



April 2, 2026

The Honorable Joseph McNamara
Chair, House Education Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: H8326

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the 12,000 educators and education support professionals represented by the National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI), I write to express our strong support for this legislation establishing school calendar flexibility during declared states of emergency.

This bill represents a common-sense approach that brings clarity, consistency, and predictability to existing law. Rhode Island's educators, students, and families have recently experienced firsthand the disruptions caused by severe weather events that necessitate school closures. In those moments, the priority must be the safety and well-being of students and staff—not uncertainty about compliance with instructional day requirements or the administrative burden of seeking individual waivers.

By deeming days missed during a declared state of emergency as excused for purposes of meeting minimum school day requirements, this legislation provides school committees and districts with clear guidance and assurance when they are navigating challenging and often rapidly evolving situations. Eliminating the need for individual waiver requests to the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ensures a more efficient and equitable response across all districts, while reducing unnecessary administrative strain during emergencies.

Importantly, this legislation also protects the integrity of locally approved school calendars. Requiring districts to extend the school year or add additional days after emergency closures can create significant challenges for educators and families alike, including conflicts with childcare, summer programming, and contractual obligations. This bill respects those realities while still maintaining accountability through the governor's formal declaration of a state of emergency.

We appreciate that this legislation maintains the Commissioner's ability to issue general guidance, ensuring that districts continue to receive support and direction without being subjected to inconsistent or burdensome waiver processes.

We are grateful to the sponsors for advancing a thoughtful and practical solution that reflects the lessons learned from recent emergency situations. By providing consistency in statute, this bill ensures that school committees can act decisively and confidently in the best interests of their communities during times of crisis.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to support this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Lucini".

Alexander Lucini
Government Relations Director, NEARI