

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Governor's School for Entrepreneurs Summer Startup Program Announces 2025 Business Pitch Competition Winners

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Some of Kentucky's most innovative high school students created business solutions for real-world problems and acquired skills that will serve them for a lifetime during the 2025 Governor's School for Entrepreneurs (GSE) Summer Startup Program. Students tackled challenges ranging from mental health to lithium-ion battery disposal to heart failure detection. GSE identifies, inspires, and empowers Kentucky's future innovators through its three-week Summer Startup program for high schoolers.

This year, 159 students completed the program in the largest single session in program history, held at the University of Kentucky Gatton College of Business and Economics June 22 - July 13. The intensive, hands-on experience builds entrepreneurial skills with lifelong impact — helping drive economic growth across the commonwealth by supporting the dreams of students passionate about creating jobs and businesses here in Kentucky.

“As an education-first administration, I am always excited to see what Kentucky's talented high school entrepreneurs come up with each year,” said Gov. Andy Beshear. “Many past GSE participants have businesses today that grew from their experiences at this summer program. In just three short weeks, these students make connections and gain confidence that will follow them throughout their lives, and Team Kentucky is proud to support this investment in their future and the future of our commonwealth.”

The program culminates with an exciting Pitch Fest – this year expanded into two days to accommodate the largest session in program history – where each team presents its business idea to a live audience and a panel of judges. The 32 teams were divided into Leagues, the Hills League and the Hollers League, with the Hills pitching Saturday and the Hollers on Sunday. The top three teams are selected and awarded cash prizes: \$1,000 for first place, \$750 for second, and \$500 for third.

2025 Pitch Fest Winners

Hills League Winners - Saturday

First Place: Life Patch – An adhesive patch that monitors heart fluid buildup to improve efficiencies in heart failure detection.

Team Members:	Cyrus Carver	Homeschool (Hopkins County)
	Hamza Iqbal	Sayre School (Fayette)
	Jacob Sipple	Beechwood High School (Kenton)
	Wesley Tonn	North Oldham High School (Oldham)
	Anvika Vangala	duPont Manual High School (Jefferson)

Second Place: Li-ON – Solving improper disposal of lithium-ion batteries by removing them before they go to landfills.

Team Members:	Charlie Ma	Paul Laurence Dunbar High School (Fayette)
	Cade Rousey	Casey County High School (Casey)
	Misha Badrinath	Ballard High School (Jefferson)
	Nate Johnston	Murray High School (Calloway)
	Parker Davis	Taylor County High School (Taylor)

Third Place: VIBZ – Solving social isolation in teenagers in rural towns by providing gathering spaces.

Team Members:	Gaven Lakes	Bullitt Central High School (Bullitt)
	Sean Evans	Christian Academy of Louisville High School (Jefferson)
	Koen Hensley	Rose Hill Christian School (Boyd)
	Graciela Tovar	Bryan Station High School (Fayette)
	Madelyn Vargas	Madisonville North Hopkins High School (Hopkins)

Hollers League Winners - Sunday

First Place: Ever-Safe – A safety bracelet solving exploitation and violence against teenage girls.

Team members:	Alisyn Caldwell	Hazard High School (Perry)
	Lacey Burnley	Ballard Memorial High School (Ballard)
	Lucia Isenhardt	Craft Academy (Oldham)
	Savannah Dunaway	Assumption High School (Jefferson)
	James-Anna Soto	Glasgow High School (Barren)

Second Place: Good Gear – Solving buyer's regret in sports goods with a customized AI-powered survey.

Team members:	Kristopher Gibson	Clay County High School (Clay)
	Lily Hoang	Sacred Heart Academy (Jefferson)
	Noah Bailey	Caldwell County High School (Caldwell)
	Thomas Mann	Walton-Verona High School (Grant)
	Caris Taylor	Logan County High School (Logan)

Third Place: Knot a Problem – A magnetic jewelry box that prevents tangled jewelry while traveling.

Team members:	Addison Reed	Lafayette High School (Fayette)
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Alfredo Chagua	duPont Manual High (Jefferson)
Kady Boaz	Hickman County High School (Hickman)
Panida Chetawatee	Murray High School (Calloway)
Nina Zurad	Larry A. Ryle High School (Boone)

“GSE has changed my whole perspective on life, and it's changed my life for the better,” said James-Anna Soto, a Glasgow High School student from Barren County and member of the Ever-Safe team. “GSE taught me lifelong skills I'll bring with me every day. I don't know where I'd be without GSE.”

The 2025 Pitch Fest judges on Saturday were: Logan Jones, Partner and Co-Host at Middle Tech and Co-Founder of DevelopLex; Ameet Patel, Managing Principal and Founding Member at Thoroughbread Hospitality; Dana Bowers; CEO-Founder of Venminder; and Hunter Porter, VP of Leasing at BC Wood Properties and Principal Broker at True Line Real Estate. Sunday's judges were: Kezia Ramsey, Investment Officer at Monticello Banking Company; Marc Schuler, Tax Senior Manager at EY; LaDaya Kami Owens, Human Resources Business Partner at Home of the Innocents; and David Hasler, Founder and President at Breakthrough Solutions Consulting.

“The skills developed and connections made during GSE Summer Startup provide meaningful, lasting benefits for the students and for the entire state,” said Anne Jewell, president and CEO of GSE. “We make sure they know Kentucky is here to support their enterprises and encourage them to grow their businesses in the commonwealth.”

Since its first year in 2013, GSE Summer Startup has graduated 1,258 high school students from more than 100 counties. Graduates have launched dozens of businesses in Kentucky and even filed patents. Program graduates are also eligible for scholarships at Kentucky colleges and universities.

GSE and the University of Kentucky Gatton College of Business and Economics (UK Gatton) recently announced a three-year partnership that includes UK Gatton hosting the GSE Summer Startup program through 2027.

All Kentucky students in grades 9–11 are eligible to apply for the Summer Startup program. GSE does not consider GPA or test scores, and the program is free for all selected students thanks to funding from the state and generous public and private donors. The application for GSE's 2026 Summer Startup program opens later this fall at kentuckygse.com.

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. 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.