



# STAR ACADEMY

## COMMUNITY TOUR

### FEATURING BUDDIEROE

TELLING MEANS BUDDIE ROE APPEARANCE/PERFORMANCE

16 DEC	COOLXDAD HQ, 5 <sup>TH</sup> WARD	22 JAN	BLOOM ACADEMY, SUNNYSIDE
17 DEC	AFTER SCHOOL MEAL LAUNCH FAMILY & FRIENDS	23 JAN	BETHEL FAMILY CHRISTIAN ACADEMY
08 JAN	KINDRED STORIES (CLASSROOM CONCERT)	31 JAN	THE HIVE, SPRING BRANCH
09 JAN	FREEDMEN'S TOWN, 4 <sup>TH</sup> WARD	06 FEB	WORKSHOP HOUSTON, 3 <sup>RD</sup> WARD
12 JAN	HARVARD UNIVERSITY	18 FEB	TABSE STATE CONFERENCE
		06 MAR	MISSOURI CITY (CITY HALL)



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WHEN CULTURE MEETS THE CLASSROOM



Forward Times and NNPA leaders—including Rev. Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.—join Reading With A Rapper Co-Founder Jarren Small at the launch of the Burger Bodega “After School Meal.”



Community enjoys the Reading With A Rapper and Burger Bodega “After School Meal” during its official launch.

The face of education in Houston is changing. Since 2018, the Reading With A Rapper (RWAR) program has helped improve student learning outcomes through its edutainment-based pedagogy, blending technology with socially conscious hip-hop lyrics. According to program data, RWAR has driven a **70% increase in standardized test scores**, a **90% improvement in social-emotional learning**, and a **90% increase in attendance** among participating students. Now, RWAR co-founders Jarren Small and Douglas Johnson are building on that success with the launch of **Star Academy**, a six-week program designed to reimagine the school-to-career pathway.

The initiative officially debuted with the **Star Academy Community Tour**, a two-day kickoff designed to introduce the program’s mission and curriculum directly to the community. The tour launched Dec. 16 at the CoolxDad headquarters in the Fifth Ward with an informational meet-up and live classroom-style demonstration, before continuing Dec. 17 at Burger Bodega on Washington Avenue for a community pop-up tied to the program’s broader outreach efforts. Across both events, attendees connected with the Reading With A Rapper team and gained deeper insight into Star Academy’s vision and approach to education.

Founded by Kevin Barnett, CoolxDad empowers fathers through financial security, mental health, community service, and self-esteem. By launching the Star Academy Community Tour at CoolxDad’s headquarters in the East River district of Fifth Ward, Star Academy placed education within a broader cultural ecosystem rooted in fatherhood and community. Beyond shared values, the collaboration is also functional: the CoolxDad space will serve as one of four Star Academy locations. On Dec. 16, the site hosted an interactive presentation detailing RWAR’s origins, its educational approach, and how co-founders Jarren Small and Douglas Johnson helped create

and define the **edutainment** space. Reading With A Rapper CEO Jarren Small opened the program with an overview of RWAR’s history. He and co-founder and COO Douglas Johnson launched the nonprofit Legends Do Live in 2013 to fund and support underserved youth. On the business side, their company Ed.ENT—short for Educational Entertainment—focuses on educating, entertaining, and evolving through innovation, culture, and technology. One of its key tools is CPs, or Curriculum Projects, a form of streaming content that can be commercially licensed and used as educational curriculum. CPs include music, audiobooks, comic books, short films, and TV shows. Musical CPs are produced in-house through Ed.ENT, creating original music that becomes part of the RWAR curriculum.

Within the Reading With A Rapper program, students analyze socially conscious hip-hop lyrics to identify literary devices such as similes and metaphors, then create their own original work in the form of a poem, essay, or song. At the conclusion of the program, each student presents their work to the class, followed by a surprise appearance from the artist whose music they studied, offering insight into the inspiration behind the project. *Lost & Found* by Houston-based rapper BuddieRoe holds special significance as Reading With A Rapper’s first-ever Curriculum Project, setting the foundation for the program’s edutainment-based approach.

Following a short video featuring student testimonials, RWAR Dean of Instruction D’Juan Hych led attendees through a live classroom-style demonstration. Audience members learned to define terms like metaphor—a comparison that does not use “like” or “as”—and hyperbole, or exaggeration for emphasis. Together, they analyzed BuddieRoe’s lyrics onscreen to identify examples of both. BuddieRoe was present to answer questions, including one posed by Small: “Why did you choose to go this route, even though you’ve been successful commercially?”

“The simple answer is to make a difference,” BuddieRoe said. He reflected on his childhood, which included attending both underserved and prominent schools. In fifth grade, a close friend was killed in his neighborhood, prompting his mother to send him to a predominantly white suburban school about 35 minutes away. The transition created culture shock and made it difficult for him to engage academically. “I didn’t really have the capacity to tune into what school had to offer,” he admitted. “Once I discovered myself through music and my purpose, I knew that was what I wanted to bring to the table—helping people find themselves.”

Johnson then introduced Star Academy, a six-week, cohort-based literacy program serving elementary, middle, and high school students. Beginning in March, students will attend one 90-minute session per week at their selected Star Academy location. Each weekend over the six-week period, participants will engage in literacy instruction, vocabulary and comprehension development, creative writing, and more, working consistently with RWAR edupreneurs.

At the conclusion of the program, all cohorts will gather for a citywide celebration concert and showcase. Families can expect live performances, meet-and-greets with featured artists, merchandise, Reading With A Rapper trading cards, and a shared experience with students from across the Houston area. Students may also enroll in additional cohorts as new programs become available. The full six-week program costs \$300.

Star Academy classes begin March 28, initially meeting on Saturdays only. As enrollment grows, sessions will expand to Sundays. Parents may drop off students or remain on-site at designated waiting areas. “There will be a spot for parents at every location,” Johnson shared. Star Academy will operate at four Houston sites:

- Third Ward (Workshop Houston, 3615 Sauer St.)
- Fourth Ward (Freedmen’s Town Conservancy, 1204 Victor St.)
- Fifth Ward (CoolxDad headquarters, 2810 Riverby Road)
- Spring Branch (The Hive, 7800 Amelia Road)

Small expressed the locations were selected intentionally. “We chose cultural hubs on purpose,” he told the *Forward Times*. “Oftentimes, we’re always asking, ‘Is it OK? Are we funded?’ In our system, we’re not asking anybody. We’re creating our own runway.” He added that Star Academy will soon expand to Missouri City, with plans to renovate a space located at City Hall. “This is a citywide partnership,” he said.



The Community Tour also highlighted another collaboration: RWAR’s partnership with Burger Bodega at 4520 Washington Avenue. The restaurant is offering an “After School Meal” that includes a burger, fries, drink, and a RWAR trading card—collectible, Pokémon-style cards featuring characters from the Reading With A Rapper cinematic universe. Proceeds support literacy grants for Star Academy.

The After School Meal launched Dec. 17 at Burger Bodega, which blends New York bodega aesthetics with Houston flair—a fitting backdrop for Small and Johnson, who hail from Houston and Brooklyn, respectively. “With us being from Houston, TX, and Brooklyn, NY, partnering with an innovative concept like Burger Bodega allowed us to celebrate both our cultures to make an impact on one community,” they said.

Houston showed strong support at the launch, with attendees including BuddieRoe; Stockz, artist and founder of BUY MONEY Ent.; Forward Times CEO and Publisher Karen Carter Richards; and Rev. Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., President and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA). The After School Meal is available at Burger Bodega Tuesdays through Fridays from 4 to 6 p.m. through Feb. 17.

The Star Academy Community Tour will continue throughout 2026, offering additional opportunities for families, educators, and community members to engage with the program ahead of its official launch. The tour will lead up to the start of **Star Academy classes on March 28**, as Reading With A Rapper continues building momentum around its expanded approach to literacy, creativity, and career readiness.

Readers can learn more about Star Academy and register online at [www.readingwitharapper.com/staracademy](http://www.readingwitharapper.com/staracademy).

## CLASSIFIEDS

### REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

**Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Public Services – Video Surveillance, Access Control & Security Fencing Systems – SE05-26**

H-GAC is soliciting responses for the selection of qualified manufacturers, distributors, installers and service providers of Video Surveillance, Access Control & Security Fencing Systems and to make these types of products and services available to Customers of the HGACBuy Cooperative Purchasing Program under blanket type contracts.

To view the solicitation documents, visit <https://www.hgacbuy.org/bid-notices> or [ESBD@txsmartbuy.com](mailto:ESBD@txsmartbuy.com).

**Response Deadline: January 29, 2026 @ 12:00 P.M. CT**

## HELP WANTED

**Budget Analyst wanted by Nan Ya Plastic Corporation USA in Houston, TX w/ Bachelor's degree in Finance & 6 mth of exp in cash flow management. Must know financial planning & analysis, financial models, budget allocations, statistical analysis, financial risk assessment, cost-benefit analyses, pricing models. Duty: Perform cost-benefit analysis, fiscal allocation & budget preparation; Perform cost & revenue forecasting; Consolidate budget into operating & capital budget summary; Compile & analyze accounting record to determine resource for project; Dvlp & review budget proposal & monitor spending & availability of fund; Review & approve or deny funding request & evaluate program to determine cost effectiveness; Analyze accounting record to determine resource for program & make recommendation for budget allocation; Consult w/ manager to ensure budget adjustment made according to marketing strategy; Research global economic & financial development affecting budget. Send resume to [jchen@nuhs.npcusa.com](mailto:jchen@nuhs.npcusa.com) using subject line: WC-BA/Nan Ya Plastics Corporation USA**

## HELP WANTED

**Quality Manager**  
Manage cross-functional projts w/ the Quality Team. Continuously dvlp & adapt processes & methodologies to the team's needs. Inspect, monitor, & report NCI (Non-conformance Incidents) as well as monitor & control progress to mitigate risks involved in the project. Performing detailed & recorded inspections of final products so the products are up to industry & company stds. Contribute directly as a proj team coordinator w/ cstomers, vendors, manufacturers, & suppliers to ensure smooth & successful execution of prototyping, testing, validations, & the start of production. Utilize industry best practices, techniques, & stdsards throughout the entire proj execution to meet project quality as well as customer satisfaction. Regs a master's degree in proj mngmt or industrial eng. Please mail resumes to HR at Omni Powertrain Technologies, LLC. 3620 West 11th Street, Houston, TX, 77008.