

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Hartford, CT**

**April 22, 2026**

### **SINA's Fifth Annual Young Author Awards**

The 2026 REACH Young Authors Awards ceremony will take place on **Wednesday, May 20th**, from **4:00 to 6:00 p.m.** at **Hartford Public Library's Park Street Library @ the Lyric**. The event celebrates local students who have written and illustrated their own books, offering them a professional book-signing experience.

Hosted by **SINA (Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance)**—a partnership between **Connecticut Children's, Hartford Hospital, and Trinity College**—and in collaboration with the **Hartford Public Library Park Street Library @ the Lyric**, the event honors the creativity and voices of students in grades K through 5.

The REACH program began five years ago after SINA staff heard the story of a young student who wrote a book and discreetly added it to a library collection. The delighted librarian chose to circulate it—an inspiring moment that led SINA to collaborate with Hartford Public Library to bring this opportunity to more young authors.

This year, 44 students participated in creating 22 book submissions in the theme of 'Secrets and Surprises'. A panel of judges from the REACH committee and Hartford Public Library selected 21 authors and illustrators as winners. Ten books were chosen for publication and will be professionally printed and bound by the CRT Print Center, complete with ISBNs, barcodes, and copyrights. Copies will be distributed to the students' schools and the Hartford Public Library Park Street Library @ the Lyric.

### **This Year's Winning Books**

#### ***The Story of the Lost Wallets***

Written and illustrated by Eliana Grace Alicea and Mia Elizabeth Quito, second graders from Maria Sanchez Elementary School. Two girls search across Disneyland for their missing wallets, racing from ride to ride and relying on a clever plan to save the day.

#### ***The Mystery of the Forest***

Written by Juan Carlos Mendez and Christopher Perez Velasquez, and illustrated by Dafni Lopez and Jackeline Ortiz Velasquez, third graders from Maria Sanchez Elementary School. During a family camping trip, two siblings uncover a surprising secret about the animals in the forest after meeting a mysterious dog named Rex.

#### ***Spider Kitty (Saves the World)***

Written by Yahdiel Caraballo and illustrated by Jacob Lopez Herrera and Anderson Ramirez, fourth graders at Maria Sanchez Elementary School. Spider Kitty sets out to save the world and must follow a trail of clues to rescue a captured cat while facing a dangerous villain.

#### ***The Quest for Something***

Written and illustrated by Mercy HseeZar, a fourth grader at Maria Sanchez Elementary School. A determined albino axolotl named Miish sets off on a quest to find something special, using clues and creativity to remember where she needs to go.

### ***Alexis and the Monkey Greg***

Written and illustrated by Jonathan Zamorano, a fifth grader at Maria Sanchez Elementary School. After crashing his plane in a forest, Alexis meets a mysterious monkey and discovers unexpected help as he searches for a way back home.

### ***The Stranger Danger Mystery***

Written by Isabella Venkatsammy and Jeremiah Lopez Cruz and illustrated by Jessica Wah and Seeyo Soy, fourth graders at EB Kenelly Elementary School. A group of students follows mysterious clues from an unknown source, leading them on an adventure that makes them question who is behind it all.

### ***The Unknown***

Written and illustrated by Carolyn Soto, Natalie Arias, and Arianis Deplet, fourth graders at EB Kenelly Elementary School. A mysterious cat secretly watches over a young girl named Mia, protecting her through a difficult moment until its hidden presence is finally revealed.

### ***Dany's Journey to Calm***

Written and illustrated by Arnab Rana, a fourth grader at Betances STEM Magnet School. A ram named Dany struggles to control his anger and learns an important lesson about calmness and self-control.

### ***Cherry and the Great Nut Mystery***

Written and illustrated by Viviana Bathina, a fifth grader at Montessori Magnet at Batchelder. When nuts begin disappearing in the woods, Cherry and her friend Chestnut follow clues and set a trap to solve a mystery full of surprises.

### ***The Treasure Hunt***

Written and illustrated by Aarush Bajpai, a fifth grader at CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary School. A pirate named Bob sets out in search of treasure with his parrot, only to discover that his adventure holds more than he expected.

## **Event Highlights**

The event will be co-hosted by **Ravonne Barret** of Hartford Public Library and **Linda Torres** of SINA. This year's keynote speakers are **Erwin T. Hurst, Sr.** and his daughter, **Evie Erin**, a dynamic father-daughter writing duo and co-authors of the *Kizzy Kloo Mystery Series*, including *The Golden Egg*. Erwin is the head writer for Keiterbennett Publishers, a Hartford-based independent press, and a dedicated advocate for youth and literacy in the Greater Hartford community. Together, they bring a passion for storytelling and representation, inspiring young authors through their work. Student authors will receive certificates and trophies, read from their books, and sign copies for attendees selected through a raffle.

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