



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**SXSW EDU® Announces Winners of the 2025 Launch Startup Competition  
and Student Impact Challenge**

**March 5, 2025 // Austin, Texas** – South by Southwest EDU® Conference & Festival is thrilled to announce the winners of its 2025 [Launch Startup Competition](#) and [Student Impact Challenge](#). They were announced at the Launch Spotlight and the Student Impact Ice Cream Social, respectively. **College Contact** was presented with the Launch Startup Competition Grand Prize Award, and **Spark** was named the Student Impact Challenge winner.

For 14 years, the **Launch Startup Competition** has provided a forum for early-stage startups to pitch emerging ideas, products, and services to a cohort of industry leaders, early adopters, investors, and educators. During this year's event, *presented by the Walton Family Foundation*, participants were given the chance to showcase their ideas in front of a panel of distinguished judges, including **Amelia Kelly**, CTO of SoapBox Labs, **John Gamba**, Entrepreneur in Residence at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, **Katie Fang**, CEO of SchoolLinks, and **Missy Testerman**, 2024 National Teacher of the Year.

After hearing from the 7 finalists, the judges awarded [College Contact](#) based in Austin, TX with the **Grand-Prize Launch Award** for its focus on helping students become college and career-ready through their near-peer mentorship model. The following awards were also announced as part of the Launch Startup Competition:

- **Impact Award:** This honor, recognizing the potential to impact student learning based on the science of learning, was given to [Making Space](#), based in Los Angeles, CA for its work to create new and improved pathways to employment and career advancement, ensuring Disabled professionals have equitable access to meaningful careers.
- **Community Choice Award:** This award, which acknowledges the finalist that received the most votes from the audience during SXSW EDU, was presented to [Bili](#), based in Houston, TX, which empowers families and educators with tools that make bilingualism a natural and exciting part of kids' lives and help them maintain a strong connection to their heritage languages and cultures.

“This award is a powerful recognition of the impact we’re making—connecting hundreds of thousands of students with mentors who help them see and shape their futures,” said **Sophie Smith** and **Leah Guesman**, co-founders of College Contact. “What excites us most is the hope and ambition we see in our high school and undergraduate students every day. Winning this competition validates that same hope among educators, investors, and the broader community, reinforcing the bright future ahead.”

"This is a pivotal moment in education where we must do good while doing well. Supporting entrepreneurs in building strong business fundamentals—from early stage to sustainability, scalability, and ultimately exit—is critical," said **John Gamba**, Entrepreneur in Residence at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, who served as a judge in the competition.

In addition, SXSW EDU proudly awarded the **Student Impact Challenge**, presented by *The Allstate Foundation*, to **Spark**, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as this year’s winner. Spark promises to revolutionize support for autistic children by offering personalized therapy supplements, a wealth of resources, and interactive tools designed to empower caregivers. In addition **Swype AI** and **Household Appliances Innovation Powered by Solar** were recognized as the first and second runner-ups respectively.

This year, the Student Impact Challenge expands from its previous year to focus on how students can solve pressing social, economic, and environmental problems facing the world today. The winner was chosen by judges **Kate Nack**, Vice President, The Allstate Foundation & Social Impact, **Juanita Soranno**, Head of Impact at Cengage Group, **Rohit Srinivasan**, Founder of Trashbots and former winner of the Student Startup Competition, and **Tiana Day**, Founder and Executive Director of Youth Advocates for Change.

“I’m so excited and honored to receive this incredible award,” said **Nandana Menon**, founder of Spark. “Winning the Student Impact Challenge will lead me to so many more opportunities to help children all along the way. This is really going to set up Spark for more success.”

To learn more about the competition programming at SXSW EDU, visit <https://www.sxswedu.com/competitions/>.

#### **About SXSW EDU:**

The SXSW EDU® Conference & Festival is a reflection of the world’s most critical social issues as seen through the lens of education. This year’s event will bring together the learner, the practitioner, the entrepreneur, and the visionary to share their groundbreaking stories, tackle complex issues, and build reimagined paths forward. As a community of diverse people who are united around a like-minded vision for the future, SXSW EDU serves as a place for attendees to renew their purpose in practice from both a personal and professional perspective. It is a place to reinforce the core principles of teaching and learning as well as an opportunity to express your creativity and passion for education. Join the passionate and innovative community at SXSW EDU, March 3-6, 2025.

For more information, please visit [sxswedu.com](http://sxswedu.com).

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