Thanks to ArtPlace America, students in Patagonia could have a rare opportunity to learn about their environment from local experts through a creative new media arts format. The Patagonia Pollinator Project, which is a grant finalist in ArtPlace America’s highly competitive National Creative Placemaking Fund, will develop an educational pilot called “Outstanding in the Field,” using local artist Ned Schaper’s fantastical world of Beveldom to help local experts teach students about place-based fields of study.

The project proposal, submitted by Mat Bevel Company, reaches K-12 students by incorporating the achievements of local experts into curricula and hands-on workshops that include theater, found-object kinetic art, and digital storytelling. The goal? To increase school enrollment and provide a model for other rural public schools across the country that face the challenge of declining enrollment. Specifically, the project is designed to draw more young people to the community, bringing the median age far below the current 59.8.

Paula Schaper, Vice President for Mat Bevel Company, says, “If we can develop an educational pilot that makes learning exciting and memorable, we can increase student comprehension, engagement and achievement. In doing this, we will attract more parents, students and teachers to Patagonia Schools because of our education curricula and programs.” The opportunity will become a reality if the project is selected to receive the grant from ArtPlace America’s highly competitive National Creative Placemaking Fund.

When choosing its grant finalists, ArtPlace America representatives visited each finalist’s community. On June 28, ArtPlace America’s Javier Torres and McKayla Shirley visited Mat Bevel Company’s New Beveldom Studios and three other locations, including Patagonia Public Schools, Patagonia Creative Arts Association and Borderlands Restoration’s Seed Bank at the Old Main Campus.

ArtPlace America will announce its winners in December. The winners will begin their projects in January, 2018. To learn more about the Patagonia Pollinator Project, contact Paula Schaper, at Mat Bevel Company, at 520-604-6273.