I'm Celi Khanyile-Lynch, I graduated from LREI in 2009 where Nick O'Han was my teacher and mentor. He not only shaped my education at LREI but the education of many at the school. He previously served as Director of Education at LREI and principal of the upper school. As lead historian for the school, he's spoken on the school's history at numerous conferences, including The History of Education, The Municipal Arts Society, and The Cooper-Hewitt Museum as well as other professional associations.

In 2004, Nick established the Community Service Roundtable. Nick introduced me to the joy and impact of service when I joined the round table in 2007. A few fellow students and I would meet weekly to discuss issues that plagued our communities. These discussions translated directly into action. We would board a train to the last stop in East New York in the dry heat of early and late summer. Beyond abandoned buildings, broken glass crunching beneath our feet, Nick, in his canvas hat, would introduce us to the beauty of the neighborhood. He would guide us to East New York farm located behind a learning center, with satellite farms housed in empty lots nearby. Each of us grabbed a shovel as Nick introduced us to members of the community who spoke to him like family. Nick knew everyone and the deep seeded history of the place.

His teaching is so much a part of how we learned to learn at LREI. Many of us were lucky enough to take Nick's walking tour this morning, engaging with NYC history and our own memories of Greenwich Village. My former classmate Julie recently shared the significance of Nick's tours, which were incorporated into our history curricula; she recalls, "I didn’t really appreciate New York for what it was until taking Gotham. When I visit NY now and I’m walking around the Village, I always remember little tidbits of information, like that 75 1/2 Bedford is the narrowest house in NYC, and that you can tell the age of a brownstone just from looking at the banister!"

These simple moments are what inspired me to choose a career in public service. Nick holds an incredible power in the way that he has taught hundreds to engage in the world. Progressive education would not exist without individuals like Nick. As an alum and his student, I am thrilled to present Nick O'Han with this award of LREI Honorary Alumnus.