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[Bear River senior's exploration of declining arts programs garners top prize \(video\)](#)

Stephen Roberson | Staff Writer

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Aidan Conley must thrive on pressure.

The Bear River High School senior was supposed to have one week to create a two-minute film to enter into the Student Voices Campaign competition.

Except he wasn't in class on the Friday the project was assigned. He wasn't in class on Monday, either.

So by the time he got the assignment, he had roughly three days to complete the film.

"That was the entirety of the time I was going to be working on it," Conley said of his lost weekend.

Turns out he didn't need the extra time.

Conley earned a tie for the first-place prize for his film "Student Voices: Art in Education," a look at the deteriorating state of arts programs in our schools. Conley beat out more than 100 other entries from eight counties.

He was honored recently in Los Angeles at a conference sponsored by the California Alliance for Arts Education.

The film looks at the dwindling state of arts programs in education and how it's narrowing the road for students who struggle academically but are creatively inclined.

These students, the film explores, have fewer post-high school options to express their talents in creative fields.

"We're pulling too many students together into a singularity of focus, so with classes like common core education, where everyone is tested at the same level and expected to succeed at the same level, it's pretty unrealistic because not all students can succeed or focus in that environment," Conley said.

"There are students who succeed much more in the artistic fields, be it video, photography, art, drama, theater, music. All of these options they would usually have are being closed down and defunded."

AWARDS CEREMONY

The award came with a trip for Conley-plus-one to Los Angeles.

The extra ticket is generally designated for a chaperone or mentor, but Conley's 18, meaning he could take whomever he wanted.

Enter Andrew Rolland, whose short documentary film "A Net Positive" was screened at the Wild and Scenic Film Festival in January 2016.

Rolland, who Bear River digital and media arts teacher calls an all-star, has had a big impact on Conley, so he joined him in L.A.

"Andrew's been more of a mentor/chaperone to me than my actual film teacher was," Conley said. "I thought he might as well come with me because he'd benefit a lot more from the actual experience and creative studios than a teacher would."

In addition to the awards ceremony, the conference included time slots for two workshops.

The first was a creative panel that included people from General Motors, a TV pilot and Pixar shorts writer, a record label owner and an actress.

"I was asking the actress how to get the best performance out of my actors," Rolland said. "She said, 'Take an acting class.' So I might see if something is available like that at Sierra College."

The second featured a number of behind-the-scenes personnel from the upcoming film "Beautiful Boy," the story of a father's journey through his son's addiction due out next year.

Among those in attendance were the assistant director, set designer, prop guy and the location scout.

"I was hoping we could talk to either a (director of photography) or a director, but it was still a really cool opportunity," Rolland said. "They told us a lot about their process and how they got into the field."

To contact Staff Writer Stephen Roberson, email sroberson@theunion.com or call 530-477-4236.