

ANNUAL REPORT

FREE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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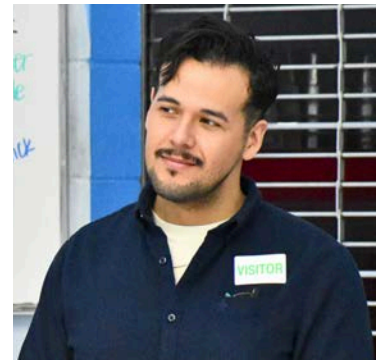
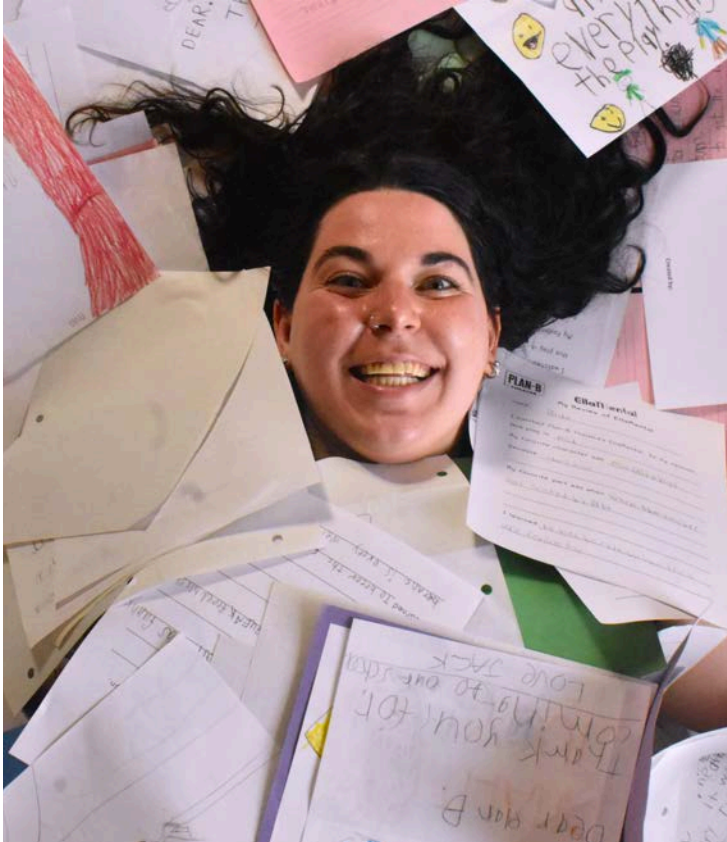


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OVERVIEW

SCHOOLS

252

STUDENTS

30,086

EDUCATORS

2,201

Plan-B Theatre develops and produces unique and socially conscious theatre created by Utah playwrights. The mission of our education programs is to authentically connect what students see onstage with what they envision themselves creating as artists, expecting as patrons and supporting as citizens.

As one of 15 professional arts organizations comprising the Professional Outreach Programs in the Schools (POPS) in partnership with Utah State Board of Education, we provide free opportunities for students to experience and connect with live professional theatre through our *Free Elementary School Tour* (kindergarten through sixth grade) and *A Week With A Play* (seventh through twelfth grades). Our playwriting residencies guide students through creating their own work and our teacher professional development offerings equip K-12 teachers with the skills and resources to integrate playwriting into their classroom.

These free programs are on par with or exceed those of larger organizations locally and nationally. Although we are by far the smallest POPS organization with the smallest budget, we provide the best value for money. In fact, we serve more rural schools each year than all of our POPS colleagues combined.



FREE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TOUR

SCHOOLS

172

STUDENTS

29,332

EDUCATORS

2,059



CAST & CREATIVE

Playwright: **Elaine Jarvik**

Actors: **Estephani Cerros, Amona Faatau, Taylor Wallace, & Ben Young**

Director: **Jerry Rapier**

Designer: **Arika Schockmel**

Education Liaison: **Penelope Caywood**

Tour Manager: **Kallie Filanda**

EB & FLO by Elaine Jarvik was our thirteenth annual *Free Elementary School Tour* (FEST). Created specifically for grades K-3, EB & FLO served 101 public and charter schools and one private school with live, in-school performances. We also served an additional 71 public schools via video-on-demand and the public via 6 free performances at the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center.

In EB & FLO, a fantastic flamingo named Flo who craves adventure meets Eb, a sensible seagull worried about a shrinking lake. They concoct a unique way to spread the word about the importance of Great Salt Lake and how small actions can have big effects.



We gifted a copy of the book *The Great Great Salt Lake Monster Mystery* by Dr. Bonnie Baxter and Jaimi Butler, illustrated by Arly Landry to the library of each school we served in person.

All 172 teachers and principals who responded to our feedback survey (sent by our Education Coordinator within an hour of each performance) unanimously agreed that their students enjoyed EB & FLO and that the message was valuable and relevant.

FEST allows students to develop audience skills. Kindergarten teacher Jen Lightfoot at McMillan Elementary (Murray School District) told us, “For many students this was the first time seeing live theater. I hope you continue coming and that funding for this program is generous.” Her students were among the 6,356 students who enjoyed EB & FLO as their first exposure to live professional theatre!

FEST assemblies are highly interactive. The actors and Tour Manager greet students at the door as they enter the cafetorium/multi-purpose room/library/classroom. Once they take the stage, they introduce themselves and the characters they play, provide a roadmap to the interactive elements of the play, introduce basic theatre terminology, and ask who is seeing a play for the first time, and carefully establish expectations in the pre-show discussion and reinforce those expectations throughout the performance.

Second-grade teacher Shanice Robinson at Iron Springs Elementary (Iron School District) said, “The management was fantastic! Great job keeping the audience engaged and also keeping them in control by setting clear

expectations!” Kindergarten teacher Jenn Hahn at Davinci Academy Flex (Davis County charter school) shared that she was initially apprehensive that her kindergarteners were going to have to sit still and focus for 35 minutes, “but your team ROCKED IT! Great job!” First-grade teacher Crystal Norman at Grant Elementary (Murray School District) agreed, telling us, “It was an amazing performance. The students were truly engaged and the material held valuable information. Students returned to class singing.”

Immediately following the play, our Tour Manager and the actors lead a post-show discussion specifically constructed to encourage students to share personal responses and to identify similarities between the characters and their own experiences. They all then interact again with students at the door as they exit.

The discussion continues in the classroom, supported by the activities in the accompanying [study guide](#), which provide opportunities for students to evaluate the performance and create their own dramatic works (meeting all standards in the Create and Perform strands of the Core Standards for Drama).

72% of survey respondents expressed appreciation for the study guide.

Common themes in responses included:

- Educational Content: Teachers valued the background information on Great Salt Lake, the *Pink Floyd* story, and vocabulary which helped students prepare for the performance.
- Multimedia Resources: video clips, maps and diagrams provided engaging ways to introduce the play's themes and concepts.



- **Hands-on Activities:** The diorama projects were highly popular, along with other creative tasks like creating brine shrimp puppets, wetland scenes, and Spiral Jetty art.
- **Flexibility and Utility:** The comprehensive nature of the guide allowed educators to pick and choose activities suited to different grade levels and classroom needs.

Kindergarten teacher Angela Eckhardt at Larsen Elementary (Nebo School District) wrote, “When I talked to other teachers, it felt like we all chose something different to use from the study guide. I appreciated that there were many options. As a kindergarten teacher I appreciated the friendship and kindness themes woven throughout more than anything else. The third grade teachers were very excited that their class got an introduction to the Great Salt Lake, because they are just about to start learning about it.”

EB & FLO captured students’ imagination and ignited their curiosity. Third-grade teacher Hannah Ence at Jean Massieu School of the Deaf (Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind) shared that a few of her students went home after the play and researched Great Salt Lake on their own. They returned to class the next morning to share what they’d learned. “It’s SERIOUS,” one boy told everyone, and another boy responded “I know! Think of the bird highway and all the animals.”

Shanda Stenger, Art and Wellness Coordinator at USBE reported that her child experienced EB & FLO at his school, Sunset Elementary (Davis School District). “He came home and spoke about making new friends, and also was fascinated with the migration and ecosystem of birds and talked about the food chain. He spoke about this event for two days and was very interested in the science content that was conveyed and loved the acting that happened.”



FEST aligns with all six of USBE's Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Outcomes, empowering students to manage emotions and solve problems collaboratively. For second-grade teacher Kim Piacente at South Clearfield Elementary (Davis School District), the SEL content was the most applicable in her classroom. She told us, "We discussed the interactions between the two characters. They used their voices to share how they felt and listened to one another. They were able to become friends because they cared."

It's clear that the SEL aspect of FEST plays have lasting impacts on students and school communities. Principal Kali Briggs at Manila Elementary (Daggett School District) was enthusiastic about FEST returning to her school. "We love it when you come here! We still use the breathing exercises from the show two years ago!" she said, recalling techniques that were part of our SY24 tour of SQUEAK by Tito Livas.

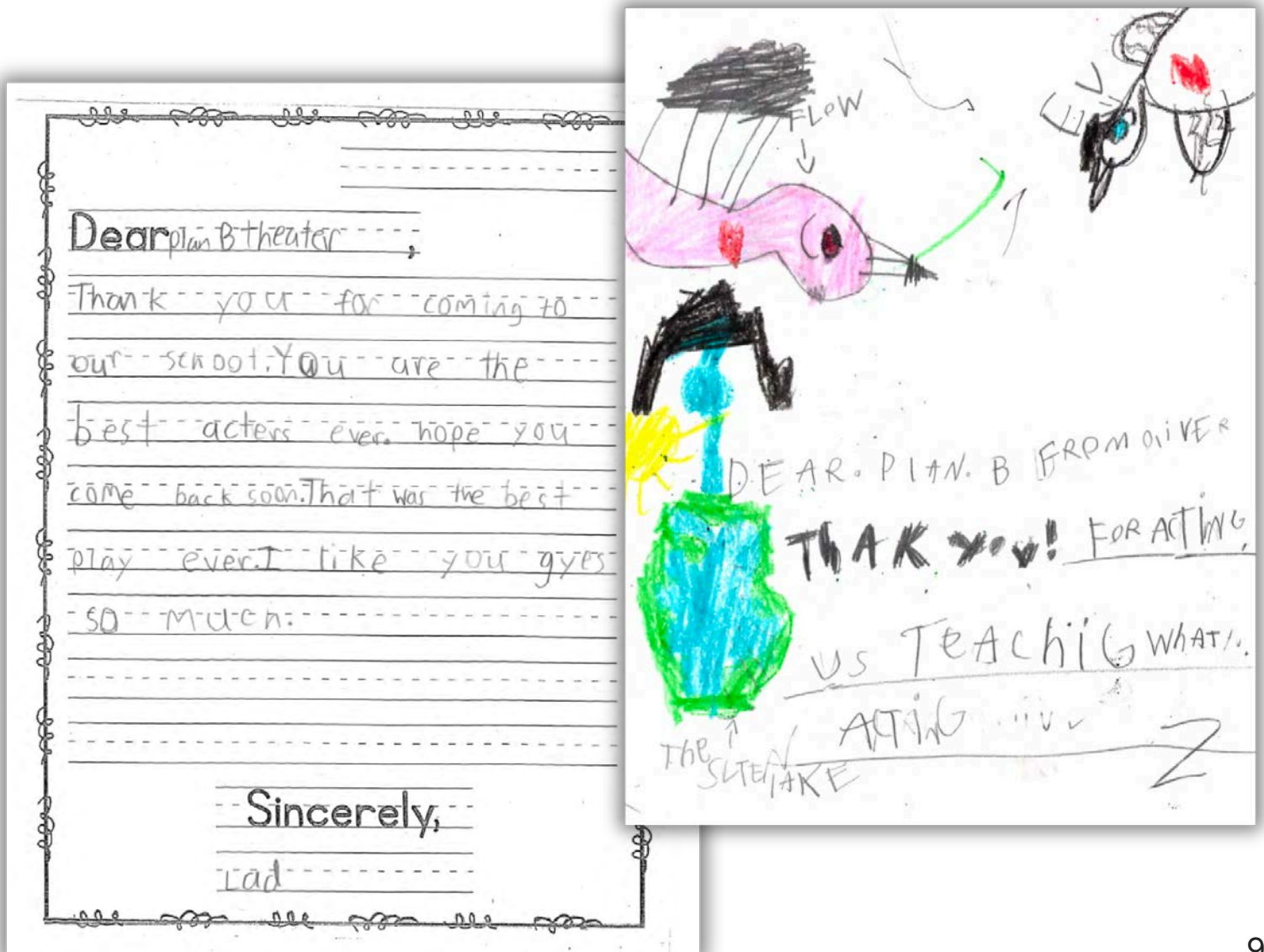
First-grade teacher Shannon Rhodes at Edith Bowen Laboratory School (Cache County Charter School) wrote that immediately after the performance, her class reflected together about what they loved most:

- "We loved Eb and Flo, especially singing, I'm going on a bird highway, a very high highway, I'm going on a highway, on my way home."
- "Shaking your feathers, your pink feathers, Flo."
- "I liked when Eb picked up those fries, the pretend fries at the beginning. I got to touch them at the end and they were not real, just props made from something you can't really eat."



- “Eb is a seagull, she called it a California gull. She squawked and sang with Flo, the bird wearing pink socks. He was a flamingo that escaped from the zoo and landed in an ocean, but it was the Great Salt Lake. His favorite color is pink because he likes eating shrimp and fish and bugs.”
- “Our USU student teacher Ms. Morgan’s favorite part was when they made interactive music. They taught us first the words, and we could sing when it was time.”

Shannon concluded with, “We liked all of it and our opinion is that other first graders will love it too. We appreciated getting to meet the actors playing Eb and Flo, getting a class selfie with Flo, and making aquatic macroinvertebrate brine shrimp and brine fly connections to other insects we have studied this year, like dragonfly larvae at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge and stonefly larvae in the Logan River. THANK YOU for creating this rich experience for us.”





A WEEK WITH A PLAY

SCHOOLS

13

STUDENTS

254

EDUCATORS

20

This year 254 middle and high school students participated in *A Week With A Play* where they read a new play in class, attended a student matinee of that play at no cost, and discussed what they read and saw in a post-show discussion with the playwright. Tenth-grade student Angela Hastings from City Academy (Salt Lake City charter school) appreciated reading plays before seeing them. It “was really helpful for understanding the characters and why they act how they did,” she told us, “Understanding people is really fascinates me and it made me able to focus on the play and story while watching it.” Her classmate, ninth-grader Scarlet Thomason, shared that discussing each play with the playwrights deepened her understanding. “I was able to make a lot of connections I don't think I would have been able to otherwise.”





JUST ADD WATER by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik

Great Salt Lake takes human form and heads into the city on a quest to understand what is happening to her and what she can do about it. A whimsical, cli-fi dramedy about nature spirits, open mics, mic drops, humans, dust, and hope.

In addition to inviting students to attend a dress rehearsal of JUST ADD WATER, we offered four student matinees in the 42-seat Studio Theatre at the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center. 118 students and 10 educators from nine middle and high schools attended. One City Academy senior had a blast completing their service learning internship as part of the production team. Twelfth-grade student Ren Lasher got valuable hands-on experience as they assisted designer Janice Chan in creating the set, participating in production meetings, and attending rehearsals.

Eighth-grade student Charley Cowley from Open Classroom (Salt Lake City School District charter school) told us, “I learned how much water the Great Salt Lake is actually losing and why we need to protect it. I thought it was very fun. I thought it was very cool how you used ordinary objects like the binder and turned them into things like birds.”

Science teacher Greg Mohammed at Horizonte Instruction and Training Center (Salt Lake City School District) wrote, “The performance was not only entertaining, but highly educational. I loved it. I'm pretty knowledgeable regarding issues surrounding Great Salt Lake so I was impressed at how much information was made available to the common, not highly informed citizen in such an interesting and entertaining way. Kudos for introducing my students to the theater and the arts and educating them on important issues at the same time.”



DUMBED DOWN by Darryl Stamp

After 25 years, Kevin is (really) leaving teaching (this time). But what will happen to the students who might otherwise slip through the cracks?

DUMBED DOWN is a tale of language, loving, and learning inspired by playwright Darryl Stamp's career teaching 11th grade American Literature at Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas and Hunter High School in West Valley City.

We offered four free student matinees in the 42-seat Studio Theatre at the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center. 136 students and 10 educators from five public high schools attended. Twelfth-grade student Thierry Esquivel from City Academy said, “The performance was GREAT. I was engaged the whole time and the actors put their all into this. It was a really great experience to watch with my friends.”

Ai Fujii Nelson, Education Director for Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, peer reviewed an *A Week With A Play* matinee. She wrote, “Especially considering the audience's age and developmental stage, this student matinee was the opposite of 'dumbed down'—the production was challenging, exciting, inspiring, and wonderfully complex. There is a real trust in the students to rise to the occasion for reflection, analysis, and intelligent conversation around a difficult theme—and the students there did just that. The students were asking genuinely great questions, and Jerry's facilitation of the discussion was spot-on: kind, direct, and caring, without any need to talk down to them or sugarcoat anything. The playwright and actors were equally generous in sharing their insights with the audience. The performance and play itself were, of course, great—but much of the additional learning happened during the question-and-answer session, through the direct interaction and candid conversation between the industry professionals and the students.”



PLAYWRITING RESIDENCIES

SCHOOLS

6

STUDENTS

457

EDUCATORS

34

Our approach to residencies sets us apart from other arts organizations because we work side-by-side with teachers in their own classrooms. This requires significant buy-in from teachers as they actively participate in planning and instruction, but leads to longer-lasting impacts for students and teachers alike. Students benefit from lesson plans carefully tailored to their needs, and teachers are empowered to incorporate what they learn from us into their wider teaching.

We returned to three Salt Lake City charter schools we worked with in SY25: City Academy, Guadalupe School, and Salt Lake Center for Science Education (SLCSE). New this year were residencies at Glendale Middle School (two weeks, Salt Lake City School District) and South Summit Middle School (four weeks, South Summit School District). We also enjoyed a one-day residency at Walden School of Liberal Arts (Utah County charter school).

Residencies are guided by our curricula *Playwriting With Young People* (for elementary students) and *Playwriting With Young Adults* (for middle and high school students) written by Julie Jensen, with accompanying lesson plans by Education Liaison Penelope Caywood and Education Coordinator Sarah Meservy. We introduce students to the art of playwriting and guide them through the process of writing short plays. Each class engaged in activities to strengthen their imagination and collaboration skills and to practice communicating using their bodies and voices. Students developed characters

through improvised scenes, learning how physical and vocal choices impact character interactions and becoming skilled at listening and responding to scene partners in character. Teaching artists guided students as they developed characters, structured plots, and refined their scripts.



City Academy

SY26 marked the third year of our partnership with City Academy (which serves $\frac{1}{5}$ of the entire student body)! Plan-B teaching artists Sharah Meservy and Estephani Cerros co-taught a year-long, introductory playwriting class for grades 9-12 with ELA teacher Christal Jackson as an English class. Students who took playwriting last year were placed in the advanced class (also a year-long English class) for grades 10-12, which was co-taught by Plan-B teaching artist Darryl Stamp and ELA teacher Mele Fiaui. Students in both classes read plays, attended professional productions (at Plan-B and other theatres), learned from numerous professional theatre artist guest lecturers, and wrote several short pieces independently and collaboratively. The classes frequently met together, allowing the advanced students to mentor their beginning-level peers. As a result, the beginning students learned more quickly and wrote much stronger pieces than any previous cohort.

At both City Academy and Guadalupe School, professional actors visited the classroom to read the students' first drafts. This allowed the budding

playwrights to hear their words read aloud by industry professionals who had not been involved in the writing process and receive unbiased feedback.

The residency culminated in two showcases of staged readings. The advanced students each presented ten-minute plays as staged readings to an audience of friends and family. The intro class worked in groups of three to write shorter pieces presented as staged readings to a full-school assembly.

Christal says, “I can't say enough good things about Plan-B and this program. Lessons were engaging and effective. Students were fully supported

throughout the process. These talented educators taught students skills and provided them with a creative outlet. Because of our time with Plan-B, students have recognized some of their interests and talents with playwriting and acting that they might not have discovered otherwise.”



Guadalupe School

SY26 also marked the third year of our partnership with Guadalupe School, where the majority of students are English language learners from Spanish-speaking households. Plan-B teaching artists Estephani Cerros and Pedro Flores, both bilingual and biliterate in English and Spanish, co-taught with sixth grade teacher Mits Bryant once a week for four months. Each of the 32 students served had their first experience with theatre by writing short pieces collaboratively in small groups. They performed staged readings of their work at an assembly for parents and fifth grade students.

Mits shared, “I've worked with Plan-B for 3 years now. Each year our



collaboration gets better and better. Estephani and Pedro do a great job with my sixth graders. One of the things I enjoy seeing is how they interact with each other. They can connect with my class on a level that I can't with their shared culture and traditions. I think this aspect only enhances my student's experience and makes the students feel more comfortable doing something that is inherently difficult for students their age."

South Summit Middle School

Plan-B teaching artists Kallie Filanda and Taylor Wallace co-taught a three-week residency with drama teacher DeEtte Earl. Working in small groups, 38 sixth-graders wrote short pieces which they then performed as staged readings for their peers in class. DeEtte loved how engaged her students were in writing and how much they enjoyed performing their work. "The enthusiasm and instructional support for the students made the learning very successful. The course was very well designed to go along with the 6th grade ELA Core



Standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It also supported the objectives of the drama course. The students had recently learned about the importance of paying attention to the script directions when performing, and they were able to make that connection when they were script writing. Thank you. I would love to participate in this program again.”

Walden School of Liberal Arts

Following our performance of EB & FLO At Walden School of Liberal Arts in Utah County, Plan-B teaching artists Kallie Filanda, Taylor Wallace, and Amona Faatau visited the classrooms of grades 1-6. Students learned basic playwriting concepts and used improvisation skills to develop characters and create dialogue.

Salt Lake Center for Science Education

Plan-B teaching artists Sharah Meservy, Estephani Cerros, and Kallie Filanda co-taught a four-week residency with theatre teacher Noel Lindes-Frost. Forty high school students wrote short pieces collaboratively in small groups. Given that this was a theatre class of both acting and tech students, Noel opted to forgo the usual staged readings and give her students a more involved challenge. Under her direction, students memorized, rehearsed, and created props and designed lighting for their work. Two weeks after the conclusion of the residency, we returned to SLCSE to enjoy a fully-produced evening showcase for family and friends.

Noel told us, “This whole experience was tightly aligned with the core standards. I'm very impressed with the content, the teachers, and the care they showed my students and me.”





Glendale Middle School

This two-week residency arose out of our collaboration with the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program team at the University of Utah. It differed from our other residencies as the focus was on using theatre to develop students' English listening and speaking skills rather than playwriting. BTSALP Drama Professional Development Partner Laura Taylor invited us to visit her three sixth grade ELD drama classes. These students were all recent arrivals in Utah with minimal English proficiency.

After teaching artist Sharah Meservy introduced specific vocabulary, actors Estephani Cerros and Benjamin Young performed a short excerpt from *EB & FLO* three times. Between each repetition, Sharah asked questions to check student comprehension. After the third repetition, students who had started out feeling completely lost were able to follow much of the dialogue.

Sharah then used a section of the script to help the students practice speaking. The class read through it many times chorally before breaking into pairs to practice. After class, ELD teacher Faleh Recan was effusive with praise about how Sharah got even the most reluctant students to participate: "That was amazing!"

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



SCHOOLS

75

EDUCATORS

90



BTSALP Great Salt Lake Professional Development Workshop

Education Coordinator Sharah Meservy collaborated with biologist Jaimi Butler to create Great Salt Lake & You, a guide for K-6 teachers to use in their classrooms. It is full of lesson activities which support SEEd, Fine Arts, and Social Studies Core Standards. This guide was shared with K-6 teachers statewide during SY25. We also included many of these materials in the study guide for EB & FLO.

In September 2025, we partnered with the Beverly Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program team at University of Utah to create an event centered around Great Salt Lake. 65 BTSALP specialists from schools in Salt Lake City,



Granite, Canyons, Murray, Tooele, Park City, Davis, North & South Summit School Districts, and many local charter schools, had the opportunity to see a performance of EB & FLO by Elaine Jarvik before choosing among breakout sessions led by Plan-B, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, and SpyHop.

Education Coordinator Sharah Meservy and biologist Jaimi Butler led Plan-B's breakout session. 21 participants explored ecosystems of Great Salt Lake, created puppets, and devised short plays to communicate what they'd learned about the lake.

Provo School District

Provo School District invited us to present to their middle and high school theatre teachers in January 2026. Four teachers attended the hour and a half session where Sharah introduced our *Playwriting With Young Adults* curriculum. Participants had fun sharpening their improv skills and writing a short play collaboratively.



In SY27, we present SNAIL MAIL as our fourteenth annual *Free Elementary School Tour*, created specifically for grades 4-6 by Melissa Leilani Larson.

We are offering free *A Week With A Play* student matinees of three productions: *FACING EAST* by Carol Lynn Pearson (grades 11-12), *WHAT THE PHỞ?* by Wendy Dang (grades 11-12), and *RADIO HOUR EPISODE 18: THE LAND OF OZ* by Debora Threedy (grades 7-12), where students will be part of the “live studio audience” as the matinee will also be broadcast live on KUER RadioWest.

In SY27 playwriting residencies continue at City Academy (year-round), Guadalupe School (four months), and Salt Lake Center for Science Education (four weeks). We are excited to begin a new four-month residency with students in grade 6 at Dual Immersion Academy, co-teaching with both English and Spanish Immersion teachers.

In SY27, we will begin expanding access to our free, self-paced *Playwriting With Young People* and *Playwriting With Young Adults* professional development training courses as a newly-approved Altitude provider.