

Local high school hosts inaugural Black Brilliance Conference

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High school students across the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) descended on Centre Dufferin District High School (CDDHS) on Tuesday as they took part in an inaugural conference.

Organized by the student group, Black Chapter, CDDHS hosted the first-ever Black Brilliance Conference, an event for African, Caribbean and all Black Identifying (ACBi) youth attending secondary schools in Dufferin County. The event has been years in the making.

'It's been a rocky road, very stressful from all standpoints, but also exciting for it to happen,' said Gabby Spencer, CDDHS Black Chapter student representative.

This year's theme for the conference was 'Unapologetically Black'.

'What I find sometimes, but I see it a lot less now, is people are ashamed of some aspects of being black. I know a lot of people who wouldn't walk around wearing an afro, who are ashamed to walk around speaking their native language, and not proud enough to say 'I'm African',' said Spencer. 'When we say 'unapologetically black' we're trying to get people to be proud about their blackness.'

The Black Brilliance Conference kicked off with keynote speaker, Michael Dunkley also known by the stage name ADM. Dunkley was a 2020 graduate at CDDHS and a former member of the Black Chapter.

Speaking with the Free Press, Dunkley spoke about his gratitude for Black Chapter saying he likely wouldn't be an artist without it.

'It was the place that gave me the chance to try something new and exercise my creativity,' explained Dunkley.

The inspiration given to Dunkley through Black Chapter, was one he wanted to reflect to students.

'I want them to have the courage to learn, to chase their dreams, and find a passion because I feel like one thing school doesn't really teach you is focusing to help students find their passion,' said Dunkley.

The Black Brilliance Conference also features four student led workshops; Hair Love; Police Brutality, Fu Fu Meets Jerk Chicken, Our Histories and Connections; and Black Face: History, Canada, and Digital Implications.

'I hope they leave here knowing something they didn't know before and with a positive perspective of Black Chapter and the Black Brilliance Conference,' said Spencer.

CDDHS has the largest black student union in the Upper Grand School Board with 72 members. Developed five years ago at Centre Dufferin, Black Chapter began with original members.

'I am so unbelievably proud of the folks who put the workshops together, they worked so hard. They did the research on top of all of their regular school work, worked through the pandemic and school closure and came back still with a ton of energy,' said Trina Thompson, CDDHS staff representative for Black Chapter. 'This work wouldn't have happened without our original Black Chapter members, who without we won't be here today.'

Schools in attendance at the inaugural Black Brilliance Conference included Centre Dufferin, Orangeville District Secondary

School, Westside Secondary School, Erin District High School, Norwell District Secondary School, Wellington Heights Secondary School, and Grey Highlands Secondary School.