



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **SparkNC wins First Prize for Impact in the 2024 Education Innovation Showcase at the ASU+GSV Summit**

SAN DIEGO, CA (April 22, 2024) - SparkNC earned the top prize in the Impact category at this year's Education Innovation Showcase at the ASU+GSV Summit in San Diego on Tuesday, April 16. The annual Showcase is a global event that honors "K-12 education system leaders advancing innovation in their community and fostering meaningful change at the systems level."

SparkNC was selected in February as one of the top ten finalists for the prestigious award from among education initiatives across the country and internationally. "This award is a credit to the innovative district leaders and partners who came together to reimagine a new way to do school, and then to implement it this year in 17 districts across North Carolina," said Joe Ableidinger, SparkNC's Executive Director. "We are grateful to the North Carolina General Assembly and to leadership at DPI and the State Board of Education for entrusting us with the resources and flexibility to translate the vision of SparkNC into action."

At the Showcase, the top ten finalists each presented a one-minute introduction of their work. Brittany Branch, SparkLab Leader in Mount Airy City Schools, spoke about three elements of the SparkNC approach: student agency, business engagement, and real world projects. Ms. Branch sees SparkNC enabling new educator roles and dynamic relationships in the classroom. "Students in SparkNC are learning skills I didn't learn until grad school. Sometimes they get stuck, and being able to say, 'I don't know, let's figure it out together,' is a powerful message from educator to student."

The top two finalists each shared a three-minute pitch, after which judges selected the winner. Ms. Branch delivered SparkNC's pitch along with Senator Michael Lee, the legislative champion of SparkNC. Senator Lee said that as an elected official, he is looking for answers on how to redesign high school to better serve all students, and that he wants our education system to help create a strong economy for North Carolina businesses. He sees SparkNC as a response to both challenges. At a legislative briefing last month, Senator Lee said of SparkNC, "This is the future of education—and I'm not just talking about high school—the ability to work at your own pace, partner with industry, [and] achieve a skill."

## About SparkNC

SparkNC is a North Carolina nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, launched with the generous support of the North Carolina General Assembly and in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The strategic vision of SparkNC, and its emphasis on development of students' durable skills and engagement with real-world challenges, aligns closely with the goals of other statewide initiatives. SparkNC began as an initiative incubated within The Innovation Project, a nonprofit collaborative working group of North Carolina public school district leaders, before transitioning to a separate, standalone nonprofit during the 2023-24 academic year.

SparkNC is a proof of concept for a new way to do school—one that is more learner-centered, industry-relevant, and competency-based. In its first year of implementation (2023-24), SparkNC is partnering with 17 North Carolina school districts. Looking ahead, SparkNC plans to eventually expand to work with public schools across North Carolina and to extend its approach to other fields. Learn more at <https://www.sparknc.org/>.

## About the ASU+GSV Summit and the Education Innovation Showcase

The ASU+GSV Summit, co-founded by Michael Moe and Deborah Quazzo, began in 2010 with a collaboration between Global Silicon Valley (GSV) and Arizona State University (ASU). Our north star is that ALL people have equal access to the future, and we believe that innovations at scale in "Pre-K to Gray" learning and skills are critical to achieving that end. Learn more at [www.asugsvsummit.com](http://www.asugsvsummit.com).

The Annual Education Innovation Showcase Competition is a global event honoring K-12 systems leaders who are launching and sustaining innovation in their communities. Educator leaders from around the world submitted their innovative ideas for a chance to pitch their projects and be recognized with awards, including over \$50K in cash and prizes for the top innovations. This Showcase provides a platform for leaders to share their innovation and spark inspiration & action for districts, networks, and schools around the world.

## Watch Showcase Presentations from SparkNC

[View One-Minute Introduction Here](#)

[View Final Pitch Here](#)

## Media Contact

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