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Singer Usher Backs Music Program at McLaughlin

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THE LEDGER

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LAKE WALES | The "Godson of Soul" is helping to bring in a wide range of music related possibilities for students at a Lake Wales middle school next year.

Two new music programs will begin at McLaughlin Middle and Fine Arts Academy next fall to augment the school's arts-focused curriculum.

One, sponsored by Grammy-award winning R&B artist Usher Raymond IV's non-profit foundation, Usher's New Look, will implement Music Industry Leadership 101, a program designed to give middle and high school students exposure to more than 30 careers in the music industry.

The second program, Rock and Roll Academy, is a student-led music program founded by Mark Galbo, a musician and teacher at Telluride Mountain School in Colorado.

Galbo's program, which is already in place at five schools, focuses on allowing students to make choices and "take ownership of their learning, and develop independence of thought and spirit," he said.

In his music program, students will be able to choose the instruments and music they want to play, and instructors, whom Galbo will train, will have a minimal role in the classroom.

"Having the opportunity to make music in a self-directed, social, and collaborative way can often change a child's perspective of what they are capable of, what is possible for them. (Rock and Roll Academy) provides kids with an experience in hands-on, self-directed learning. When a student has success, it absolutely changes their perception

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of what they are capable of," he said.

Usher's new program, which piloted in several states earlier this month, focuses on the business side of the music industry, from branding and marketing to leadership and economics.

"Business is what building a legacy is all about. The learning experiences and content in these courses are around education, leadership talent and service," Usher said in a promo video about the program.

Usher's foundation will bring in industry professionals, a graphic designer and a record executive to talk to students about career opportunities, said Beth Cummings, acting director of fine arts for the School District.

The district plans to add the Music Industry Leadership 101 at a Polk high school as well, but Cummings said Superintendent of Schools Kathryn LeRoy hasn't announced which one.

In May, the foundation will put on a free, two-day leadership academy at McLaughlin. Students who complete the academy will receive a certificate signed by Usher.

Neither McLaughlin program brings extra cost for the district beyond staff and some equipment cost, Cummings said.

She said the superintendent wanted to provide some special offerings at McLaughlin, which received an F grade from the state last school year.

"We're very excited about it because we do see the positive possibilities for students at McLaughlin. It's going to be unique for our area."

Galbo said the main goal for his program is to improve McLaughlin as a whole.

"We are there for one reason: To contribute to the success of McLaughlin, and help them face challenges they are facing," he said.

While classes don't start until the fall, the district is holding a launch of both programs May 1 and 2 at McLaughlin.

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