

Learning Without Limits: John Legend's Sound Investment

HIGHER EDUCATION The Grammy-winning singer-songwriter celebrates teachers who inspire students to be tomorrow's innovators.



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Legend is investing in teachers who are working to expand the time and space students have to create, explore and follow their interests.

John Legend knows the value of a great education.

"I was from a pretty small blue-collar town in Ohio, and it if it weren't for great teachers and counselors and people who really cared about me at my school, I certainly wouldn't be where I am today," says Legend, who calls education "my connection to the world."

Creativity in the classroom

Now the nine-time Grammy Award winner, who also has an Academy Award, a Golden Globe Award, the BET Award for Best New Artist and the special Starlight Award from the Songwriters Hall of Fame, is working to inspire teachers and students to be creative inside and outside the classroom.

"I always enjoyed the teachers the most that had interesting projects for us: things that connected the curriculum to our life experience; things that inspired our creativity; things that allowed us to be individuals and not just memorize things," says Legend, who liked math, history and social studies as a student and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied English and African-American literature.

“Those were the teachers who were really memorable and inspired me the most. The more we can encourage teachers to be those kinds of teachers, the better off our young people will be.”

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Celebrating teachers

The “All of Me” singer is working with the [LRNG Innovation Challenge](#), a grant competition initiative, led by the MacArthur Foundation and the National Writing Project and Legend’s Show Me Campaign, which aims to use education to break the cycle of poverty.

LRNG (pronounced “learning”) is focused on celebrating, elevating and supporting teachers.

Through the LRNG Challenge, teachers who focus on creating time and space for deeper learning receive grant money to work on educational projects that are innovative and stimulating for students and other teachers.

“We’re trying to harness the teacher’s creativity, harness the student’s creativity, account for the fact that different students have different strengths— things that excite them, ways to see what excites those young people,” says Legend. He adds that the point being to “really give teachers the opportunity to not just give them what’s on the curriculum but light a spark in the students and make them really love learning.”

Exceeding expectations

With a theme of “No Bells, No Walls, No Limits on Learning,” the LRNG Challenge is re-imagining classrooms and hoping to shape students into “the innovators of tomorrow.”



SPEAKING OUT: Legend urges, “Many of our schools are literally and figuratively crumbling, and we’re not giving kids, especially low-income and minority kids, the chance to succeed.”

“We’re certainly tapping into demand from the young people to have an education that’s really suited to the 21st century and to the needs they have,” explains Legend.

At an event in Los Angeles this October, he will honor teachers and recipients of the recent LRNG Challenge for being education innovators.

In LRNG’s first year, teachers and students used tools like writing, science and technology for projects including: creating a multimedia online community for immigrant teens in New York City, a game design center for after school and weekends in Los Angeles and a STEM project for middle and high school students in Pittsburgh who are building devices and products to help disabled war veterans.

KRISTEN CASTILLO, editorial@mediaplanet.com