



Conor Tuohy | TuohyC@issaquah.wednet.edu

To Whom It May Concern,


Re: Aeden Brookshire,

My name is Conor Tuohy. I was a tech industry professional for twelve years, including some years in game development and production at Microsoft as well as independent game development before I became a CTE high-school teacher teaching Computer Science at Issaquah High School. I don't usually start my recommendations for students with quite as much of a bio about myself, but I wanted you to understand that I have a working knowledge of both the game industry and the tech industry at large to give context to the rest of this recommendation letter. As such, when I say: "I would hire Aeden in a heartbeat" or "I consider it a privilege that I have gotten to work with Aeden at all" - I need you to understand that I am not being hyperbolic. I intend to use this recommendation letter to give you a glimpse of what I see in Aeden. To state it outright to begin: I give Aeden Brookshire my highest possible recommendation.

I had Aeden initially as a student in 9th grade during the 'online year' with an Intro to Computer Science class. Despite my getting to know very few students that year, Aeden made an impression. In these early days I saw Aeden putting serious effort into minor projects and always pushing further to see what was possible. When faced with the limits of the meager SNAP engine (While loops were responsive, but the engine could only handle about six before slowing down), Aeden experimented and created a simple 'hybrid' loop that got the same responsiveness of a while loop while being user/keystroke triggered (which normally had about a half-second delay, but didn't this way). It was simple and notable enough that I added it to the IHS Intro to Computer Science curriculum where it continues to be taught, credited to Aeden, to this day.

The next year, I was delighted to find that Aeden had joined my brand-new 'Video Game Design with Unity & C#' class. The course was designed for Computer Science students looking for the next step and/or the next challenge beyond what the AP Computer Science classes could offer. As such, every student ranged from being a competent to highly competent programmer – and Aeden was definitely in the top two or three in terms of raw ability and experience (and for this and other reasons you'll see as you read on, I would continue to forget that Aeden was only in 10th grade through the entire year). The course has two distinct semesters; the first is mostly tutorials and a final project in the last weeks, to ensure all students have good all-around dev skills for the second semester: a semester-long group project. Naturally, Aeden did all the classwork tutorials in the first few weeks of class – and instead of resting on their laurels they proceeded to work harder than any other student; researching and creating new tutorials for systems that hadn't been covered through the classwork. The result is that just a few months into 10th grade, Aeden has completed the coursework for the semester, self-taught themselves several additional Unity features, and written a tutorial on *shaders* (without losing their mind, somehow). The rest of the first semester continued like this.

Going into the second semester, I knew that Aeden was personally skilled, dedicated to improving their craft, and had become more of a collaborator with me for my new class than a student. Still, the second semester, being a semester long group project, had very different challenges. In addition to the code and creativity



needed to develop a project, students would also need to collaborate and coordinate with the others in their group. This would include project-management work, assigning tasks and schedules, and different developmental builds across the semester (prototype, minimum viable product, playtest build, beta, and final build). Aeden led their group – not by taking charge, but by listening and encouraging others to do so (keeping the most vocal in the group from dictating the design by establishing a collaborative tenor). From this, Aeden built the schedule and did the project management based on what was mutually agreed on; the harmony Aeden invoked allowed for quick progress on their survival horror game. When difficulties did arise in the playtesting phase (the 'survival' aspects of the survival horror game didn't give the gameplay thrill they wanted), Aeden led the group through a difficult pivot. Taking the UX playtest data, Aeden devised a pivot to a narrative atmospheric horror game - and then deftly executed on building it. In the process, I noticed that some of well-made features Aeden built were cut, for the sake of the project. When I discussed this pivot with the other CTE teachers, we decided to break with the typical tradition of nominating exiting Seniors and instead have Aeden be one of our CTE Showcase award winners. We all agreed that Aeden earned it with their lead-from-the-front leadership skills.

Through 11th grade, I had the delight of watching Aeden continue to grow, even occasionally getting to dispense some advice on their other endeavors – like Aeden's co-founding 'Studio-19' - a small student game developer collaborative for those that already were and/or wanted to continue developing games outside of my class. All last year Aeden came by, and we'd chat about projects they were developing, industry news, interesting mechanics we'd come across, or we'd white-board ideas (like 'What's the structure of an engine for a murder-mystery game where the clues and the killer could change every run?' - and we cracked that design, too!). Aeden constantly honed their skills not just by dreaming about them, but through experimentation and making things. This 12th grade year, Aeden is not on campus as often, instead having managed to leverage the Running Start program to get themselves into game development classes at DigiPen. Though less frequent - our conversations are now noticeably next level; a clear sign of how much Aeden can absorb from their environment. In turn, every environment has prospered for having Aeden there, too. I've given just a few examples of how both of my classes have prospered, I know Studio-19 continues to benefit from Aeden's collaborative spirit and leadership, as have school clubs, and I've never heard any teacher say anything less than glowing about working with Aeden.

Passion is just not nearly a grand enough word for what Aeden has. 'Dedicated and consistent passionate discipline' might be a better reflection of what it is, but even that fails to include the empathy that Aeden brings to any collaborative project. Let me put it this way instead: Aeden Cares. Aeden cares, knows things can be better, and is relentless in this pursuit. Aeden cares about their craft and the industry, and I know they will make both better in the years to come. I'm happy that I'll have been a small part of that, too.

I feel I have barely scratched the surface of wonderful things Aeden has earned being said about them. Please do contact me at TuohyC@issaquah.wednet.edu - I would appreciate the chance to share more.

Sincerely,

Conor Tuohy