

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3206

September 18, 2015

Chancellor Carmen Fariña
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Fariña,

Earlier this year, you made the extraordinary move of adding 25 new dual language programs and expanding an additional 15 existing dual language programs offered in New York City (NYC) public schools. It is clear that you personally understand the value of these programs for both English language learners and students who seek to learn languages other than English. You recognize the tremendous benefits these students will gain by learning in a second language.

As you know, NYC public schools boast 182 dual language programs. Students in dual language programs receive half of their instruction in English and half in another language. There are programs in Spanish (153), Chinese (11), French (9), Haitian Creole (3), Russian (2), Korean (1), Arabic (1), Polish (1), and Hebrew (1). There are also Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programs, in which newer immigrant students can learn some subjects in their native language, as well as instruction in English as a Second Language. There are three TBE programs in Bengali; however, there are no dual language programs in any South Asian languages.

The South Asian-American community in NYC is ethnically and linguistically diverse with well over 351,000 South Asian Americans living in NYC and over 60% of that population located in Queens, NY.ⁱ This community includes, but is not limited to: Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, and Indo-Caribbean Americans. The most common South Asian languages spoken in NYC are also the languages with the most Limited English Proficient (LEP) speakersⁱⁱ:

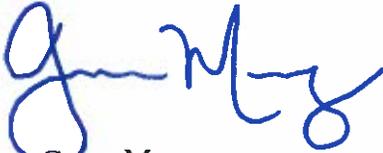
New York City			
Language	Population 5 years and Over	LEP Population	LEP Population (%)
Bengali	84,662	44,827	53%
Urdu	41,243	17,855	43%
Hindi	32,349	8,768	27%
Punjabi	26,641	12,655	48%

After the 2010 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau determined that Queens is eligible, under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, for Asian Indian language assistance. After a two year review of the data and advocacy from non-profits and community groups, the NYC Board of Elections added Bengali language ballot translations and interpreters to approximately 60 polling sites in Queens, and Hindi and Punjabi language interpreters at various poll sites based on local data. The decision to provide interpreters in three South Asian languages underscores the vital need for language learning and assistance in multiple South Asian languages.

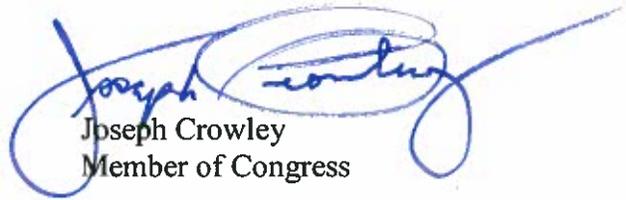
In 2006, President Bush established the STARTALK Language Program, as part of the National Security Language initiative, with the purpose of increasing the number of U.S. citizens with language capacity in critical need foreign languages. Funding from STARTALK is used to create high-quality summer language learning opportunities in these critical need languages, including Hindi and Urdu. This past summer, STARTALK funded one Hindi language class and two Urdu language classes for students in NYC.

The NYC Department of Education has a history of strong programs for English language learners. We would like to see the number of language learning opportunities in South Asian languages, specifically dual language programs, expand to match the need of the LEP population.

Sincerely,



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress

ⁱ Taking Our Seat, *Opening the Golden Door Report Part III*, released September 2011.

ⁱⁱ 2009-2013 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample, analyzed by NYC Department of Planning Population Division.