is, you'll  
16 be hearing from me and my committee in the very short  
17 future for your help and support on securing funding  
18 for dual language programs in our-our-not just  
19 District 3, but throughout the city. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
21 Next, please.

22 JOHN CARLINO: Good afternoon, Mr.  
23 Chairman and committee members. Thank you especially  
24 to Council Member Levine for your sponsorship of this  
25 initiative and for the invitation. My name is John



2 Carlino, and I'm currently the Executive Director of  
3 the New York State Association of Foreign Language  
4 Teachers as well as the Executive Director of the  
5 Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign  
6 Languages. I also sit on the Board of Directors of  
7 the Joint National Committee of Languages in  
8 Washington. I recently left the classroom like you  
9 after 27 years of teaching German and French in  
10 grades 7 through 12. The learning and teaching of  
11 languages has been my passion since I was young, and  
12 my life has been enriched in so many ways for having  
13 been fluent in more than one language. Not only  
14 knowing French and German, but also having a deep  
15 understanding of the cultures and people behind and  
16 intertwined with those languages has opened up worlds  
17 of opportunity to me both personal and professional.  
18 In my packet of testimony I have included an excerpt  
19 from a publication entitled *The Complete Curriculum*  
20 published by the National Association of State Boards  
21 of Education in October 2003. In this report, we  
22 read the following under the heading *The Benefits of*  
23 *Arts and Foreign Languages in the Classroom*. The  
24 advantages of the ability to use more than one  
25 language are many. At a minimum as human beings we

2 all need to communicate, and learning another  
3 language opens a student to communication and  
4 interaction with a vastly greater number of people.  
5 Foreign language education today does not focus just  
6 on rules of grammar and vocabulary, but embraces  
7 culture—culture, history and experiences within  
8 larger humanities context. With today's ever-  
9 increasing diversity in the classroom, workplace and  
10 community, it is crucial that native English speaker  
11 students have a greater understanding of the cultural  
12 respect of the—of the background of their fellow  
13 classmates, and perhaps more important to learn  
14 respect for diverse cultures. The report goes on to  
15 enumerate con—to enumerate concrete benefits to  
16 learning languages, which may include higher  
17 achievement levels in English language arts, higher  
18 scores on basic skills tests regardless of race,  
19 gender, academic level or socio-economic status.  
20 Developmental skills essential to the learning  
21 process creative inquiry and critical thinking and  
22 enhance problem solving skills, and general cognitive  
23 development. The proposed New York State legislation  
24 would be a strong step in the right direction. We  
25 are lucky to be in one of the few states with a world

2 language mandate. However, because languages are not  
3 mandated at the elementary level, support of teaching  
4 languages is limited primarily to those schools in  
5 districts that are wealthy enough to be able to  
6 afford it. Learning languages and the benefits that  
7 students can reap from being multilingual must be an  
8 opportunity afforded to all of our students  
9 regardless of socioeconomic background. As we watch  
10 the news and listen to political discussions around  
11 us, it's impossible to not notice that the voices of  
12 those who are opposed to openness of other cultures  
13 and to a more global mindset that is the natural side  
14 effect of learning of languages other than learning  
15 another language and another culture. In a speech  
16 this weekend, Governor Cuomo said, we know our  
17 diversity is a strength not a weakness, and New York  
18 State is the progressive capital of the nation and  
19 its social conscience. I would add that New York  
20 City is the heart—at the heart of New York State's  
21 strength and its diversity. I would like to end with  
22 a simple quote from the German philosopher Ludwig  
23 Wittgenstein. [speaking German] The limits of my  
24 language are the limits of my world. It's our duty  
25 to expand the limits of our world for our students

2 today, for our children today, and for the coming  
3 generations, and I thank you for your support of more  
4 language instruction, and our students' right to a  
5 world without limits to their opportunity.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
7 Next, please.

8 FATU MATADA WAGAN: Good afternoon, Mr.  
9 Chairman and honorable council members. My name is  
10 Fatu Matada Wagan (sp?), and I am a civic organizer  
11 with African Communities Together, an organization of  
12 immigrants from Africa and their families fighting  
13 for civil rights opportunity and a better life. ACT  
14 empowers African immigrants to integrate socially,  
15 get-get ahead economically and engage civically. As  
16 language is a key mechanism for immigrants to build  
17 community, and integrated into American society, ACT  
18 has worked on a range of language justice issues  
19 including the mobilization to expand the city's  
20 language access policy to recognize French, Arabic  
21 and African languages. In our role as the voice of  
22 the African immigrant community and NYC, ACT fully  
23 supports Reso 890, the plan to expand the city's dual  
24 language program especially as our city's 130,000  
25 African born population continues to rise. We at ACT

2 believe that culture immersion and exchange in the  
3 classroom is a key—is key for our city to maintain  
4 its role as a melting pot. Expanding dual language  
5 programs in public school is a key social structure  
6 that every immigrant and their family interacts with,  
7 is foundational to educational success in a  
8 competitive global economy. Our city's non-native  
9 born children will be provided the resources and  
10 tools to achieve full language competency while  
11 native born children will also be provided the  
12 opportunity to immerse themselves in the language—in  
13 the culture of their classmates. We should not  
14 forget that given our contentious political climate,  
15 our city's immigrants and social allies now more than  
16 ever especially our elementary age children in the  
17 classroom. Expanding the dual language program will  
18 be key in building this allyship. Being multi-lingual  
19 is a privilege. As the daughter of West African  
20 immigrants, navigating American society as a  
21 bilingual has afforded me the opportunity to use my  
22 foreign language skills to help vulnerable groups in  
23 my community, and has also provides me a fresh  
24 perspective and curiosity to learn and discover world  
25 cultures and languages. I hope that every New York

2 City public school student can also be provided with  
3 opportunity and privilege. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,  
5 please.

6 FABRICE JUNOT: Good afternoon. My name  
7 is Fabrice Junot. I moved to New York City before  
8 9/11 to become an Education Attache' for the French  
9 Embassy, and I'm also a Program Officer at the  
10 French-American Cultural Exchange Foundation. My  
11 work includes collaboration with numerous school  
12 leaders, teachers, parent groups and community  
13 organizations. Together, we formed an initiative  
14 that led to the creation of New York City's first two  
15 language programs in French, Japanese, Italian,  
16 Russian and German. Our story caught the attention  
17 of numerous media outlets including the New York  
18 Times. We published an article on the rise of dual  
19 language programs in New York in 2014 highlighting of  
20 quality of impacts these programs could have on  
21 public schools and their communities. After  
22 publication an interesting debate ensued regarding  
23 the relevance of learning languages today in the  
24 United States and the validity of early language  
25 acquisition. These debates and the questions that it

2 raised among parents within several linguistic  
3 communities pushed me to speak today. As the father  
4 of two bilingual and bicultural girls who attend the  
5 French Dual Language Program in a public school in  
6 Brooklyn, I am also deeply attached to the concept of  
7 dual language education as a way to both sustain a  
8 cultural heritage or require a second language.  
9 Through my research as well as my professional and  
10 personal experiences, I have found that children who  
11 have had bilingual upbringing enjoyed numerous  
12 benefits beyond the acquisition of another language  
13 including a better appreciation for other cultures,  
14 other individuals and even oneself. Additionally, I  
15 have come to believe that the cognitive emotional and  
16 social advantages of being multilingual and  
17 multicultural should simply not be limited to private  
18 schools and those who can afford to attend them. In  
19 my opinion, multilingual education is a great public  
20 good that ought to be developed everywhere as it can  
21 so vividly transform a child, a school, a community  
22 and a better country. It is with this belief and with  
23 the conviction that early language acquisition can  
24 make a difference, and I speak today in favor of  
25 Resolution 819. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So thank you very  
3 much, and some of your testimony reminds me of my own  
4 experiences because I didn't have the opportunity to  
5 learn a foreign language in elementary school, but I  
6 did have the opportunity in high school, and in  
7 addition to that, I was able to travel to Spain for a  
8 summer, and spend time there. And, whereas, I didn't  
9 think that—I had originally wanted to be a Spanish  
10 teacher, but the I thought the kids down here in New  
11 York City could probably speak Spanish better than I  
12 could, and I better switch majors quick. So I went  
13 to communications arts, but I didn't think that my  
14 ability to speak Spanish would be all that useful to  
15 me, but I worked in—in Harlem in a daycare center on  
16 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue. It became very  
17 clear to me right away that knowing Spanish was  
18 something very beneficial, and then I spent 25 years  
19 a monolingual general education classroom teacher,  
20 but because many of the students in my class were  
21 Latino and spoke Spanish, I was able to hold all my  
22 parent-teacher conferences in Spanish. And that  
23 practice led to me then when I ran for City Council  
24 being able to knock on doors to talk to people about  
25 my candidacy, and my opponent didn't have the ability



2 to be able to speak Spanish. And so I always said  
3 that my ability to speak Spanish was my secret weapon  
4 in my campaign for--for election. So I think often  
5 times we don't even know how the benefits of knowing  
6 or speaking or reading and writing a second language  
7 will affect our lives until other points of our  
8 lives, and I--I just couldn't agree more with you.  
9 And I was fortunate to be able--although I don't speak  
10 Spanish as well as Council Mark Levin [laughs] but I  
11 just think that the advantages of it are great, and I  
12 think when children are--are younger also they can  
13 absorb it even more. And I thin that's why it's  
14 important to--to really teach at a young age, and so  
15 Council Member Levine, did you have any questions?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: You know, I  
17 hadn't actually heard the entire story of your  
18 language history, and it's very inspiring, and I--I  
19 can also personally attest that how learning other  
20 languages has changed my life. I wouldn't be an  
21 elected official if it weren't for that, and it  
22 opened my mind to a whole new world of cultures  
23 around me, and it's just a gift I want every child to  
24 have. You all spoke so powerfully each of you in  
25 different ways about why this matters to you

2 personally, why you understand this matters to our  
3 city. I'm sorry more folks aren't here to witness it  
4 in person, but I'm gratified knowing that that is  
5 going to be memorialized in the testimony of this  
6 committee. The video is being watched currently, and  
7 will be available online. I think it's very, very  
8 important that people who have experienced  
9 bilingualism testify to the broader city about why  
10 this is worth investing in. And I—I did want to ask  
11 a question or two to each of you or to a couple of  
12 you. Mr. Carlino, we—we—we're focusing today on the  
13 problem of the teacher shortage, and when I—when I  
14 ask professionals doing this work what's the biggest  
15 barrier to building this out to reach every child in  
16 the city, usually they say we just don't know how—we  
17 don't have enough qualified teachers. Could you  
18 speak a little bit to the extent to which you see  
19 that as being a challenge? If so, what we can do  
20 about it, and how you think that the bills that we're  
21 supporting in Albany today might help with that,  
22 please.

23                   JOHN CARLINO: I know that is a huge  
24 challenge just having left the classroom and been a  
25 department chairperson. Any time we have to

2 interview for language positons it-it was like  
3 pulling teeth to try to find qualified language  
4 teachers who were available to teach, and that was  
5 Upstate, but I hear the same the same stories from  
6 all over the state, and I-even from other states in  
7 the region. There was just a piece in the paper  
8 about Maine where they're moving towards Rosetta  
9 Stone because they can't find enough qualified  
10 language teachers, which to me is just tremendously  
11 sad. And a range of something that happens between  
12 two human beings. From what I understand about the  
13 proposed legislation in New York State about half of  
14 it would be reserved to provide ten-\$110,000 grants  
15 to undergraduate students who are going into language  
16 education. And I know that works that because I  
17 myself benefitted from a similar grant 30 some years  
18 ago where I had received a scholarship to go into  
19 foreign language education then in exchange for  
20 teaching in a high needs area. With that little  
21 caveat that you're doing that in exchange for  
22 teaching in a high needs area for a certain number of  
23 years, it helped solve the teacher shortage problem  
24 in the world that was there then. (sic)

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: I'm glad you  
3 brought up the issue of technology. I've often heard  
4 people say either while in the age of Rosetta Stone  
5 and similar products, isn't that enough? Why do you  
6 need to pay a teacher to provide this instruction, or  
7 even more radically I've heard people say in the age  
8 of automated translation, why does anyone need to  
9 learn another language. And you—you spoke about the  
10 human connection, and there is simply no substitute  
11 for the human connection in learning a language, and  
12 if you wish to connect to another human being across  
13 the barrier of language, as wonderful as holding up  
14 your phone, for translation purposes might be if you  
15 have to complete a transaction when you order  
16 something in a restaurant. That kind of richness  
17 that—that only we humans can assemble in our language  
18 is simply not recreated by machines today, and to me  
19 the argument is stronger than ever even in this age  
20 of technology for human instruction and for humans to  
21 become multi-lingual in this global age. So—so thank  
22 you for—for providing that.

23 JOHN CARLINO: Absolutely.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Did you want to  
25 jump in, Manuel? Yes, go ahead.

2                   MANUEL CASANOVA: Yes, I wanted to add  
3 two points and—and I'm glad that you're raising that.  
4 I worked in international business, and as somebody  
5 who can speak a couple languages, when you're doing  
6 business, you're developing a relationship.  
7 Relationship can be health, you know, and—and push  
8 forward with in—instruments, but when you're  
9 connecting with a buyer or a seller, whatever it is,  
10 the fact that you're able to connect with the other  
11 person in terms of what their needs are is—is very  
12 important. The other thing that I would add is that  
13 in the city we have a really strong group of people  
14 that have come from abroad, and I include myself and  
15 that work in different companies, and eventually they  
16 may look into teaching as an option. So if there is  
17 also a support in the legislation where if the state  
18 or the city who are professionals who are currently  
19 working from international corporations that decided  
20 hey I want to teach, and, I've seen it in people that  
21 work with me who said I'm going to teach and I'm  
22 going to be able to teach a dual language program.  
23 But they need sometimes a bridge in order to go from  
24 the professional world into getting, you know, the  
25 special type of degree, et cetera. So I—I really

2 encourage it not only for undergraduate or not, but  
3 if you can find a way, too, where you can talk to  
4 your partners up in Albany and say we have a really  
5 school of potential dual language teachers in the  
6 city. It's about to open in the borough to those  
7 professionals that also are going to bring some  
8 professional background and experience that can be-  
9 make it easier to teach the students about what they  
10 can look for in the future.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Well, I really  
12 appreciate the perspective. Mr. Liu, I wanted to ask  
13 a follow-up on a comment you made about the cost of  
14 implementing these programs. And I believe you made  
15 the point, correct me if I'm wrong, that there are  
16 some extras expenses and that if the DOE doesn't  
17 provide funding for that it's an impediment-  
18 impediment to grow. Could you elaborate on what-what  
19 the extra expenses are, and to what extent they're  
20 being supported by Tweed at this point?

21 LUCAS LIU: Sure. So in New York City a  
22 case-an elementary student general ed and no special  
23 needs, the school gets about \$4,100 for that student.  
24 If the student, English Language Learner student,  
25 that student will bring an addition. And the DOE

2 just changed this form itself. That student gets  
3 approx--depending on their proficiency, they're--when  
4 they are tested anywhere from an addition 15 to I  
5 think about 55% of additional funding. But, if  
6 you're English speaking student, and you want to  
7 learn a second language, the school does not give any  
8 additional funding to teach that student a second  
9 language. The school has to come up with that  
10 funding from its own budget. So even though that  
11 student is--is an English speaker, they still and they  
12 want to learn the language, they still need the  
13 library books in whatever the targeted language is.  
14 They--they--they still need the in-class materials.  
15 They still need the textbooks. The teacher still  
16 needs enough materials to teach all the students in  
17 the class, not just the English Language Learners who  
18 are in that classroom. So there are all those  
19 incidental expenses, if you want to call it that--  
20 that are not covered. And if you think about an  
21 English language learner who may get English Language  
22 Learner who may get what's called 50% additional  
23 funding, which covers their--their special needs, an  
24 extra \$2,000 per student, that's something the--the  
25 school is not getting to teach the dual language

2 student, the one who wants to learn a second  
3 language. And so what this A.329 and S.554 are  
4 doing, they're—they're identifying that there are  
5 additional financial needs to teach a student. You  
6 can't just say you'll teach a student and—and you'll  
7 provide the teacher. The teacher needs the resources  
8 to do it correct, and that's the part that I think  
9 is—is—is missing right now, and if you can—Just like  
10 everyone here, has said there are the benefits of—of  
11 learning a second language. My kids speak two  
12 languages. They'll probably speak three by the time  
13 they graduate from—from high school. We are in a  
14 global society, and if your kid isn't speaking a  
15 second language by the time they graduate from high  
16 school, they are at a significant disadvantage. Now,  
17 that's just kind of a side note, but it's the funding  
18 and—and that—that is lacking in the schools to  
19 support true dual language programs [coughing] and  
20 that's what I am here to talk about, and that's what  
21 my committee has taken on in—in this—this year as our  
22 -our primary objective. Last year it was to get a  
23 Russian dual language program started up at PS 145 on  
24 105<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, and like said, this year  
25 now it's about funding that all the dual language



2 programs need. Not just in District 3, but across  
3 the city.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Well—well, thank  
5 you for sharing that with us, and—and I thank this  
6 entire panel for a really compelling testimony.  
7 Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Council Member  
9 Margaret Chin has some questions.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you, Chair.  
11 Thank you to the panel, and I know that in previous  
12 committee hearings we always year from the Chancellor  
13 so she's very supportive of the language program, and  
14 they have put in funding to help schools start those  
15 programs, and a lot of times those programs are  
16 started by parents, and advocate, you know, if they  
17 have dual language programs Japanese, Mandarin,  
18 Spanish. So I think it's—it's really good to hear  
19 that we need to continue its funding, and it's really  
20 important, and I agree with you that the dual  
21 language has to start in elementary school, as early  
22 as possible. We have some programs in my district  
23 where I have pre-K classes and kindergarten classes  
24 where the kids are in a dual language program, and  
25 it's just amazing. They're learning how to count.

2 They learn how to say simple things, but that's where  
3 you start. By the time you get to high school, it's  
4 kind of late. So we really need to help advocate for  
5 more resources for that, and then the other question  
6 about teachers I also urge you to reach out to the  
7 Department of Education because that's the first  
8 thing they tell us, they don't have enough teachers  
9 to do all the dual language programs. So if there's a  
10 way that we can work together to help recruit  
11 teachers, and get them certified, I think for the—for  
12 some of the dual language programs in Mandarin, that  
13 we have also been working with Asians with the—with  
14 the Chinese Institute to try to get the teachers  
15 certified, and also trained so they could become dual  
16 language teachers. So, I mean if we start early from  
17 the pre-K up, I think we can—don't have to worry  
18 about a teacher shortage in the future. But right  
19 now there is a huge shortage, and we have to figure  
20 out how to recruit teachers and get them trained so  
21 that they can—we can make the move.

22 LUCAS LIU: Right and I—I think it's  
23 also, you know, we can—part of it is more and we do  
24 need more teachers, but at the same time, we do have—  
25 --You know, the resolution talks about five

2 districts. It's \$200,000 each, and to start new  
3 foreign language programs, but we already have so  
4 many here in the city that need the funding. I mean  
5 it-it-it's-why-why continue having okay programs when  
6 you could make really good programs? You know, it's-  
7 it's-it's not-it is a quality versus quantity, and I  
8 think we should go for quality first given the  
9 benefit and given the target of-of high needs of  
10 schools. The better the dual language program, the  
11 better the school, the better the education and it's  
12 better benefits for the kids, and that just goes on  
13 for a lifetime. It's not just one and done sort of  
14 thing. So, you know, in addition to the needs for  
15 teachers, I think it's-like I said earlier, you-you  
16 need to fund the teachers overall, you need to fund  
17 the program. A teacher without the resources isn't  
18 going to have a good chance of success, and I think  
19 everybody feels-would-would agree with that.

20 MANUEL CASANOVA: And-and let me add to  
21 what Lucas is saying is that if you focus in a couple  
22 of schools and you make them great, that means that  
23 there is the main teacher and a teacher assistant.  
24 That teacher assistant can later on go on and to move  
25 into another store when you open and expand. And on

2 a personal note as you were saying, I will never  
3 forget about a year—a year ago, when one of my  
4 daughters was doing homework and it was Monday, and  
5 she was doing it in Spanish, and I said, America  
6 (sic) you're extremely lacking. She's like, what?  
7 I'm doing homework, but you're doing it in Spanish  
8 right now. So my doing it this last year, you're  
9 going to be far ahead than your cousin in Santiago  
10 who is only learning Spanish. You're going to know  
11 it in English and Spanish, and you're going to be—be  
12 able to survive in both environments. So you'll  
13 never know when you may need that for professional  
14 and for other purposes. So, but I—I will echo what  
15 Lucas was saying is that if the resources can be  
16 funded to make sure that the schools are super  
17 successful, because also that breeds more interest,  
18 right? It will be like money pulls money. It was  
19 interest and also you may be able to support those  
20 people who are studying to be a teacher, be part of  
21 the school, take an internship, and then move on and  
22 then that way expand on it.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Well, I then—I  
24 really urge you to help us advocate for the—the next,  
25 the fiscal year budget. I mean start now, and to

2 make sure that DOE puts forth more funding into the  
3 language program. Because the Chancellor put money  
4 to help schools start the program, but once they  
5 start, they need to count on how to support to carry  
6 through, and we need more programs to be started. So  
7 I think to add your voice to that advocacy, it would  
8 really be helpful for us to keep on pushing this.  
9 Because we've come a long way. I mean back in the  
10 days when I started teaching, there were no bilingual  
11 programs, and parents didn't understand the need for  
12 it. They thought that if they put their kids in a  
13 bilingual program, the kids will be at disadvantage,  
14 and those will be immigrant kids. And now, you know,  
15 we're building on these dual language programs and  
16 that's--those are the--the programs of the future. So  
17 I thank you for all the work that you do, and hope  
18 that you will help us continue the advocacy.

19 LUCAS LIU: Well, we will. I know who  
20 you guys are right now. So I'm a persistent guy.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So just to also  
22 distinguish between bilingual and dual language there  
23 is a difference, and there difference is that, you  
24 know, bilingual primarily consists of native speakers  
25 whereas the dual language I think is mixed with half

2 native English speakers, half native speakers of the  
3 other language other than English whatever it may be,  
4 Chinese or-or Spanish, whatever. And I have to tell  
5 you they are actually selling mechanisms. They sell  
6 the schools because the parents in my district want  
7 their children to go to those classes in the  
8 district, and actually the parents are requesting  
9 more and more of these programs, and I'm was in one  
10 at one at 222 in Jackson, and it was a-a first or  
11 second grader young girl of Indian descent who spoke  
12 fluent Spanish better than I did. [laughs] Having  
13 been in this bilingual this dual language class for  
14 like a year, a year and a half now this is  
15 kindergarten. It was really phenomenal to see, and  
16 to-and to listen to her. So it was great, and Mr.  
17 Liu, yes, we-we welcome the CEC to come down here.  
18 Anybody who has not been here, we certainly would  
19 like to have the input. We want to hear what's going  
20 on. We're aware of the other issues that are going  
21 in you district as well as we speak, and just want to  
22 assure you that, you know, keeping in touch with  
23 people on these issues are of vital importance to us.

24 LUCAS LIU: Thank you, and we're  
25 actually-actually I'm interested in starting a-

2 looking into a punch dual language program up in  
3 Harlem so--

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] I-I--

5 LUCAS LIU: --you know, we'll put one  
6 there and I want to start--

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, with both of  
8 them. (sic)

9 LUCAS LIU: --rallying resources around  
10 that.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Very good. See,  
12 French was very hard for me when I got to college.  
13 I-I said Spanish was enough at this point, but  
14 anyway, that's me. I thank you all for coming in.  
15 We appreciate your time. Thank you. Alright, now  
16 our final panel, unless there are others who have not  
17 signed up, please do so if you want to speak. Ryan  
18 Adams, New York State Education Initiative. Is Ryan  
19 here? Sabrina Lamb, CEO of World of Money.org, and  
20 Chris Caltibiano, the Council for Economic Education.  
21 [pause] Okay, I'd just like to ask you to raise your  
22 hand so I can swear you in. Do you solemnly swear or  
23 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
24 nothing but the truth and to answer council member  
25 questions honestly? Okay, thank you. When--would you

2 like to begin? Yes, press the red button and then  
3 identify yourself first.

4 SABRINA LAMB: Great. My name is Sabrina  
5 Lamb.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh, I'm sorry, before  
7 you start, we've been joined by Council Member Steve  
8 Levin.

9 SABRINA LAMB: Okay, thanks.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Go ahead, yep.

11 SABRINA LAMB: My name is Sabrina Lamb.  
12 I'm the founding CEO of World of Money. I'm here in  
13 support of Resolution 845-2015. Chairman Daniel  
14 Dromm and Education Committee members of the New York  
15 City Council, on behalf of nearly 4,000 World of  
16 Money Children, and their families I think you for  
17 this opportunity to testify today. We wholeheartedly  
18 support personal finance being available and provided  
19 for New York City children and youth supported by  
20 Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and founded  
21 in 2005, the World of Money.org is a New York City  
22 based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission  
23 is to empower youth ages 7 to 18. This organization  
24 was selected as a promised pace by a America's  
25 Promise Allowance and AOL Impact as one of the top 10



2 social good organizations in America. Even though we  
3 have educated ages 7 to 18 and provided 40 classroom  
4 hours of financial education for children, our  
5 question as an organization is how can empower more  
6 than 4,000? So targeting five million underserved  
7 youth the World of Money has created an accessible  
8 mobile financial education app creating or offering  
9 60 self-paced videos. The mobile video app is  
10 designed for youth by youth. We're speaking in the—I  
11 was hearing from the previous panel about, you know,  
12 foreign language for many families and children.  
13 Specifically money is a foreign language, and often  
14 you need to have that human to human interaction.  
15 Well, our app is taught by children. So children  
16 listening to the videos will see children who look  
17 like them and interact with these videos, and we  
18 translated four of the videos thus far in French,  
19 Spanish, Portuguese and Swahili. It's very important  
20 that they hear their native language as well. The  
21 users range from age 7 to 25 and teaches financial  
22 concepts that will catalyze workforce admittance and  
23 long-term financial capability. Twenty national  
24 regional organizations including Harlem School  
25 District 5, the Eagle Academy Foundation, the

2 Executive Preparatory Academy of Finance, A Better  
3 Chance, Memphis Challenge, the YWCA of New York City,  
4 National Cares Mentoring, Save a Girl/Save our World,  
5 the Brooklyn Brownstone School and then NAACP Youth  
6 in College Division Early World of Money Mobile App  
7 Coalition Partners. The user will receive daily  
8 wealth affirmations and personal finance flash study  
9 cards, are also embedded in the app. For maximum  
10 appeal, the World of Money Mobile Application  
11 reflects the cultural and racial diversity as well as  
12 gender and age diversity of New York City youth.  
13 Also, the courses that are included in the app  
14 include daily wealth affirmations, Money Mind Sets,  
15 Masking Your Card, Payment Technologies, Introduction  
16 to Credit, Entrepreneurship, Banking, Credit Unions,  
17 Budgeting, the History of Money, Insurance, Stock  
18 Market, Mutual Funds and Tax lists. Now more than  
19 ever although we are appealing to the State that,  
20 you, we would like this included in every classroom,  
21 we're using or harnessing the power of technology,  
22 and providing it for schools so that we can provide  
23 this information and deliver it to where children and  
24 youth spend most of their time, and that's staring at  
25 their devices. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much,  
3 and I'm going make a couple of comments, but let's go  
4 to our next witness.

5 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: Thank you. My name is  
6 (off mic) and I'm the Chief Program Officer for--

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Is it on? Is the  
8 little red light on?

9 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: It is. It is on.  
11 Okay, good. Maybe just bring it a little closer.

12 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: How's that? How are  
13 we now?

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Good.

15 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: We good?

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yeah, we are good.

17 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: Alright. Hello, my  
18 name is Chris Caltibiano and I'm the Chief Program  
19 for the Council for Economic Education. Thanks for  
20 giving me the opportunity to testify today. CEE is a--  
21 an organization that has a national reach that is  
22 right here in our back yard in New York. We are  
23 supportive of K12 economic and financial education  
24 particularly building strong teachers, are competent  
25 and capable of teaching economics and financial

2 literacy in the K-12 classroom. So I want to talk a  
3 little bit today about why—why we're supporting this—  
4 this resolution. There's not a lot of disagreement  
5 that—the basic understanding of the financial role  
6 this critical success today in modern society, and  
7 that society is getting more complex, and at the same  
8 time the gap between the people knowing what they  
9 need to know is actually widening. There's tons of  
10 examples I could give, but I'll just give you one  
11 today. A few years ago the OECD had a program for  
12 international student assessment in financial  
13 literacy and they found that one in five American  
14 teenagers could not even reach a baseline level of  
15 proficiency in financial literacy. Of the 18  
16 participating countries we fall right square in the  
17 middle of path between Latvia and Russia as far as  
18 financial literacy and financial capability. So now  
19 for some good news. Here in New York, the CEE noted  
20 for our survey of the State that there actually is a  
21 financial literacy requirement here in the state of  
22 New York. Now the bad news. It is required  
23 typically at the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level typically taught in  
24 the last semester of senior year. I don't think I  
25 could tell you where people's heads are the last

2 semester of their senior year of high school. Some  
3 other bad news, we actually surveyed economic  
4 teachers a few years ago, and found that only 24% of  
5 those teaching economics were there because it was  
6 their choice. In most cases they, so to speak, drew  
7 the short straw. They were assigned to teach the  
8 course because someone needed to teach it. So, we  
9 have teachers who aren't prepared to teach, aren't  
10 actually even getting the support that they need. In  
11 that same survey, 45% of teachers indicated that the  
12 schools offered no content specific profession  
13 development, and the best that did was either  
14 poor or at best decent. We know that kindergarteners  
15 through high school seniors can learn financial  
16 concepts. We also know that behavior changes. We  
17 see lower credit delinquency rates. We see higher  
18 credits so as a result of students in states where  
19 is a prior intention to release these. So, we're  
20 putting students at a disadvantage in this state, and  
21 by not preparing them—preparing them. And so, we  
22 would like to recommend and support you all in  
23 three things really. One is to expand the  
24 requirement here in New York to all grades starting  
25 in kindergarten and culminating at the high school

2 level of a semester long course. We strongly  
3 recommend that our standards and benchmarks align  
4 with the National Standards for Financial Literacy  
5 and finally, we strongly recommend that there are  
6 resources provided to support the teacher  
7 professional development so that they can be capable  
8 teachers in financial literacy. So thank you for  
9 your—for your time, and we support you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And thank you both  
11 for sticking around. I know it's the last panel and  
12 everything like, and it's just worked out that way  
13 today. But I am a deep believer in financial  
14 literacy as well, and I have seen first hand how many  
15 students graduate our schools, and don't know how to  
16 write a check.

17 SABRINA LAMB: Right.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I've seen the  
19 formerly incarcerated come out and just totally be  
20 lost. Part of the reason why I think that they went  
21 to be incarcerated even in the first place is that  
22 they didn't have that understanding. I know for  
23 myself personally, I didn't really know how to go  
24 about getting a mortgage until I was 45 years old.  
25 And I think if I knew, I would have invested in real

2 estate [laughs] a lot earlier in my life, and I have  
3 taken advantage of some of that. So, and here I was,  
4 you know, I went to pretty good schools and  
5 everything, but I'm I even remember when I went to  
6 college in Poughkeepsie, Marist College of  
7 Poughkeepsie, that's where I first got introduced to  
8 some banking where they--they--they set up a system  
9 where we would go to I think it was Dutchess County  
10 Bank at the time, and then we can get a checking  
11 account there. It was the first time I ever had a  
12 checking account, but I was 40 (sic) in that sense,  
13 but it--I--I see the need for this all over the  
14 place, you know, and I particularly see it even  
15 within our immigrant communities because I think  
16 there's a--a distrust of banks also within the  
17 immigrant communities, and--and trying to get young  
18 people to invest and put their money in the bank at a  
19 young age is important. And--and maybe you know the  
20 answer to this question because I don't. I know that  
21 when I was younger, somebody in my family took me to  
22 I think it was the Dime Savings Bank and I was able  
23 to open an account. Is that still possible for young  
24 people? Is there an age limit on that, and I wonder  
25 why we also don't do more of that.

2           SABRINA LAMB: That can—that can occur  
3 but, of course, they need to have the consent of the  
4 adult in their life, and—but the—the paradigm in  
5 which banking institutions or financial institutions  
6 reach out for new customers they're looking for the  
7 big depositors. You know, it has to be embedded in  
8 that financial institution's culture really because  
9 that happened when I was child, and it no longer  
10 does, but some credit unions they do offer that—that  
11 experience because it's embedded in that unique  
12 credit union's philosophy, you know. And I—I just  
13 wanted to underscore something that—that—that my  
14 colleague had said in terms of teachers, and drawing  
15 the short straw. I mean I hear from teachers across  
16 the country as well. It's not enough. I know we are  
17 appealing or this resolution is appealing to New York  
18 State to provide curriculum for the teachers who  
19 delivers this very powerful currency to a child. It  
20 matters because if the—if that person is not fluent  
21 in money, the child can feel it, and they feel that  
22 it's really an—really an experience in terms of their  
23 own value system and their own self-worth. So when  
24 teachers tell me that they resent having to teach it,  
25 oh, my gosh, this is something else for me to do. I



2 didn't go to school for his so why do I have to do  
3 it? The—the child feels that. So that's why it  
4 needs to be taught as with our organization our  
5 curriculum that the World of Money Youth Financial  
6 Education Training Institute is taught by Wall Street  
7 professionals who are affluent in money. They're not  
8 learning it on the, you know, looking over someone's  
9 shoulder in terms of a curriculum. It's really  
10 important the spirit in which it's—it's shared.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: With your app do you  
12 go into schools with that?

13 SABRINA LAMB: Yes, the—I'm very excited  
14 that Harlem District 5 is going to be providing it  
15 for all of its schools. National regional  
16 organizations will—will incorporate the app in the  
17 programming. There's 60 videos, four of which have  
18 been translated.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] I know  
20 that you said that.

21 SABRINA LAMB: The—the—the former panel I  
22 would—would sit—I was really interested in the  
23 representative from the—you know, speaking the  
24 African community because we—we see requests for, you  
25 know, language translations from around the world.

2 This is as the OECD, my colleagues from the OECD in  
3 terms of the vulnerability of American children and  
4 families, and specifically those who are underserved.  
5 When you're an immigrant to this city, you're  
6 particularly underserved, and you feel that you're on  
7 the outside looking in. So there's no way you're  
8 going to enter an institution that were not  
9 generationally never a part of. So you have to be  
10 taught why and how it has to be delivered. That's  
11 why our Portuguese and our Swahili language for those  
12 who live right here New York City never mind in  
13 Kenya, that they--that they hear someone speaking in  
14 their--in their tongue, and that this is okay. This  
15 can be trusted because trust is the major--is the  
16 first law with the world of money to exchange I trust  
17 you. I trust you. That's what it is. That's the  
18 basis of it.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I mean I remember  
20 learning about FDIC. You talk about trust training--

21 SABRINA LAMB: Right.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: --you know, and that--  
23 and then, of course, the history of--of how that  
24 started, you know, with the profession of it, and--but

2 I don't know how often we get to that in the  
3 classrooms in the city today.

4           SABRINA LAMB: Well, if you and--and--and  
5 it has to be immersive. There's no reason--I grew up  
6 for a short time in Germany. I speak very little  
7 German today. It must be immersive and--and so that  
8 the child can be fluent in the language of money.  
9 And so children--my colleague indicated, you know,  
10 children absolutely get it. We start at age seven.  
11 They absolutely get it. You know, when you teach  
12 them--first, you have to teach them the--the why--

13           CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Uh-huh.

14           SABRINA LAMB: --and that they deserve to  
15 have financial security and what the long-term  
16 ramifications are for their life and not knowing then  
17 they're open to learning. But if--many of them feel  
18 when they're first introduced well you're going to  
19 attend World of Money, their response is well it's  
20 going to take up my summer. But when you teach them  
21 the why because that's the favorite question for all  
22 children, why. You teach them the why. Oh, if I  
23 don't my college--my college preparedness, my  
24 workforce preparedness will be impacted. I will be  
25 the first target for legal financial scams, and my

2 self-esteem over the long term of my life will be  
3 impacted. Oh, okay, now I'm ready to learn.

4 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: And there has been  
5 some research that shows that children start to form  
6 their financial behaviors very young in early  
7 elementary school years. So, by starting here at  
8 the--the high school level 12<sup>th</sup> grade, it's--it's in  
9 many ways almost too late, and that's why we need to  
10 be starting earlier.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Uh-huh. The Mayor I  
12 think yesterday announced that they are doing a  
13 college savings program--

14 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: [interposing] Uh-huh,  
15 I--I agree.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: --through their  
17 families, and I think that was--

18 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: [interposing] It  
19 definitely was a good step.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: --a good step in the  
21 right direction here.

22 SABRINA LAMB: Well, children have said  
23 that they're not ready to save unless they believe  
24 that their life worth--is worth saving, and when I  
25 heard the testimonies for all those wonderful

2 children early when they talked about uniforms, you  
3 know, this all wraps up into our shared work in terms  
4 of values in them. You know, when you're having a  
5 conversation, when you value those--those name brand  
6 items over your education, financial education is  
7 about shifting your value system and saying your  
8 education is worth is more.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes, uh-huh, uh-huh,  
10 and finally, let me just say also we've been  
11 fighting. I wish we had that. I know other members  
12 of the Council as well to get banks to accept IDNYC  
13 as a--yeah, as a form of identification for our  
14 undocumented community to be able to open accounts as  
15 well. So, that's been a struggle here as well.

16 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: Yeah, and there's a  
17 lot illegals in immigrant communities who are  
18 sometimes coming from countries where--where they have  
19 a very good reason not to trust the banking system.  
20 And so by finding ways to immigrate--immigrate them  
21 into kind of the formal banking system in this  
22 country, and that's a really big cultural step.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Right. It even  
24 helps in terms of their immigration case further on  
25 down the road, if we ever get to immigration reform--

2 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: Absolutely.

3 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: --under the next  
4 administration, but I'm not going to go there today.  
5 So, but anyway, I'm going to end it here. Thank you  
6 very, very much.

7 CHRIS CALTIBIANO: My pleasure.

8 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, we did receive  
9 testimony from others for the record, and that will  
10 be included on our website as well, and I thank you  
11 again for coming in, and appreciate the hanging  
12 around, and with that, we are ready to adjourn at  
13 3:35 p.m. Thank you. [gavel] Thank you, Margaret.

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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 December 16, 2016