

La Journée de la francophonie

a été fêtée le 22 mars 2019 à la Melrose Middle School avec plus de 900 élèves et deux groupes de musique: Crocodile River Music (Mali) et Jacques Schwartz-Bart (Guadeloupe), un quiz sur la francophonie, de brèves présentations en français par des élèves, et des prix en quantités impressionnantes! [Merci, Kristen!] Une belle fête!

Melrose middle schoolers host regional celebration of all things francophone

By Conor Powers-Smith of the *Wicked Local* Posted Mar 22, 2019 at 1:32 PM



Students dance on stage to African influenced music performed by Crocodile River Music at Melrose Middle School on Friday, March 22, 2019. [*Wicked Local* Staff Photo / David Sokol]▲

✘ Consul General Arnaud Mentré said French and other world languages can broaden students' intellectual horizons. [*Wicked Local* photo / Conor Powers-Smith]▲

Enthusiastic event brings French-speakers together to mark language, culture, artistic creativity

The Performing Arts Center at Melrose Veterans Memorial Middle School rang with the sounds of music, poetry, and enthusiastic celebration—some of it in English but much of it in French—throughout the morning of Friday, March 22, as the city welcomed about 1,000 students from 17 schools for this year's Grande Fete de la Francophonie des Ecoles.

It was the first time Melrose has hosted the event, organized by the Consulate General of France in Boston and the American Association of Teachers of French in recognition of Francophonie Month, a celebration of the French language and the countries throughout the world where it is spoken.

Educators and ambassadors welcomed students from as nearby as Stoneham and as far away as Topsham, Maine, for a morning of songs by musicians from Mali and Guadeloupe, a

quiz about the French-speaking world, a raffle that included a hockey stick signed by the Boston Bruins and star Patrice Bergeron, and performances by some of the kids themselves.

« You are very lucky to be here today, this is a beautiful place, a beautiful school, » said Quebec diplomat Marie-Claude Francoeur. « You should be proud to learn French. Knowing a second language can give you great comfort in the future, and will open new doors. »

Francoeur pointed out the historical ties between New England and nearby, proudly francophone Quebec.

« One hundred years ago, one million Frenchmen crossed the border to come to New England to work, because there was no job, no work, at this time in Quebec, » she said. « So there are many French Canadians here, but also French from France, and from Haiti, so we have a large French community in New England. »

During a brief break from the festivities, Consul General Arnaud Mentré discussed the importance of the event.

« When you learn a language, it's very important to be part of a network, and entire environment, » he said. « Also it's a way for the French teachers to be with their students and to show them how vibrant the French language is today. »

Mentré was impressed with the enthusiasm echoing through the auditorium throughout the event.

« When I was their age, I'm not sure I would've been so enthusiastic, » he joked. « It's absolutely great. It shows also the quality of the US education system, the fact that these students are so committed to what they're doing. »

Like other languages spoken in multiple countries, French can be a window to a new appreciation of global cultures, he added.

« You start learning French because of a tradition, different aspirations, and you discover a whole area, » Mentré said. « French is not only about France. France obviously has been the birthplace of the French language, but it has expanded globally, and now we have artists, writers, and businessmen as well, coming from different francophone countries. »

French in particular, and multilingualism in general, offer benefits far beyond the simple utility of speaking more languages, Mentré said.

« It's absolutely fundamental to promote curiosity, and learning a foreign language is one of the best ways to be challenged intellectually, » he said. « Just the fact that you understand that one word, one concept, is said in one way in a language, and another way in another language, this is crucial intellectually to understand the differences, and to be more adaptable, and more open to different ideas and different worlds. »

Crocodile River Music fait danser les jeunes