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Contact: Anne Jewell
media@kentuckygse.com
502-592-0520

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

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – 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.

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.”

Session One Winners, Thomas More Campus

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

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.

Session Two Winners, University of Kentucky 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 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 www.kentuckygse.com

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The Governor's School for Entrepreneurs

The Governor's School for Entrepreneurs (GSE) identifies, inspires, and empowers Kentucky's future innovators. GSE's Summer Startup program develops entrepreneurial skills in high school students and qualifies them for college scholarships. GSE's Collegiate Pitch program is Kentucky's largest intercollegiate pitch competition, offering thousands of dollars in prizes. GSE alums have launched more than 70 businesses in Kentucky and filed for multiple patents. Because of strong partnerships with entities like the Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet and the Cabinet for Economic Development, along with private and public supporters, GSE programs are free for selected student entrepreneurs. For more information, visit kentuckygse.com.

GSE
Summer Startup