

Florida Roadshow for Opportunity Impact Report

FEBRUARY 2026

A Tour Across the Sunshine State

The [Yass Prize](#)—now in its sixth year—has quickly become one of the most dynamic philanthropic movements in education innovation, spotlighting and rewarding organizations that redefine what’s possible for students nationwide. The focus is simple: find what works based on the [STOP principles](#), invest in those efforts, and help them grow exponentially.

Last year, the Prize awarded over \$3.8 million to 23 organizations across the country, bringing total support to more than \$60 million over the past five years. But the value extends beyond funding. Through initiatives like the Yass Prize [Roadshow for Opportunity](#), awardees step inside each other’s schools, seeing bold ideas in action and exchanging insights you can’t get from a playbook or education conference.



This past February, this learning came to life in Florida, where some of the brightest and boldest Yass Prize education entrepreneurs visited five award-winning schools. What they found wasn’t theory, it was proof—strong, innovative models delivering tangible results for students and families, and a community of leaders pushing each other to go further, faster.

“It’s days of being immersed in what’s possible in education when you stop trying to fit children into systems and start designing schools around them.”



TEE WILSON
[Beyond Excellence Academy of STEAM](#), Independent School for Girls in Tennessee
2025 Semifinalist

“The Roadshow brought the mission of the Yass Prize to life...hearing firsthand how access to education has changed families’ lives was incredibly grounding.”



EDNA MARTINSON
[Boddle Learning](#), National Ed Tech Company
2025 Finalist

“When we weren’t enjoying shared learning experiences from top practitioners, we were sitting in small round-tables discussing topics that are proven levers for sustained success.”



KYLE SMITLEY
[Detroit Achievement Academy](#), Charter School in Detroit
2023 Finalist

“We all left with practical ideas, new or deepened connections, and a taste of what innovative education looks like in the real world.”



MERCEDES GRANT
[Path of Life Learning](#), Microschool in Virginia
2025 Finalist

2026 Florida Roadshow by the Numbers

5

Schools

5

Florida Towns

5,900+
Students
Served

20

Yass Prize
Alumni

4

Days of
Learning

Mapping the 2026 Yass Prize Roadshow for Opportunity: Florida Edition



STOP 1: Chesterton Schools Network (Orlando)

A growing network of 70+ Catholic high schools—empowering parents to create joyful, exceptional schools where students are known, challenged, and transformed

[Recap](#) | [Video](#) | [Photo Gallery](#)



STOP 2: WonderHere (Lakeland)

A pre-K and elementary network of child-centered microschoools that serves students in both Florida and South Carolina, combining project-based, play-driven, and personalized learning, giving children space to learn at their own pace, explore their curiosity, and grow through meaningful work and community connection

[Recap](#) | [Video](#) | [Photo Gallery](#)



STOP 3: Pepin Academies (Tampa)

A Florida charter network serving grades 3 to 12—transforming the lives of students with learning disabilities by providing a therapeutic, inclusive school environment where academics and essential therapies happen together in real time so every child can thrive

[Recap](#) | [Video](#) | [Photo Gallery](#)



STOP 4: SailFuture (St. Petersburg)

Providing project-based and apprenticeship experiences to high school students in maritime and outdoor environments in Florida—like the wind, the power in the students' sails

[Recap](#) | [Video](#)



STOP 5: Primer Microschools (Miami)

Creating student-centered microschoools in Florida, Arizona, and beyond—with a belief that every child deserves an education that cultivates their unique sense of self—making personalized and exceptional education accessible for all students, while giving great teachers the tools to create their own schools

[Recap](#) | [Video](#) | [Photo Gallery](#)

Collaboration Across Sectors

The idea of collaboration across education sectors isn't common...but it is when you're in the Yass Prize network!

The newest alumni told us again and again that the Roadshow delivered ideas they could use *right away*. Seeing bold, creative school models up close didn't just inspire them—it pushed them to rethink how they run programs, support students, and make big decisions about growth. People went home buzzing with concrete next steps: tightening up operations, trying new leadership moves, and testing fresh approaches for specific student groups.



For many, the experience didn't just spark ideas—it helped them make decisions they'd been wrestling with, giving them the clarity and confidence to move faster. **In short: they didn't just learn something new...they left ready to do something new.** Along the way, they strengthened their leadership, sparked organic collaborations, and shared expertise across organizational sectors. The experience expanded their thinking and opened new possibilities for impact.

We are now redesigning our graduation readiness framework [inspired by the portfolio based model seen at SailFuture].

KENISHA SKAGGS

SOAR Academy, Private School in Georgia and Oklahoma (2022 Finalist)

I found awardees that are within a two-hour drive from our school. We discussed the opportunity to do a regional refresher and to visit each other's schools!

WADE MOORE

Urban Preparatory Academy, Faith-Based Independent School in Kansas (2022 Finalist)

We are now planning to hold offsite, monthly Leadership Innovation meetings to identify chronic issues we are dealing with.

JOSE SUAREZ

HOPE Ranch Learning Academy, Independent School for Students with Autism (2022 Semifinalist)

Detroit Achievement Academy and SOAR Academy have offered to support me in thinking through facility strategy.

TEE WILSON

Beyond Excellence Academy of STEAM, Independent School for girls in Tennessee (2025 Semifinalist)

Summit School and Path of Life Learning have adopted the WonderHere curriculum.

TIFFANY THENOR

WonderHere, Microschool Network in Florida and South Carolina (2025 Finalist)

I am exploring co-location opportunities with Primer Microschools.

KELBY WOODARD

Cristo Rey Network, National Faith-Based Independent Network with a work-study model focus (2023 Finalist)

School House and I are exploring co-locating in San Antonio—hopefully the first of many co-location opportunities.

LISA TARSHIS

Primer Microschools, Microschool Network in Alabama, Arizona, Florida and Texas (2024 Winner)

Lasting Impact: Insights from Lisa Schade (Trinity School, 2025 Semifinalist)

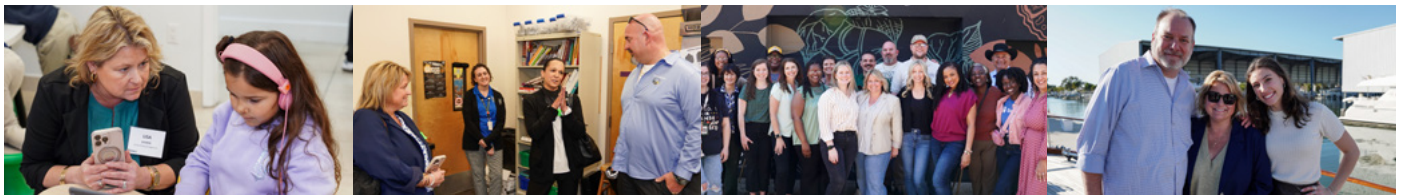
Lisa Schade applied for the Yass Prize in 2025, not knowing what a transformative impact the prize would have beyond the award. As a private school based in Oklahoma City, [Trinity School](#) serves students with learning differences through individualized, research-based instruction.

“One of the most immediate impacts of the Roadshow is that it pushed me from thinking about innovation as incremental to thinking about it as immersive. Being in conversation with leaders who are building boldly made me re-think how we can implement things we know are good for our students now, not later. For me, the biggest shift wasn’t just a single idea, it was that we can implement ideas today to create momentum.”



Following the weeklong Roadshow alongside 20-plus fellow alumni, Lisa is now planning and pursuing the following initiatives:

- Actively integrating a more Montessori-style, hands-on, independence-driven structure for her K-3 students with learning differences into portions of the school day
- Developing a device-free Socratic and critical-thinking program aimed at strengthening high school students’ articulation, confidence, and real-world connection, in which they will engage in structured reflection on what they’ve learned and, more importantly, why it matters
- Redesigning their new employee welcome package and integrating it more intentionally into their instructional support model
- Implementing iPad re-enrollment in car line and hiring an additional Educational Technology team member to better leverage AI tools and accommodations for students with learning differences
- Reevaluating their fifth-year senior transitional program
- Exploring competitive theater and vocal programs
- Launching a structured passion project initiative for every student in every grade



Lisa’s story is just one of the many alumni that have been shaped by the journey and insights of the Yass Prize Roadshow for Opportunity. Along the way, new partnerships formed. Synergy was cultivated. Ideas begin to blossom. As these connections deepened, meaningful patterns started to emerge.

When education is rooted in the STOP principles, the results are extraordinary—and students are given the permission and support they need to truly thrive. And when strong leaders come together—not just to lead their schools, but to learn alongside other remarkable peers during immersive experiences like this—the level of impact expands in powerful ways.

Follow along as we continue our 2026 Roadshow with upcoming visits to Path of Life Learning in Virginia and SchoolHouse this May. Until next time!



WATCH: Full 2026 Roadshow Week Video Recap How the 2025 Yass Prize Finalists are Transforming Education

In Their Own Words

Peter Holmstrom, M. Ed. · 1st
2025 Yass Prize Semifinalist | Outdoor Learning Advocate | Whol...
3w · 🌐

Ending night one of **The Yass Prize** Roadshow and wow, what a day.

Today they officially announced that applications are NOW LIVE for this year's \$1 MILLION Yass Prize. If you have ever even thought about applying, this is your sign. Do it. Do not overthink it. Do not count yourself out. Apply.
<https://yassprize.org>

So grateful for the chance to reconnect with members of our cohort and meet more Yass alumni tonight. There is truly nothing like being in a room with people who believe deeply in changing the trajectory of education and the lives of kids. The energy, the ideas, and the passion are real.

Grateful and fired up. Let's go!

Edna Martinson · 1st
Co-Founder of Boddie Learning | Forbes 30U30
1w · 🌐

I spent a few days last week visiting schools across Florida with **The Yass Prize**. There's a lot of national conversation right now about parents wanting more choice in education and these school leaders haven't been waiting for a trend or a headline, they've been answering that call for years.

At Chesterton, **Dale Ahlquist** shared, "Students read the Iliad "because all of life is a battle" the Odyssey "because all of life is a journey", and Dickens "because all of life is a great expectation." You could see it in the classrooms - students debating big ideas, asking real questions, fully engaged.

At WonderHere, **Tiffany Thenor** and her team have built a school where students care for animals, code, create, and explore.

At Pepin Academies, **Jeff Skowronek** has designed an environment where belonging isn't a slogan - it's built into the daily structure of the school.

We saw students sailing at SailFuture and **Mike Long** and his team helping students see their own potential and equipping them with real-world skills to build their futures; and **Lisa Tarshis** and her team providing personalized, mastery-based learning at Primer.

Different models. Same heartbeat: courageous leaders building intentionally for kids.

Tee Wilson, M.Ed. · 1st
2025 Yass Prize Contender | 2025 NBJ Woman of Influence | 2025 CGR You...
2w · 🌐

Day 3 of the **The Yass Prize** Road Show for Opportunity and I just visited one of the coolest schools. **SailFuture** is a tuition-free, project-based private school and youth development organization that serves at-risk teens, especially those in foster care or disconnected from traditional school.

Their model is unlike anything you typically see in education. Students don't just sit in classrooms. They sail. They problem-solve. They lead. They are trusted with meaningful responsibility and held to high standards. I was in awe. Really has my mind racing about all we can do for our scholars at B.E. Academy For Girls. Maybe we can do a semester at sea? 🙌💙💜💗👧👩 #sailfuture #beacademyforgirls #YassPrize #roadshow #EducationInnovation

Lisa Schade · 1st
CEO
3w · 🌐

🌟 Still buzzing after night one of the Yass Prize Roadshow 🌟

Spending the day and evening with fellow innovators and alumni is a reminder of what's possible when mission-driven leaders come together. Put passionate people in the same room—people who see every day how education can change lives—and the momentum is undeniable. The vision is bold. The commitment is real. And the kids are worth it.

The night ended with BIG news: applications are officially OPEN for this year's \$1 MILLION Yass Prize 🌟

The accelerator experience has been transformational for Trinity School, and its impact will continue long after today. Apply boldly and expand your impact.
<https://yassprize.org>

Deeply grateful for this community and the leaders who make it possible. Thank you to the Center for Education Reform and the champions moving this work forward—Emily Selene de Rotstein, Mercedes Grant, Mimosa Jones Tunney, Tee Wilson, Peter Holmstrom, Jeff Skowronek, and Tiffany Thenor.

Energized. Inspired. Ready for what's next. 🚀