Fort Greene's Brooklyn Technical High School Wins State Award In App Contest

The school's team won the prestigious award for creating an app that makes it fun for high schoolers to apply for college scholarships.

By Sarah Kaufman (Patch Staff) (https://patch.com/users/sarah-kaufman) - Updated January 19, 2017 4:57 pm ET

FORT GREENE, BROOKLYN — When a group of five students from Fort Greene's Brooklyn Technical High School read that as much as $100 million in private college scholarship money goes unclaimed by high school students each year, they knew they had to do something. So the students — Karina Melnik, Karina Popovich, Illan Weiner, Marlon Diaz, Daniel Rogov and Camille Wilson — harnessed their creative and technological genius and created an app. The app connects high school students with college scholarships that will help them and gameifies the process, making it fun for students and giving them local coupons along the way.

The group's app, Illustria, won Best in State for New York in Verizon Wireless's Innovative App Challenge, meaning they win $5,000 for their school and the chance to be named the best app in the country. If the team wins the national prize, they'll also have a chance to work with a team at MIT Media Lab to develop the app.

"The inspiration for designing Illustria came from our own experiences as students getting ready to enter college," said Karina Melnik, a co-team captain who designed the original web version of the app last year through Girls Who Code's Summer Immersion Program at Accenture NYC. "We understood that a big knowledge gap exists between independent, lesser-known scholarships and students who are in extreme need of such scholarships. By matching a user and his or her characteristics with scholarships in our database, we hope to bridge this gap."

Illustria works like this: a student registers for an account, and the app directs her to a deck of cards, each one labeled with a different scholarship. To play, the student chooses to reveal a random card from the deck and has the option of either pursuing that scholarship or returning it back to the deck to choose another. If she chooses a scholarship and successfully applies to it, she gets points based on the difficulty of the scholarship application. Her points then go toward redeeming local coupons for restaurants and other businesses.

Basically, you're applying for money to get money, the students said.

High school is overwhelming and stressful already, and the last thing students need is another tedious process to hold them back, said Popovich, the team's other co-captain. "The combination of countless standardized examinations, college applications and schoolwork can cause many students to lose interest in seeking out and applying to scholarships," Popovich said. "Our app idea will engage more students who would otherwise not apply or have a harder time applying for scholarships."

The students believe that the app presents a "win-win situation for parents, students, school and business owners," Popovich said. The app benefits the students' futures, the scholarship programs that will receive more applications and local business owners who will theoretically see more foot traffic once they give out coupons through the app, she said.

You can vote for the Illustria team as a "Fan Favorite" online (https://appchallenge.tsaweb.org/vote) until Feb. 14. If they're voted fan favorite, they'll win $15,000 for their school or an out-of-school program, training from MIT experts and a trip to the Technology Student Association Conference in June.

Photo of the students from Brooklyn Technical High School

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- SEPTEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

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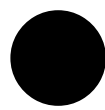Advertise on Patch (https://patch.com/new-york/fortgreene/advertise-with-us)

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