Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Advancing Equitable Opportunities

Eastern Suffolk BOCES

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February 2026 Cultural Heritage Highlights

Disclaimer: The Cultural Heritage Highlights is intended as a resource to encourage the recognition, exploration, and celebration of a wide range of cultural observances in schools and communities. Each monthly edition features selected observances that reflect both longstanding and emerging cultural traditions. While every effort is made to include diverse and meaningful content, the list is not exhaustive and should not be viewed as an intentional exclusion of any celebration. Educators and community members are encouraged to use this resource as a starting point for deeper learning, inclusive dialogue, and the continued honoring of all cultural identities throughout the year. Suggestions for upcoming highlights are welcomed and can be sent to ESBOCESdei@esboces.org.

American Heart Month

February is the month we show our hearts some extra love! Every year, we observe American Heart Month to raise crucial awareness about heart disease and encourage everyone to embrace heart-healthy habits. This awareness is critical because heart disease is the leading cause of death for people within most racial and ethnic groups in the United States. It impacts individuals across all ages, genders, and ethnicities. The good news is that we have the power to protect ourselves! Risk factors like high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, and physical inactivity can increase risk, but they can often be managed. You can take an active, positive role in reducing your risk by focusing on a healthy diet, engaging in regular physical activity, and working with your doctor to manage your blood pressure and cholesterol. Let this month be your friendly reminder and a fantastic opportunity to start or strengthen those heart-healthy habits. Your heart will thank you!

Learn more:

American Heart Association Kids Heart Challenge

CDC Heart Disease Resources

Black History Month

This year's Black History Month is a significant historical marker, celebrating the theme "A Century of Black History Commemorations." This theme honors the 100th anniversary of the first Negro History Week, established in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson. It encourages reflection on the profound impact and meaning of these annual observances in transforming the status and recognition of Black people in the modern world, while also serving as a call to promote an accurate, inclusive national history for future generations. It is a wonderful chance to reflect on this powerful legacy and commit to promoting, protecting, and preserving Black history for the next century by elevating Black history, encouraging self-study, and promoting accuracy.

Learn more:

Virtual Black History Month Festival

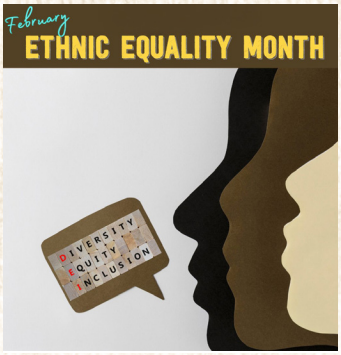
Career and Technical Education Month

We celebrate Career and Technical Education (CTE) this month, which is an annual public awareness campaign led by the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) dedicated to recognizing the extraordinary value and achievements of CTE programs nationwide. These essential programs equip students with the academic, technical, and employability skills necessary for future success, prompting specific recognition, such as the New York State Senate proclaiming February 2023 as "Teach CTE Month" to further support educators. Furthermore, a key part of the CTE experience involves Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs), like the Technology Student Association (TSA), which is formally recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for its role in developing future skilled leaders.

Learn more:

Career and Technical Education

NYS Senate Proclaims February Teach CTE Month



Ethnic Equality Month

Working toward ethnic equality is a continuous effort that strengthens our entire society! Promoting understanding and equality among all ethnic groups is about actively building stronger, more inclusive communities. The goal is to highlight the critical importance of recognizing and addressing ethnic disparities, whether they exist in health, education, or economic opportunity, and working constructively to close those gaps. By fostering this awareness and striving for genuine equality, we ensure an environment in which the unique identities and contributions of all ethnicities are valued, celebrated, and respected. This collective commitment leads to a fairer, more vibrant future for everyone.

Learn more:

Ethnic Equality Month

National Children's Dental Health Month

February is a fantastic time to focus on young smiles as we observe National Children's Dental Health Month! This annual, month-long health observance, sponsored by the American Dental Association (ADA), is dedicated to discussing the vital benefits of establishing great oral health habits early in life. This awareness campaign is crucial because, despite being preventable, tooth decay (cavities) remains the most common chronic disease of childhood. By highlighting the importance of regular checkups, proper brushing, and a balanced diet, this month empowers parents and children to protect those precious smiles.

Learn more:

National Children's Dental Health Month

Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

Every February, we dedicate time to observing Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month (TDVAM), a crucial national effort focused on promoting healthy relationships and preventing abuse among young people. This awareness campaign is sadly essential; research indicates that nearly one in three teens will experience some form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse from a dating partner before they become an adult. This month aims to raise awareness about this serious issue by educating teens, parents, and educators about the signs of unhealthy relationships. Through this awareness, we can empower everyone to understand and promote what constitutes a safe, respectful, and healthy relationship.

Learn more:

Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

Ramadan

Ramadan, the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic lunar calendar, is a deeply spiritual time of fasting, reflection, intense prayer, and strengthened community for Muslims across the globe. It is observed as a month-long spiritual journey focused on self-discipline and empathy. In 2026, this blessed month is currently expected to begin on the evening of February 17 and conclude on the evening of March 18. It is important to remember that the exact start and end dates are always contingent upon the sighting of the new moon, which makes the final schedule official just before the month begins. The conclusion of Ramadan is celebrated with the joyous holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

Learn more:

Significance of Ramadan

World Interfaith Harmony Week (February 1-7)

Celebrated annually during the first week of February, World Interfaith Harmony Week is a wonderful opportunity to promote peace and understanding worldwide. In 2010, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan presented this global observance to the United Nations, who then formally established the week to strengthen harmony between people of different faiths and beliefs. The core goal is to foster mutual understanding based on the universal principles of love of God (or good) and love of neighbor, by encouraging people from all religious backgrounds to share dialogue and actively work together on good causes that benefit their communities.

Learn more:

United Nations: World Interfaith Harmony Week

National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (NEDAW) (February 23-March 1)

Typically observed during the last full week of February, National Eating Disorders Awareness Week is an annual campaign dedicated to shedding light on eating disorders and promoting body acceptance. The powerful theme for 2026 is "Fighting for Change, Committed to Change – Every Body Belongs." The ultimate goal of NEDAW is to educate the public about the serious realities of eating disorders, challenge harmful stereotypes, and provide hope and visibility to individuals and loved ones impacted by them. It is an empowering week intended to encourage open conversations and advocate for better access to care, reinforcing the message that help is available and recovery is possible.

Learn more:

National Eating Disorders Association

February 4 – Rosa Parks Day

Rosa Parks Day is an American holiday dedicated to honoring the legacy of the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" and her pivotal role in ending racial segregation. Interestingly, it is celebrated on two different dates: February 4, which marks her birthday, and December 1, the anniversary of her 1955 arrest after she refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama. Her act of "quiet rebellion" sparked the 381-day Montgomery bus boycott and led to a Supreme Court ruling that banned segregation on public transit. Beyond her own activism, her courage helped elevate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to national prominence and continues to inspire people to stand against modern-day racism and hate.

Learn more:

Rosa Parks' Birthday

Rosa Parks Day Observances by State

February 4 – World Cancer Day

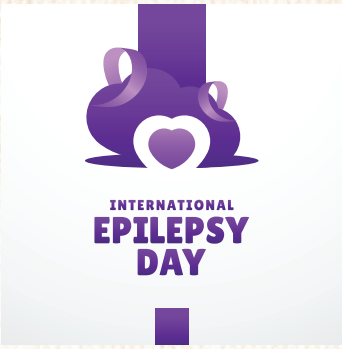
Observed annually on February 4, World Cancer Day is a critical international event dedicated to uniting the world in the fight against cancer. Founded in 2000 by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), this day aims to raise global awareness and encourage action on cancer prevention, detection, and treatment. World Cancer Day serves to educate the public while encouraging personal, collective, and governmental action on a global scale. Its primary goal is to support equal access to life-saving cancer treatment for everyone, irrespective of a person's social status or where they live in the world, in the hope of preventing millions of unnecessary deaths.

Learn more:
World Cancer Day

February 7 – National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD) is observed annually on February 7. This crucial day serves as a national call to action to address the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on the Black community. The core mission is to promote vital actions like testing, education, and access to effective treatment. By encouraging community engagement, NBHAAD aims to mobilize resources, reduce HIV-related disparities, and champion health equity, ensuring everyone has the knowledge and support needed to prevent transmission and live a healthy life.

Learn more:
National Institutes of Health (NIH)



February 9 – International Epilepsy Day

Held annually on the second Monday of February, International Epilepsy Day is a significant global observance. Created by the International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) and the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE), this day unites people from over 140 countries to raise essential awareness about epilepsy, a neurological disorder affecting millions worldwide. The core mission is to educate the public about the realities of epilepsy, dispel common myths and stigma, and advocate for improved treatment, better care, and reduced discrimination for individuals living with the condition. It serves as a powerful reminder that epilepsy is a treatable condition and that community support is fundamental.

Learn more:
International Epilepsy Day

February 13 – P.S. I Love You Day

Every year on the second Friday of February, the world turns purple to celebrate the inspiring observance of P.S. I Love You Day. The mission of this powerful movement is to instill hope for those affected by mental illness, fostering a supportive environment and a community in which everyone feels welcomed, loved, and supported. The theme for the upcoming 2026 celebration is "Be the Light," which encourages everyone to spread kindness and visibility in the fight against stigma. By wearing purple and participating, we remind each other that we are never alone.

Learn more:
P.S. I Love You Day

February 14 – National Donor Day

Observed annually on February 14, National Donor Day is a special awareness observance dedicated to celebrating the "gift of life" and promoting all forms of donation. It is a wonderful opportunity to consider sharing love by registering as a donor! The day encourages individuals to support organ, eye, tissue, marrow, platelet, and blood donation, all of which are critical for saving and enhancing lives. National Donor Day serves as a reminder of the profound impact donor generosity can have, highlighting the critical and ongoing need for new registrants across the country.

Learn more:
The Organ Donation and Transplantation Alliance

February 14 – Valentine's Day

February has been celebrated as the month of romance for centuries, culminating in the joyous observance of Valentine's Day on February 14. This special day is dedicated to expressing love, friendship, and admiration. Today's beloved traditions include the exchange of thoughtful gifts, with red roses and chocolates being the most popular expressions of affection. Interestingly, the tradition of exchanging Valentine's Day cards with declarations of love dates all the way back to the 1500s, when people often poured their hearts into handmade cards beautifully adorned with ribbons and lace. It is a timeless celebration of connection and care.

Learn more:

PBS KIDS: Valentine's Day

February 15 – International Childhood Cancer Day

In September 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer in an effort to protect young lives. This ambitious, global initiative aims to significantly transform the future for children battling cancer worldwide. The core goals are twofold: to increase the global childhood cancer survival rate to at least 60% by 2030 and, equally important, to ensure a vastly improved quality of life for all children currently living with and surviving cancer. This commitment seeks to save one million more lives over the next decade by boosting access to essential diagnosis, treatment, and care.

Learn more:

International Childhood Cancer Day

St. Jude's Initiative for Childhood Cancer

February 16 – Presidents' Day

Presidents' Day, an American federal holiday, is celebrated annually on the third Monday of February to honor all past presidents of the United States. Although the day now recognizes every commander-in-chief, it was initially established in 1885 solely to celebrate George Washington's birthday on February 22. In 1971, following the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, the date then officially shifted to the third Monday and became commonly known as Presidents' Day. Even with this change, the long-standing tradition continues of having "George Washington's Farewell Address" read aloud in the Senate each year as a powerful reminder of his enduring legacy.

Learn more:

Presidents' Day 2026

February 17 – Lunar New Year/Chinese New Year

Get ready for new beginnings! According to the Chinese lunar calendar, this year's Lunar New Year welcomes the energetic Year of the Horse. Celebrated by millions of people globally, this is a deeply meaningful and joyful festival. It is a time filled with cherished cultural traditions, vibrant family reunions, delicious feasts, and exciting hopes for good fortune, prosperity, and happiness in the coming year. It marks a wonderful fresh start for all.

Learn more:

What is Lunar New Year?

Chinese New Year Calendar and Zodiac Sign

February 18 – Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday officially marks the beginning of the solemn season of Lent, a forty-day period of fasting, reflection, and spiritual preparation leading up to Easter. Often referred to as the "Day of Ashes," the observance focuses the Christian's heart on repentance and prayer. This is done through a unique service during which ashes are placed on the forehead, often in the shape of a cross, symbolizing mortality and the call to return to God through confession and humility. It is a solemn day that sets the tone for the Lenten journey.

Learn more:

Ash Wednesday and Lent

February 20 – World Day of Social Justice

The World Day of Social Justice is observed annually on February 20. Established by the United Nations (UN), this international day highlights the urgent need to address global issues that prohibit millions of individuals from living a fair and equitable life. The world is unfortunately troubled with persistent challenges, meaning countless people are deprived of basic human needs, such as access to jobs, healthcare, education, housing, and proper nutrition. This day serves as a powerful call to action for governments, organizations, and individuals worldwide to work together to eradicate poverty, promote gender equality, and champion human rights to ensure true social justice for all.

Learn more:

United Nations: World Day of Social Justice

February 28 – Rare Disease Day

Held annually on the last day of February, Rare Disease Day is a global observance dedicated to raising public awareness about rare conditions. This day also advocates for improved access to treatment and equitable medical representation for the millions of individuals affected worldwide. Established by EURORDIS (Rare Diseases Europe), the day aims to bring together patients, families, and healthcare professionals to highlight the unique challenges faced by the rare disease community. It is a powerful opportunity to show support and champion the need for more research and resources.

Learn more:

Rare Disease Day