



# Creating Community

How the Urban Leadership class at Central Campus creates change in the Des Moines community.

If you've been searching for a sense of community, an artistic outlet, or a place to discuss activism, the Urban Leadership class at Central Campus is the perfect place for you. The Urban Leadership program is open to all high school students within Des Moines Public Schools that are interested in activism and art.

"Urban Leadership is a discussion and project-based course focused on the intersection between art, identity, and activism. We have four major units (Indigenous & Immigrant Rights, Black Lives Matter, Women's Rights, and LGBTQ+ Rights), and produce two major events each year (Teen Summit and Summer Fam Jam)," Urban Leadership instructor Emily Lang said.

Lang has been teaching Urban Leadership at Central Campus for eight years and is the co-creator of RunDSM and Movement 515. Even with Lang's experience, she has learned valuable information from her students throughout the years.

"Personally, I have evolved as a



Student artwork. Photo courtesy of DMPS Flickr.

human and activist immensely in the last eight years, and it's beautiful to watch our classroom community speak their individual truths as well as develop a greater sense of empathy for marginalized communities," Lang said.

As well as learning and creating, students in their second year of Urban Leadership teach what they have learned about social justice to younger students in Des Moines Public Schools. Hoover junior Caliyah



Junior Caliyah Saxton performs at Teen Summit in February. Photo courtesy of DMPS Flickr.

Saxton is in her second year of Urban Leadership and she describes teaching younger students as her favorite part of the class.

"My favorite part about the second class has been the kids. They are so sweet and so smart. We don't think about how much young kids absorb at their age and how that affects their thinking when they grow up. So, teaching them about body positivity, loving each other, and equality is so important," Saxton said.

Lincoln High junior Dana Idan is also in her second year of the class. To her, the community and family that is created in



Urban Leadership class photo featuring Idan and Saxton. Photo courtesy of Idan.

each class has allowed for her growth as an individual.

"Personally, I don't usually enjoy speaking on my experiences and opinions, but this class helped me to realize that in order to grow as an individual and a community, you must apply yourself. I try my best to educate the uneducated. I also always allow others to feel safe around me to share anything they need to," Idan said.

While getting good grades is top priority for most classes in high school, Urban Leadership is about the impact that students can make within the community and the world.

"Urban Leadership students are often at the forefront of rallies, marches, and protest, from organizing city-wide walkouts after Trump was elected, to the newly formed Black Liberation Movement organization that was co-founded by members of Urban Leadership," Lang said.

Students continue to learn through experiences in the community about the importance of using their voice to create change.

"I believe to be able to live comfortably, there has to be change. For there to be change, you must realize that there is a lot wrong with the





world. Educating about social justice is the first step,” Idan said.

Saxton believes that Urban Leadership has helped prepare students for what comes next in the world of social justice.

“I would absolutely recommend this class to anyone. Not only do you gain new knowledge, but also a family and community that is there for you. It’s important for students to know about social justice issues because we are the next generation and as these issues continue to affect so many of us, we will play a big part in trying to solve these



*Students cheering on their peers at Teen Summit. Photo courtesy of DMPS Flickr.*

issues,” Saxton said.

There are plenty of opportunities for students to get involved in the empowering programs that have come out of Urban Leadership.

“Students can join Movement 515, our after-school workshop series, or find another organization that speaks to them, such as Please Pass the Love, Al Exito, Monsoon, Next Gen, Black Liberation Movement, I could go on and on! It’s important to find a community you feel a part of or in service of, no matter what it takes,” Lang said.

## Former Student Spotlight: Linda Brown

Linda Brown is a 2016 Hoover graduate that found her voice in Urban Leadership. Today, Brown is still connected with the Urban Leadership community through Movement 515 and RunDSM.



**Linda Brown**

“In the Des Moines community, I am a teaching artist for DMPS students by way of RunDSM and am a part of the culture department with the Des Moines Black Liberation Movement, serving as an organizer and board member.

Urban Leadership changed my life. It saved it. It guaranteed the truth while other classes reinforce. Urban Leadership centered marginalized voices and has led me towards always learning and always growing! Social justice issues contrast and fight against the evil in the world that be right under our noses or fingers... it’s important because ensuring the truth is ensuring the future. Go read a book! Educate yourself outside what your school can provide! Learning is not limited to the four walls you all go through every day,” Brown said.