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**Surprise Teams Roll Across Kansas City to Name Top 20 Finalists in
Burns & McDonnell Battle of the Brains STEM Competition**

KANSAS CITY, Missouri — Cheers, banners and smiles filled school courtyards and auditoriums across the Kansas City region as Burns & McDonnell and Science City teams rolled out the red carpet to surprise students and teachers as Top 20 finalists in this year's [Burns & McDonnell Battle of the Brains](#) K-12 STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) competition.

On Wednesday, surprise teams followed colorful mobile billboard sign trucks and traveled across the region to deliver the news in person. Union Station President and CEO [George Guastello](#) and Burns & McDonnell Chair and CEO [Leslie Duke](#) were on hand to give students high-fives and congratulate them on their outstanding proposals.

“Top 20 day is always incredible,” said Duke. “Getting to see the excitement on students’ faces as they realize their STEM ideas made the Top 20 is exactly what Battle of the Brains is all about.”

STEM advocate, civil astronaut and former NASA rocket scientist [Aisha Bowe](#) also joined the surprise crews. In April 2025 Bowe flew on Blue Origin’s NS-31 mission. During the flight, she conducted groundbreaking research on how crops grow in microgravity.

The 2025-26 Burns & McDonnell Battle of the Brains competition engaged more than 6,700 students from 250 schools across 48 school districts. More than 710 entries were reviewed by STEM professionals from Burns & McDonnell and Science City, highlighting bold ideas to inspire curiosity, creativity and meaningful learning for visitors of all ages.

These are the Top 20 finalist teams along with their exhibit title:

- **Blue Springs South High School**, Blue Springs School District, “Going Nuclear”
- **Brittany Hill Middle School**, Blue Springs School District, “Listen hEAR”
- **Clinton County Middle School**, Clinton County R3, “Autoverse: The Science of Cars”
- **Clinton Middle School**, Clinton School District, “Disaster Strikes”
- **Cottonwood Point Elementary School**, Blue Valley Schools, “Sound All Around”

- **EPiC Elementary School**, Liberty Public Schools, “Erosion Expedition”
- **Graden Elementary School**, Park Hill School District, “Subterranean Secrets”
- **Heartland Elementary School**, Blue Valley Schools, “It’s a Hard Rock Life”
- **Horizon Elementary School**, Smithville School District, “Poop: There It Is!”
- **Indian Woods Middle School**, Shawnee Mission School District, “Symphonic Symphony”
- **Ingels Elementary School**, Hickman Mills C-1 Schools, “Inside Out”
- **McCarter Elementary School**, Topeka Public Schools, “Science of the Home”
- **Mize Elementary School**, USD 232, “Time to Drive Deeper”
- **Nativity Parish School**, Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, “Nature Knows Best: The Science of Biomimicry”
- **Olathe East High School**, Olathe Public Schools, “Brainy Bugs”
- **Olathe North High School**, Olathe Public Schools, “Magical Microbes: It's a SMALL World”
- **Oxford Middle School**, Blue Valley Schools, “Super Adaptors”
- **Sni-A-Bar Elementary School**, Grain Valley Schools, “Out of This World”
- **Sunset Valley Elementary School**, Lee’s Summit R-7 Schools, “What a Site!”
- **Tonganoxie Middle School**, Tonganoxie USD 464, “Mechanical Madness: The Science of Cars”

\$157,500 in grants will be shared among schools with finalist teams to support STEM learning. One team will earn the grand prize: a \$50,000 grant and the opportunity to collaborate with Burns & McDonnell and Science City professionals to develop a permanent exhibit valued at more than \$1 million at Science City. The winning proposal will be revealed Feb. 4 at Union Station.

“Battle of the Brains brings our community into the creative process at Science City, and in a few weeks we’ll celebrate the next student idea to inspire visitors for years to come,” Guastello said.

Since 2011, the Burns & McDonnell Battle of the Brains competition has offered a unique model for student engagement connecting more than 45,000 students to hands-on STEM learning and helping inspire eight Science City exhibits, including [Light Lab](#), which opened in May 2025.

Battle of the Brains is just one of the many [STEM-focused initiatives](#) supported by the Burns & McDonnell Foundation. Other programs include a national STEM grant program, high school job shadows, student camps and additional partnerships with science centers.



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About Burns & McDonnell

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About Science City

Centrally located in the heart of Kansas City and part of the historic and acclaimed Union Station complex, Science City boasts more than 325 interactive and static exhibits covering nearly 100,000 sq. ft. of inside and outdoor space. Internationally awarded for “Visitor Experience” by ASTC and regionally awarded “Favorite Family Friendly Attraction” by Visit KC Visitors Choice Awards, Science City powered by Burns & McDonnell is named one of the country’s TOP 25 science centers. Annually, it educates and entertains hundreds of thousands of science-thirsty children of all ages. Kansas City’s Science Center is THE place for inquisitive young minds to create, explore, and experiment with the BIG world of science through hands-on learning and non-stop fun.

Visit SCIENCECITY.COM for details.