

The ILA Celebrate Literacy Award recognizes organizations, institutions and individuals that have made significant literary contributions at the local, state, or provincial level.

This award is presented to the Hartford Stage Education Department, and will be accepted on behalf of the team by Jennifer Roberts.

The Hartford Stage was nominated by educator Lisa Flynn.

We would like to congratulate the Education Department at Hartford Stage for their literacy program, Connections, which provides direct teaching in the classroom for students in grades K-12.

Connections is an in-school residency program that uses theatre techniques to strengthen reading comprehension and build excitement about reading. For five consecutive days, a Hartford Stage teaching artist visits a classroom to lead drama activities based on a work of literature chosen by the school. Through improvisation, role-play, dialogue, and other theatre techniques, students explore the context, plot and characters of the book, building prior knowledge, creating suspense, and encouraging empathy. At the end of the program, each student receives a copy of the book to keep and read.

Annually, the program reaches over 6,000 students, in hundreds of schools and classroom across the state. The program has been in action for over fifteen years. Responses received from both students and teachers consistently showcase the importance of the program. Based on a sample of 102 surveys collected so far this year from teachers, representing a range of grade levels and towns, 98% reported that their students are excited to read the book introduced; 99% said they noticed deeper engagement from reluctant students, and 100% said that the program aided in student

comprehension. The program is heralded by students, teachers, administrators, schools and districts.

Recently, Hartford Stage has had the ability to expand its curriculum into both non-fiction and financial literacy. The program now offers over 20 book selections.

The theatre is also proud to receive financial support from the SBM Foundation, Lego, and Lincoln Financial to serve students free of charge in Manchester, East Hartford and Hartford Public Schools. This year alone, Hartford Stage has reached classrooms in Burlington, Vernon, Hartland, Avon, Ellington, Suffield, Granby, Farmington, Simsbury, Chester, Unionville and more. The program has become a staple in many schools where Hartford Stage returns year after year.

Few organizations in the state have such a unique impact on literacy. Hartford Stage's methods of educational theatre have proven to be an effective strategy for engaging young readers. For these reasons, and for the lasting impact this program has had on so many students in Connecticut, Hartford Stage is worthy of the Celebrate Literacy Award from the CT Reading Association.