



# Community District Education Council 26

## New York City Department of Education

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[Website: www.CDEC26.org](http://www.CDEC26.org)

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

**November 12, 2020**

The Community Education Council District 26 (CEC 26) is comprised of parents that are elected or appointed to serve as stakeholders of the district, representing over 15,000 public school students. The following resolution offers CEC 26's position regarding the October 26, 2020 policy change concerning the blended learning opt-in period:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Resolved,** That the Council of the City of New York and Community Education Council District 26 calls upon the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students.

***This Resolution was approved at November 12, 2020 Calendar Meeting by a unanimous***

***vote of members present including Adriana Aviles, Dilip Nath, John Gavros, Alan Ong, Cassandra Louie, Todd Friedman, David Wong, Norman Cohn and Karen Rose Scutt***