



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **SUCCESS COMES IN ALL SIZES: TECH-SAVVY TEENS TEAM UP WITH SMALL BUSINESSES & DELIVER GIANT-SIZE SOLUTIONS DURING TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION COMPETITION**

*The I3 Competition Provides A Forum For Students To Collaborate With Small Business Owners & To Use Their Talents To Solve Real Life Business Issues*

**Newark, NJ, August 24, 2021** — The [Institute For Entrepreneurial Leadership](https://www.weareifel.org/) (IFEL) today recognized the winners of the 2021 [I3 Competition](#), a technology and innovation competition created by students of the Greenwich High School South Asian Heritage Club, Greenwich, Connecticut. Recognizing the challenge that many small business owners have faced with converting to e-commerce and driving sales through online channels, GHS South Asian Heritage Club & I3 Co-Presidents, Veda Swaminathan and Aarya Dhru, launched the I3 Competition as a way of getting students to take action to address a problem affecting many communities.

Veda Swaminathan stated, "The competition is incredibly important to me and the community, and it serves as a bridge between the vast amount of talent high school students have and the small business community that has been struggling due to the pandemic for over a year." She continued, "A lot of small businesses have been struggling to adapt to the changes in market structures, and many have difficulty getting access to the capital and resources they need to continue with their ventures. High school students have grown up in the digital age and are constantly adapting and learning the new components of technology that can benefit small businesses.

The organizers partnered with IFEL to leverage the organization's long history with pitch competitions and small business volunteerism programs. In addition, the objectives of the I3 Competition align with the goals of the Small Businesses Need Us initiative launched by IFEL in 2020 in response to the devastation felt by small businesses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. IFEL Co-founder & CEO Jill Johnson, stated, "IFEL was very excited to be part of this innovative initiative to engage students in solving problems that impact their communities. The level of sophistication and ingenuity displayed by the students was

impressive and inspirational. It was heart-warming to see how quickly relationships formed between the students and the business owners leaving a lasting impression on everyone involved. ”

IFEL matched high school student teams with business owners led by black entrepreneurs from the IFEL community. Student teams had roughly two months to meet with the business, implement their solutions, and evaluate the impact of their problem-solving skills on the business. The team of Sofia Krause, Devan Fauser and Field Ogilvy, students from Greenwich High School, won the top prize of \$1,000 for their development of a social media platform on TikTok and Instagram for [Ebaata Skincare](#), a luxury skincare brand based in Brooklyn, N.Y. Team Leader Sofia Krause stated, “I highly recommend that you take part in this competition if you have the chance. It is such an amazing way for students to be more active members of their communities. This competition fosters real-life skills such as teamwork and dedication, and it allows students the experience of developing and growing a real-world business.”

Ebaata Skincare CEO Phumelele Kunene stated, “The I3 Competition is an effective way to encourage students to implement their knowledge and to support small businesses. I worked collaboratively with the team on thematic planning for videos. The students edited the videos and posted them on TikTok. I now view TikTok as easy. This was a great experience and benefit to my company, and I’m thrilled my team won.”

Middle school teams also had the opportunity to immerse themselves into the world of business by working to resolve issues which are front and center in today’s business climate. The winning team from Eastern Middle School - Brooke Cumberland, YeonWoo Kook, Charlotte Marcussen and Isabelle Heflin - addressed the topic of mental health with a concept pitch on free self-care service for teenagers. The team won a \$250 prize.

#### ABOUT THE I3 COMPETITION

The I3 Competition was founded on the ideas of community, connectivity, and communication. Our hope is that the students will be introduced to the rich and vibrant community of local entrepreneurs and connect this experience to the future of those businesses by providing a beneficial business tool and by staying in communication with the businesses after the competition. The competition is also a way for the students to receive guidance and to give guidance. While dedicated staff provide mentorship to the teams, we hope that the entrepreneurial community who are part of this competition will impart life knowledge and wisdom to the students.. Visit [www.i3competition.com](http://www.i3competition.com).

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

Founded in 2002, the [Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership](https://www.weareifel.org) (IFEL) is an independent, not-for-profit organization that supports economic development through entrepreneurship. Our vision is to eliminate barriers to entrepreneurial and small business success for main street businesses, women, and people of color, enabling them to generate wealth for themselves and the communities in which they live. Helping entrepreneurs gain access to the knowledge, networks and capital needed for business success are benchmarks of IFEL programming, expertly created to help entrepreneurs strengthen the core of their businesses, to connect them to networks of power and influence and to break down barriers that limit access to capital. For more information, visit us at <https://www.weareifel.org>.

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