Small founders. Big courage.

Twenty school-aged entrepreneurs put their ideas before real investors. The biggest lesson was having the courage to stand up and be heard.

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A young founder pitches to business owners, with peers and families watching.

Standing in front of an audience and asking someone to believe in your idea takes courage. Asking them to invest their own money takes even more. At MiniBoss Business School's annual Startup Forum, 20 school-aged entrepreneurs took on both challenges.

In front of their peers, families and a panel of experienced business owners, the students pitched businesses they had developed from scratch. Their ideas included books, energy drinks and games. Each had to explain what they were creating, how it could make money and why an investor should help fund its development.

It was a Shark Tank-style experience with young founders at the centre. The products were varied, but the challenge was shared: stand up, make your case and be ready for the questions that follow.

For children still at school, that is a substantial thing to ask. Presenting a project to a teacher is one experience. Presenting a business to people who could invest their own money in it brings a different kind of responsibility.

The forum followed a year of weekend classes at MiniBoss. Throughout the year, students learned how to come up with an idea and develop a business around it. By October, they had to bring that work together in a pitch that others could understand and assess.

An idea might begin with something a child enjoys, a problem they have noticed or a product they wish existed. Building a business around it means considering more than whether the idea sounds good. It means thinking about who would buy it and how it could become commercially viable.

Who is the customer? What makes the product useful or appealing? What will it cost to develop? What could someone reasonably pay for it? These are questions experienced founders work through too. For the MiniBoss students, they were part of learning to connect imagination with practical decisions.

The pitch gave that learning a purpose. Students had to explain their business plans and seek seed funding to develop their ideas. They needed to show the panel that there was thinking behind the product, as well as enthusiasm for bringing it to life.

Then came the questions. Preparing a presentation is one challenge; responding to an experienced business leader is another. Students had to listen carefully, consider what was being asked and explain their thinking while the audience watched.

An idea worth backing





Presenting an idea, then discussing it with the panel.





Personalised eyewear and a forum that puts young ideas in the spotlight.

There is no way to prepare a script for every possible question. That is part of what makes the experience valuable. A founder needs to understand an idea well enough to discuss it beyond the words in a presentation, and to keep going when the conversation takes an unexpected turn.

Doing that in front of family and friends adds another layer of pressure. These are people the students know, watching as they put their own work forward for scrutiny. It takes courage to begin and composure to stay with it.

For one parent, the change in her daughter was already clear. "MiniBoss has given her so much confidence and the courage she has shown has been inspiring," she said. Her comment captures an outcome that is harder to measure than funding, but just as meaningful to a family watching a child grow.

The 2025 winner received funding to develop a range of decorative charms for glasses. Similar in concept to the small charms people add to Crocs, the product offered a way to personalise eyewear and make an everyday item feel more individual.

It was an idea that could be explained simply: give people another way to express themselves through something they wear. Behind that simple concept was the work of developing it into a business proposition and presenting it to potential investors.

The investment gave the student an opportunity to take the product into further development. Experienced business owners had heard her pitch and seen enough potential to back the next stage. For a young founder, that is a meaningful response to an idea she has worked to bring to life.

For the other students, the result showed what the forum could make possible. Something developed in weekend classes could earn serious consideration and support from people with business experience. Their ideas had a place in a real commercial conversation.

Funding was an important part of the day, but every student had something to take from the experience. Each had developed a business idea, considered how it might make money and presented it to an audience. Each had practised communicating clearly and responding to questions about their work.

Those skills extend beyond entrepreneurship. Organising an argument, speaking in front of others and explaining a decision will matter in future classrooms and workplaces. Learning to hear a challenging question and respond thoughtfully is useful whether someone goes on to build a business or chooses another path.

MiniBoss gave the students a reason to practise those skills with something they cared about: an idea of their own. The Startup Forum gave families a chance to see that work, and business owners an opportunity to support its potential.

At the centre of the event were 20 young people willing to step forward, explain what they had built and ask others to believe in it. Before any investment was awarded, they had already done something worth recognising.