Submissions open for 3M's nationwide middle school science competition

Finalists will receive one-to-one mentorship with a 3M scientist, national recognition, and a chance to win top prize: $25,000 and title of "America's Top Young Scientist"

ST. PAUL, Minn. and Charlotte, N.C., Jan. 21, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- 3M (@3M) and Discovery Education today announced that the 2026 3M Young Scientist Challenge (#YoungScientist) is now open to entries. The annual 3M Young Scientist Challenge is the nation's premier middle school science competition.

"Every year, the 3M Young Scientist Challenge showcases what's possible when students combine imagination with scientific thinking," said Dr. John Banovetz, chief technology officer, 3M. "We're proud to support a program that helps young learners gain confidence, explore new possibilities, and imagine a brighter future."

Challenge details

The 3M Young Scientist Challenge invites students in grades 5-8 to use science to solve everyday problems and improve the world around them.
Students compete for an exclusive mentorship with a 3M scientist, a $25,000 grand prize, and the chance to earn the title of "America's Top Young Scientist."
The contest will name 10 finalists, four honorable mentions, and up to 51 state merit winners nationwide and in Washington, D.C.
Competition entries are accepted at YoungScientistLab.com until the deadline on April 30, 2026.

How to enter

To enter, students in grades 5-8 submit a brief video explaining their original idea to solve an everyday problem using science.
Submissions are evaluated for their communication skills, creativity, and scientific knowledge.
Categories include robotics, home improvement, automotive, safety, AR/VR, and climate technology.

Next steps

Mentorship: In June 2026, 10 finalists will be chosen to participate in an exclusive summer mentorship program, during which they will work closely with and learn from a 3M scientist.
Final event: Each finalist will then compete in the final event at the 3M Innovation Center in St. Paul, Minn., Oct. 12-14, 2026. This event will include hands-on challenges, presentations, live judging, and the grand prize winner announcement.

Previous winners

Previous challenge finalists and 3M scientists have collaborated to create solutions for a wide variety of real-world problems, including food safety, cybersecurity, coral reef health, water conservation, alternative energy sources, energy consumption, air pollution, transportation efficiency, and many more.
The 2025 winner – 13-year-old Kevin Tang from Hacienda Heights, California – created a novel fall detection device that can accelerate emergency responses to falls among older adults at home, even in the dark. Kevin created an algorithm that analyzes video input to identify falls and triggers alerts to loved ones via a smart phone application. His new solution advances current offerings on the market through the ability to capture imagery at night and provide around-the-clock monitoring. The device can also detect irregular movements while the individual is walking, which could be a symptom of a stroke.

Now in its 19th year, the 3M Young Scientist Challenge continues to inspire and challenge middle school students to think creatively and apply the power of STEM to discover real-world solutions. America's Top Young Scientists have given TED Talks, filed patents, founded nonprofits, made the Forbes 30 Under 30 list, and exhibited at the White House Science Fair. These young innovators have also been named TIME Magazine's first Kid of the Year, featured in The New York Times Magazine, Forbes, and Business Insider, and appeared on national television programs such as Good Morning America, The Kelly Clarkson Show, and more. In addition, a 3M Young Scientist Challenge Alumni Network was formed in fall 2022 and

includes more than 100 former challenge finalists, winners, and mentors who take part in networking opportunities and more.

"All across the United States are powerful young minds with incredible ideas. The3M Young Scientist Challenge offers middle school students an unparalleled opportunity to turn creative ideas into world-changing solutions," said Catherine Dunlop, senior vice president of corporate partnerships at Discovery Education. "With a blend of innovation, mentorship, hands-on learning, and creation, this challenge offers students a unique opportunity to deepen science skills and make an impact on everyday lives."

To learn more about the 3M Young Scientist Challenge, including entry details, and to find supporting resources, visit YoungScientistLab.com.

About 3M
3M (NYSE: MMM) is focused on transforming industries around the world by applying science and creating innovative, customer-focused solutions. Our multi-disciplinary team is working to solve tough customer problems by leveraging diverse technology platforms, differentiated capabilities, global footprint, and operational excellence. Discover how 3M is shaping the future at 3M.com/news.

About Discovery Education
Discovery Education is the worldwide edtech leader whose state-of-the-art, PreK-12 digital solutions help educators engage all students and support academic achievement. Through award-winning multimedia content, instructional supports, and innovative classroom tools that are effective, engaging, and easy to use, Discovery Education enables educators to deliver powerful learning experiences in 45% of U.S. K-12 schools and across 100+ countries and territories. Through partnerships with districts, states, and trusted organizations, Discovery Education empowers teachers with essential solutions that inspire curiosity, build confidence, and accelerate learning. Learn more at www.discoveryeducation.com.

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