



14th annual A.H. Nickless Innovation Award begins, with a share of up to \$77,500 in scholarships and grants at stake

During Phase One of high school STEM competition, students register, form teams and submit project proposals for consideration

UNIVERSITY CENTER, MICH., Aug. 19, 2026 – After awarding more than \$815,000 in scholarships and grants to local students and schools in its first 13 years, the annual A.H. Nickless Innovation Award competition officially has kicked off for the 2026-27 academic year.

Seeking to inspire passion for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects and challenge students to work in teams, think innovatively and develop solutions to problems impacting the world, the award is an annual competition for high school students ages 13 to 18 in Bay, Midland, Saginaw and Tuscola counties. Teams' project topics typically include – but are not limited to – alternative energy, healthcare, science, technology and life sciences.

Phase One of the competition began Aug. 17 and ends at 4 p.m. EDT Oct. 9. Prospective participants can find more information about the competition, read the rules and regulations, download the abstract template, and register at ahninnovationaward.com.

Notable for 2026-27 is a new timeline for Phase One of the competition, which began and will end earlier than ever – both to better align with area schools' calendars and to provide the teams that advance to Phase Two additional time to develop their projects compared to past years.

During Phase One, students register for the competition and form teams; each team must identify a problem and submit a two-page abstract describing its proposed project to address that problem. A panel of regional experts will then select up to 20 teams to continue in the competition. Each team that advances will be granted \$1,000 with which to conduct its research and develop a viable solution during Phase Two, which lasts until the March 31, 2027, project submission deadline. On Saturday, April 24, 2027, the teams will present their projects during a daylong public event at Saginaw Valley State University.

Members of the three winning teams will receive scholarships, and each of those teams' schools will receive a STEM education grant. Available prizes total \$77,500 annually and are awarded as follows:

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



2025-26 competition recap

For 2025-26, [the winning teams, which earned a combined total of \\$53,000 in scholarships for the student team members and STEM education grants for their schools](#), were:

- **First place** – Amped Innovators from **Herbert Henry Dow High School** (Midland Public Schools): Team Leader Sean Park and teammate Matthew Lee, coached by parent Richard Park and mentored by Grace Shin, created SCOUT (Small Compact Operational Utility Transport), a modular, remotely operated equipment transport and deployment platform designed for hazardous, high-demand environments.
- **Second place** – The Algeneers, also from **Herbert Henry Dow High School**: Team Leader Emma Huang and teammate Louis Huang, coached by parent Wenyi Huang, created AlgFilm – a dual-network crosslinked alginate superabsorbent film – as a biodegradable, antimicrobial alternative to petroleum-based meat-packaging pads.
- **Third place** – MicroGuard from **Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy (SASA)** (Saginaw Public School District): Team Leader Akshara Kanmanthreddy and teammates Matlyn Miller and Diya Ramakrishnan, coached by SASA teacher Clara Wagner, created a retrofittable, reusable washing-machine filter with progressive mesh layers that can decrease microplastics in waterways.

Other schools represented in the 2025-26 competition were **Freeland High School** (Freeland Community School District), **John Glenn High School** in Bay City (Bangor Township Schools) and **Midland High School** (Midland Public Schools).

Fostering student innovation for more than a decade

The 2026-27 competition marks the 14th year of the A.H. Nickless Innovation Award. Since the first competition in 2013-14, \$816,500 has been awarded to participants and their schools, including \$396,500 in student scholarships and \$420,000 in STEM education grants. In all, more than 625 students developed and presented a total of nearly 200 team projects in Phase Two of the competition during its first 13 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 \$815,000 has been awarded since the first competition in 2013-14. For more information, visit ahninnovationaward.com.