

The Governor's School for Entrepreneurs Summer Startup Program Announces 2024 Business Pitch Competition Winners

Transformational Program Hits Milestone, Surpassing 1,000 Graduates Since 2013

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, USA, July 18, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Some of Kentucky's most innovative high school students created business solutions for serious, real-world problems during the 2024 Governor's School for Entrepreneurs (GSE) Summer Startup program. Problems addressed ranged from food deserts to crash-test dummies to challenges faced by breast cancer patients.



Student entrepreneurs celebrate the successful completion of their business pitches during the GSE Summer Startup program.

GSE identifies, inspires and empowers Kentucky's future innovators with its three-week Summer Startup program for high schoolers. This year, 158 students completed the program.

The intensive, non-traditional learning experience develops entrepreneurial skills with lifelong impact. The goal is to help drive economic growth across the commonwealth by supporting the business dreams of students who have the drive and passion to be entrepreneurs and create jobs in Kentucky.

"Kentucky's youth are amazing and leading in such innovative ways," said Gov. Andy Beshear. "With so many great jobs coming to Kentucky it is exciting to see the next generation working so hard to help us continue our economic momentum. Congrats to everyone for their great ideas and hard work."

The program culminates with a thrilling Demo Day event, where each team pitches its business idea to a large audience and a panel of judges. The teams field questions from the judges, who deliberate and select the top three ideas.

The winning team receives \$1,000. Second place is awarded \$750, and the team placing third receives \$500. GSE Summer Startup held two sessions this summer, one on the campus of Thomas More University and the other at the University of Kentucky Gatton College of Business and Economics.

“The GSE Summer Startup experience really has changed so much for me,” said Carlie Hinken, a student from Rowan County High School, who was a winning team member. “I feel like I’ve learned so many skills that I can use further in life, not just in college but in my career. It’s been a great experience, a great program to be in.”



A student entrepreneur makes her business pitch with her team during GSE's Summer Startup program.

Winners, Thomas More Campus

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First Place: Oasis – An innovative mobile food bank that collaborates with local farmers to address food desert challenges in Appalachia.

Oasis Team:

Mason Atnip, McCracken County, Paducah Tilghman High School

Carlie Hinken, Rowan County, Rowan County High School

Saanvi Vinod, Jefferson County, Ballard High School

Cindy Wang, Fayette County, Paul Laurence Dunbar High School

Andrew Wilson, Martin County, Martin County High School

Second Place: Athena – Car crash test-dummy manufacturer solving the lack of female representation in crash testing with dummies representing different shapes, sizes and genders.

Athena Team:

Kashton Webster, Trimble County, Homeschool

Molly Miller, Muhlenberg County, Muhlenberg County High School

Rocco Rinaldi, Union County, Larry A. Ryle High School

Summer Brown, Breckinridge County,
Breckinridge County High School
Ananya Polepalli, Jefferson County,
DuPont Manual High School

Third Place: FloWays – Subscription box of menstrual products, with profits directed toward combating period poverty in developing nations, ensuring access to essential hygiene products for those in need.

FloWays Team:

Abigail Luking, Franklin County,
Frankfort High School

Bryanna Grider, Casey County, Casey
County High School

Zainab Haider, Oldham County, North
Oldham High School

Monica Tanner, Jefferson County,
Mercy Academy High School

Brylee Whitledge, Webster County, Webster County High School



GSE's Summer Startup program is an intensive three-week experience where Kentucky high school students develop lifelong entrepreneurial skills.

The judges at Thomas More University were Michael Thompson, founder of Michael Thompson Studios; Annie Brown, founder of Laughing Bees; and Cara Brooks, Economic Development Manager for Duke Energy.

Winners, University of Kentucky Gatton College Campus

First Place: Voluntera – Improves the connection between nonprofit organizations and teenage volunteers, simplifying the coordination of volunteer opportunities.

Voluntera Team:

Karlee Mellenkamp, Mason County, Saint Patrick School

Yash Pathak, Jefferson County, DuPont Manual High School

Caden Samuels, Bullitt County, Bullitt Central High School

Benjamin Walker, Fayette County, Paul Laurence Dunbar High School

Sylvia Wessel, Kenton County, Beechwood High School

Second Place: Rebound - Reducing recidivism rates among formerly incarcerated individuals by providing enhanced access to education and employment opportunities.

Rebound Team:

Ian Blackburn, Pike County, Pikeville High School
Kingston Dailey, Boone County, Covington Catholic High School
Brooks Wolfe, McCracken County, McCracken County High School
Sadie Young, Taylor County, Taylor County High School

Third Place: Urban Roots - Professional installation of green roofs and urban gardens, aimed at helping local businesses reduce energy costs and improve access to green spaces in urban areas.

Urban Roots Team:

Logan Fett, Fayette County, Lafayette High School
Aubrey Glass, Metcalfe County, Metcalfe County High School
Brenna Jackson, Franklin County, Western Hills High School
Brayden Johnson, Edmonson County, Edmonson County High School
Sophia Spier, Calloway County, Murray High School

Judges for the University of Kentucky session were Hope Zoeller, founder, Hope for Leaders; Hunter Porter, senior associate, BC Wood Properties; Warren Nash, executive director, Von Allmen Center for Entrepreneurship.

“The skills developed and connections made during GSE Summer Startup provide meaningful and lasting benefits for the students and the entire state. We make sure they know Kentucky is here to support their enterprises and encourage them to base their businesses in the commonwealth,” said Anne Jewell, president and CEO of GSE. “At least 70 businesses have been launched by GSE graduates in the Bluegrass, so we know there’s a return on the investment in Kentucky’s future.”

To date, more than 1,000 high school students have graduated from GSE’s Summer Startup program since it began in 2013. Graduates qualify for millions of dollars in scholarships at colleges and universities across Kentucky. Dozens of businesses have been launched in Kentucky by GSE graduates and several patents have been filed.

All Kentucky high school students in Grades 9, 10, and 11 can apply for the Summer Startup program. GSE does not consider grade-point-average or test scores in its application, and the program is free for selected students thanks to generous funding from the state, and donations from other public and private supporters. The application for GSE’s 2025 Summer Startup program opens later this fall at kentuckygse.com

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