

THE TEACHERS’ LOUNGE Continued from Front Page



RWAR CEO and co-founder Jarren Small moderates a fireside chat with NBA Foundation Head of Operations and Strategic Programs Lauren Sills during The Teachers’ Lounge launch event at Studio Eight08.

Lauren Sills was 22 years old the first time she walked into a classroom and realized she had no idea what she had agreed to. She had come to Los Angeles through Teach for America, full of the particular confidence of someone who had grown up watching her grandfather govern a city, who had studied at Spelman, who had spent college internships in Senate offices and believed, not unreasonably, that intention was most of the work. The classroom disagreed. Her students were 10th- and 11th-graders at a school with limited resources, and four of the girls in her class were already mothers. The principal and both vice principals would be fired before October. By the end of her first year, 18 of the 27 or 28 teachers in her building had been let go or pushed out. Sills stayed, coached volleyball, taught geometry and history, and kept showing up. But she was taking notes on something else entirely: what it costs to do this work without any real infrastructure around you. That lesson, absorbed in a Los Angeles classroom years before she would go on to help oversee the NBA Foundation’s \$300 million commitment to economic opportunity, was the quiet center of the conversation she sat down to have in Houston on May 22. The venue was Studio Eight08, an Emergent & Co. concept space tucked into Downtown Houston off Travis St. The evening was the soft launch of The Teachers’ Lounge, a new membership community from Reading with a Rapper built around a proposition that feels both obvious and overdue: that Houston’s educators deserve a room of their own. The room itself earned that idea. Networking bingo cards were handed out at the door as a tool that made strangers feel like they already had an excuse to talk. UNBRIDLED bourbon, a Kentucky-based spirit, kept attendees light on their feet as they sipped curated cocktails. Art covered the walls. Ninth Sage set the soundtrack for the space, and when Reading With A Rapper CEO and Co-Founder Jarren Small settled into his chair across from Sills for the evening’s fireside chat, the educators filling the seats leaned in not because they had to, but because they truly were curious about Lauren’s journey. Reading With A Rapper has been in this work since 2018, funding and equipping disadvantaged youth and communities through workshop programs and cultural experiences — a model that has reached more than a million students and clocked over

of her career in detail. What the Studio Eight08 conversation offered was something different: Sills sitting close enough to the room that the room could feel her, telling the parts of the story that don’t fit neatly onto a LinkedIn profile. She talked about the administration at her school being toxic, about not having the language for it at 22 but knowing what she felt. She talked about spending her lunch breaks — twenty minutes at a time, day after day, for six months — on the phone with strangers who might know someone who could help her transition out of teaching and into government. She talked about going to Washington, D.C., during spring break to do interviews, about working in the Senate and discovering that gridlock keeps real change from happening, about watching a dynamic Black woman at a Chicago nonprofit receive a foundation grant and thinking, for the first time, that she wanted to be on the other side of that transaction. At each turn, the throughline was the same: she did not wait for a system to notice her. She built the scaffolding herself, one cold call at a time. The NBA Foundation, which she now helps lead, oversees programs including the NBA HBCU Fellowship, a 10-week internship where HBCU students work inside NBA offices — a program that drew 11,000 applicants for 70 spots in its most recent cycle. The scale is impressive. But what Sills brought to Studio Eight08 was the reminder that the most far-reaching work often begins in deeply personal places. That is the bet Reading with a Rapper is making with The Teachers’ Lounge. Not that every educator in Houston wants to leave the classroom — many don’t, and the city is better for their commitment. But that every educator deserves to know what their options are, what their skills are worth beyond the building they work in, and what their lives can hold outside of lesson plans and parent-teacher conferences. They deserve a community that sees their full range. They deserve, more than occasionally, a room where they are the guest of honor. Through this first event, Reading with a Rapper made the case it has been building toward for years: that the future of Houston’s classrooms depends not just on what we give students, but on how deeply we choose to invest in the people who show up for them every single day. The Teachers’ Lounge is open. Houston’s educators know where to find it.



CLASSIFIEDS

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Enterprise Solutions – HGACBuy/Cooperative Purchasing Program – Medium and Heavy Trucks, Truck Bodies, and Trailers – HT07-26A

H-GAC is soliciting responses for selecting qualified manufacturers, dealers and distributors of Medium and Heavy Trucks, Truck Bodies, and Trailers and to make these types of products available to Customers of the HGACBuy Cooperative Purchasing Program under blanket type contracts. **NOTE: This solicitation is a supplement to the previously offered Request for Proposal (RFP) #HT07-26. Current HT07-26 awardees do not need to submit a response.**

To view the solicitation documents, visit <https://www.h-gac.com/procurement> or [ESBD \(txsmartbuy.com\)](https://www.esbd.com)

Response Deadline: June 18, 2026 @ 12:00 P.M. CT