



20 student teams working to make their mark on the world via A.H. Nickless Innovation Award projects

Students from districts in Bay, Midland and Saginaw counties participating in 13th annual STEM competition; in April, three teams will win a share of up to \$77,500 in school STEM education grants and student scholarships

UNIVERSITY CENTER, MICH., Jan. 13, 2026 – The 20 teams participating in the 2025-26 [A.H. Nickless Innovation Award](#) are hard at work on their respective projects, with project reports due in late March and a day of live project presentations scheduled for late April at Saginaw Valley State University.

Presented by the Nickless Family Charitable Foundation, the A.H. Nickless Innovation Award is an annual competition for high school students ages 13 to 18 in Bay, Midland, Saginaw and Tuscola counties. Its goal is to inspire passion for STEM subjects and challenge students to work in teams to think innovatively and develop solutions to problems affecting the world. Topics typically include – but are not limited to – issues related to alternative energy, healthcare, science, technology or life sciences.

The 20 team projects from the five participating schools are as follows:

Herbert Henry Dow High School in Midland (Midland Public Schools), **two teams:**

- Biodegradable, antimicrobial alginate-based absorbent pads for meat packaging to reduce plastic waste and improve food safety
- Low-cost micromobility vehicle kit with additive manufacturing to scale and accelerate adoption of sustainable urban transit

Freeland High School (Freeland Community School District), **three teams:**

- Affordable, compact system that detects and shares the location of lost individuals
- Modular attachment system of solar panels and wind turbines for charging small- to medium-sized devices
- Robotic vehicular pacing device to mentor novice runners at a consistent speed in unique environments for any distance

John Glenn High School in Bay City (Bangor Township Schools), **one team:**

- Sensor that detects PFAS in private water wells and sends an alert to the well owner

Midland High School (Midland Public Schools), **one team:**

- Safety precautions at intersections to protect drivers from crashing if one cannot physically stop at an intersection

Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy (Saginaw Public School District), **13 teams:**

- Detector and app to prevent carbon monoxide and volatile organic compound deaths/poisonings
- Methods and products to make 3D printing more environmentally friendly through recycling and biodegradable products



- Tools to make daily tasks easier for people with dexterity disabilities
- Performance stocking designed to increase blood flow, supporting comfort and peak performance for sports
- Add-on system that detects black ice through thermal, non-contact sensors and alerts drivers to slow down
- Solution for anterior cruciate ligament tears beyond traditional methods
- 3D-printed compatible spacer to assist with inhaler use and reduce infection rates
- Biodegradable alternatives to single-use medical equipment to improve human and environmental health
- Retrofit, reusable washing-machine filter with progressive mesh layers that can decrease microplastics in waterways
- Reusable, environmentally friendly animal-tracking devices enabled by robotics
- Device that detects strokes, calls a chosen contact with prerecorded messages, produces soothing sounds and vibrations, and guides the victim and bystanders
- Resources for breast cancer patients to make their difficult situation less stressful
- Syringes that lock to prevent multiple uses of a needle, preventing bloodborne pathogens from spreading

During Phase One of the competition in September and October, each team identified a problem and submitted a two-page abstract proposing a project to address it. Each team that advanced to Phase Two received a \$1,000 grant with which to conduct its research and develop a viable solution between November and March.

Teams must submit their Phase Two project reports by 4 p.m. EDT on March 31 and then will deliver 10-minute presentations on their projects before a panel of judges during a daylong public event on April 25 in [Alan W. Ott Auditorium in SVSU's Gilbertson Hall](#). Admission is free and open to the public. The exact start time for the event will be announced closer to April 25; watch the Newsroom page at ahninnovationaward.com for details.

At the conclusion of the April 25 event, up to \$42,500 in scholarships for students on the winning teams and an additional \$35,000 in STEM education grants for the winning teams' schools will be awarded:

- **First place** will receive up to five **\$5,000 scholarships** for student team members and a **\$20,000 grant** for the school.
- **Second place** will receive up to five **\$2,500 scholarships** for student team members and a **\$10,000 grant** for the school.
- **Third place** will receive up to five **\$1,000 scholarships** for student team members and a **\$5,000 grant** for the school.



Fostering student innovation for more than a decade

The 2025-26 competition marks the 13th year of the A.H. Nickless Innovation Award. Since the first competition in 2013-14, \$763,500 has been awarded to participants and their schools, including \$378,500 in student scholarships and \$385,000 in STEM education grants. In all, more than 550 students developed and presented a total of nearly 180 team projects in Phase Two of the competition during the competition's first 12 years.

About the A.H. Nickless Innovation Award

The A.H. Nickless Innovation Award was created by the Nickless Family Charitable Foundation to honor the memory of the late Arthur H. Nickless, a local innovator and owner of Wolverine Telephone Company. With a goal of inspiring passion for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), the competition is open to high school students in Bay, Midland, Saginaw and Tuscola counties and awards up to \$77,500 per year in scholarships to students and STEM grants to schools. A total of more than \$760,000 has been awarded since the first competition in 2013-14. For more information, visit ahninnovationaward.com.