

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Ensuring Stability for UCAP Students

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Anna Prince, and I serve as a school social worker at the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

For more than 37 years, UCAP has provided accelerated, personalized education to students who have struggled in traditional settings. Our students often require intensive academic and social-emotional support, and UCAP was built specifically to meet those needs.

From 2021 - 2024 I had the privilege of working as the full time social worker for UCAP. After stepping away from this position to pursue more advanced clinical training, I have had the unique opportunity to return to work part-time in addition to another full time social worker on a growing student support team. A multidisciplinary team including advisors, counselors, and administrators that has really shown up for under-resourced families with significant mental health needs, trauma histories, and social challenges. At a time when most districts have reduced funding for social work services in schools, UCAP has made mental health counseling, wraparound support and meeting families where they're at a priority. I can honestly say that the work we are able to do here, providing quality in-school clinical services, family support, coordination of care, and bridging the gap between education and mental health is my dream job. It's also a job I believe I would not be able to do with as much consistency, efficacy, or impact at any other school or institution.

What is especially frustrating and confusing about all of this is that from what I've witnessed first hand, the overall progress of the UCAP school has been exponential over the past 5 years. During this time and through the inclusive leadership of the admin team, the UCAP community has built equitable and trauma-informed systems, strengthened relationships between students, staff, and families, and implemented consistent and restorative discipline practices with a focus on social emotional development.

It's heartbreaking to know that our current 7th graders and potential future students, many of whom would meet the criteria for a mental health diagnosis and/or have significant trauma histories that get in the way of their ability to learn, might no longer receive the services they deserve. Services that provide them with the emotional and physical safety they haven't been able to access anywhere else.

S-2208 / H-7271 would modernize UCAP's statutory framework and allow additional districts to refer students. This ensures that access to UCAP is based on student need.

Our students deserve continuity and stability. I urge you to support this legislation to protect a proven public education model that has served Rhode Island students for decades.

Sincerely,
Anna Prince, School Social Worker
Providence, RI