Kids compete in Shark Tank

By Sara Mitchell
Signal staff writer
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Everyone has one big idea for a product or service the world needs, but one local class will actually pitch its idea to local businesses as part of the course.

For its project, members of the Principles of Business class — an elective course at SCVi Charter School — will present a product or service that it has been researching and working on this year to a panel of judges.

“Professionals will vote on the most creative, most unique and potentially profitable business idea,” said Brian Cuda, who teaches the course in addition to running Conceptinet, a local Web design business.

The project is based on the TV show “Shark Tank,” on which contestants pitch business ideas to a panel of five wealthy entrepreneurs, who then decide whether to negotiate investments with their favorites.

Cuda decided the premise was perfect for the class’ final project, since it ties all of the year’s lessons together.

“It seemed like a great concept,” he said.

This is the first time the course has been taught at SCVi, and it runs through topics such as marketing, management, finance, ethics and business law.

Throughout the year, students have been applying the lessons to their products or services — doing everything from organizing a business plan to planning a marketing strategy to creating a code of ethics for the hypothetical company. They’ve also watched episodes of “Shark Tank” to get ideas on how to pitch an idea to potential investors.

“They kind of applied every discipline to their project, ” Cuda said.

“I really enjoy the class,” wrote Sarah Schnittker, eighth grader. “I feel as if I’m living and creating a business.”

On Jan. 23, the students will present to the panel, which will be composed of local members of the business community.
Cuda said he is still looking for two or three judges.

The panel currently has members from the banking, aerospace, energy and nonprofit sectors, but Cuda wants more from other areas to diversify the panel.
The project also needs businesses willing to donate prizes — anything from money, or products to potential internship opportunities, Cuda said.

Amber Raskin, founder of SCVi, is one of the judges lined up for the project. She said schools tend to emphasize preparing students for college, but courses, such as Cuda’s and projects like Shark Tank will prepare them for the business world after college.

“We love things that make learning engaging,” she said.

“It’s very much like what you have to do in today’s business environment,” she said. “You have to present your ideas and defend them. That’s what Shark Tank is.”

To get involved in Shark Tank, contact Brian Cuda at the course website, cuda.me