

# Richard Branson's Virgin Unite Launches Student Initiative in Space

The new Galactic Unite initiative encourages students to become space entrepreneurs. Next up for Branson? Exploring not just space, but the world's oceans.

By **TAMARA SCHWEITZER RABEN**

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Virgin Unite, the nonprofit arm of Richard Branson's Virgin Group, announced Wednesday the formation of Galactic Unite, which will be aimed at encouraging students to pursue careers in space exploration and aviation. Galactic Unite, a partnership with Branson's commercial spaceliner company [Virgin Galactic](#), will be working with NASA's [Student Launch Program](#), a competition in which middle school students design experiments using the environment of suborbital space to answer scientific and

engineering questions. The winning experiments will be sent into space on rockets provided by the [New Mexico Space Grant Consortium](#) from Spaceport America in New Mexico.

Additionally, Galactic Unite is overseeing a mentorship program in which Virgin American pilots and engineers are mentoring K-12 kids in Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay Area schools, in partnership with [KIPP](#) (Knowledge is Power Program), an organization that helps prepare students in underserved communities for success in college and life. Students in the KIPP program and NASA's Student Launch program will be attending the unveiling of Virgin America's [new sustainable terminal](#) at San Francisco International Airport on Wednesday. The launch will be commemorated with a series of inaugural flights that celebrate the evolution of travel. Students will get a "behind the wings" tour of the new terminal and meet the pilots from Virgin America and Galactic's [WhiteKnightTwo](#).

"We need to show kids early what is exciting about science and technology. We need to make investments to connect students and teachers with the entrepreneurial activities of commercial space," George Whitesides, CEO and president of Virgin Galactic, said on Galactic Unite's website.

In timing with Virgin's new space initiatives, and keeping with Branson's mission of world travel and

exploration, the CEO announced on Tuesday his plan to also take to the seas with Virgin Oceanic in a submarine unveiled in Newport Beach, Calif. Branson has teamed with Orange County businessman Chris Welsh, and within the next few months, Welsh will pilot the 18-foot submarine to the Pacific Ocean's Mariana Trench, the *Los Angeles Times* reported. Branson, a member of the [AOL Small Business Board of Directors](#), said he also plans to take the submarine to the four other trenches of the world's oceans -- and believes many of the 250 potential astronaut customers of Virgin Galactic would also be interested in exploring the oceans with him as well.