

UGDSB students participate in virtual conference H2Awesome!

Intermediate students from the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) and Wellington Catholic District School Board will be taking part in an annual conference addressing water conservation.

H2Awesome! has traditionally been held as an annual one-day conference at the University of Guelph for Grade 8 students in the Upper Grand and Wellington Catholic school boards. The conference focuses on the importance of water and water conservation.

With the current restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, organizers of the event opted to move the conference to a virtual format allowing it to be held over a five week period.

“Going virtual has allowed us to expand the voice of water. Under this format, 7-10 narratives will be heard and although each perspective could be appreciated as a stand-alone experience, collectively they will blend and tell an incredible story,” said Peter Glaab, H2Awesome! organizer and healthy active living resource teacher at Wellington Catholic, in a press release.

The 2021 H2Awesome! “Water Matters” Conference, will feature a number of keynote speakers including The Water Brothers, Emily Da Sousa, Paul Gifford, Jeremy Shute, Dan and Mary Lou Smoke, Jennifer Baichwel, Greg Kennedy, and Jan Sherman, as well as French Language presentations by UGDSB students Robyn Gow and Laura Gilbert.

“It is great to bring such a diverse group of speakers into classrooms virtually. Most of the speakers are community partners of both school boards. Many students will be familiar with them,” said Heather Walker, an H2Awesome! organizer and UGDSB curriculum leader, in the press release for the event. “Connecting our students to members of their own community who are working on water conservation, Indigenous water rights, and the importance of water is powerful. It will help students to examine their own relationship with water.”

Over 90 classrooms between the Upper Grand and Wellington Catholic school boards will be participating in the week's long conference, including students from both Grade 8 and Grade 7.

Grade 8 students have previously been the target grade for the conference, as their science and technology curriculum addresses water and the conservation of it.

“The hope is that this conference will inspire inquiry, design thinking and tap into 21 Century learning skills such as critical thinking and leadership. We are excited to see what student actions and student voice will come from this learning experience,” added Walker.

H2Awesome! officially launched on Monday (March 22), which marked World Water Day, an annual United Nations day of observance that highlights the importance of fresh water. The conference will run until April 22 (Earth Day).