

United Nations' International Mother Language Day

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

—Nelson Mandela

February 21, 2015



Join the Office of Head Start and the National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness and celebrate International Mother Language Day on February 21!

What is it? Mother Language Day, sponsored by the United Nations, recognizes languages as the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing human heritage. This day provides an opportunity to celebrate and share all languages and cultures and the ways they enrich the human experience throughout the world.

Why celebrate? Multilingualism is a living resource (Bokova, 2012). Language communicates and transfers knowledge from each generation to the next thereby ensuring a sustainable future.

How can your program participate?

- ◆ Work with families from diverse backgrounds to plan and make February 21 a day to celebrate all the languages spoken in your community, Head Start Center, or classroom.
- ◆ Tell families about local organizations with members who speak their home language, reflect their culture, and offer activities and events for adults and children.
- ◆ Create a list of all of the languages spoken by the families and staff in your program and include the list on your website and classroom bulletin boards and in your newsletter. (Don't forget to ask about the languages of grandparents and other Elders.)
- ◆ Gather the word “welcome” as it is written in all the languages and scripts of your community, including staff, families, community partners, etc. Display in a gathering place in the building these many ways of saying hello. Have those who wrote them come and share how to say the greeting, and let the children practice saying hello in the different languages. Extend the activity by looking at a map or globe and learning where all of the children's families came from.
- ◆ Hold staff discussions and trainings about ways to promote home languages every day throughout the year.
- ◆ Download and distribute NCCLR resources, such as *The Importance of Home Language Series* and *NCCLR Quick Guides for Teachers*, from the [ECLKC](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic).
- ◆ Work with the local newspapers and radio and television stations to feature Mother Language Day.
- ◆ Publish quotations about home languages on your website and social media and in your newsletter.

