

Good evening. My name is Lara Haggerty, and I have had the honor of teaching at The Greene School for the past fifteen years as a biology teacher leader. I am here today to respectfully oppose Bill H7415.

Over my years at Greene, I have watched students arrive carrying heavy stories; experiences with bullying, anxiety, and the quiet belief that they simply are not capable of success. Too often, they have already decided that school is not a place where they belong.

As the longest-serving teacher at Greene, I have seen what happens when those same students are given something different. They find adults and peers who become their champions. They find belonging. They discover their independence, and their ability to thrive.

This transformation is not accidental. It is the result of an intentional system that our educators work every day to refine. We hold high expectations for our students because we believe deeply in their potential, and we continually redesign our approach to meet their needs. That commitment, to both care and accountability, is what allows our students to succeed.

After a rigorous application process, Greene was already approved to expand to include grades 6, 7, and 8. That decision followed careful review and strong support from students, families, staff, and community members across Rhode Island. It is deeply concerning that an opportunity that has already been thoughtfully evaluated could now be taken away.

I respectfully ask that you trust the process that has already taken place. The Commissioner personally visited our campus, observed our classrooms, and saw how we connect a diverse group of students from across the state to meaningful learning.

Expanding to middle school would allow us to reach students earlier—at a moment when belonging, confidence, and identity are still forming—and help set them on a stronger path toward success.

I invite you to visit our campus and walk our trails. Our seventy-acre campus is more than a school—it is a living laboratory where students connect with the natural world, with each other, and with real-world problem solving.

At a time when young people are facing a growing mental health crisis and an uncertain climate future, we should be expanding opportunities that we know are working, not limiting them.

For the sake of the students who are still waiting to find a place where they belong, I ask that you oppose Bill H7415 and allow more Rhode Island students the opportunity to grow and succeed at Greene.

Thank you.