

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Carolina Almonte, and I serve as the MLL Specialist 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.

I have worked at UCAP since 2013, and I can confidently say it has been one of the most meaningful places I have worked because of the strong community we have built. As a former student from the Providence school district, I have personally seen the differences between school environments. UCAP has helped adolescents during some of the most important years of their development by providing personalized learning and a supportive environment.

First, UCAP's small setting gives students the opportunity to truly get to know one another and build meaningful relationships. Students often tell us how much they value being part of UCAP because, for the first time, they feel seen, heard, and accepted. Many of our students come from similar backgrounds, which helps them connect with one another and form supportive friendships. Some students share that they experienced bullying before coming to UCAP and were afraid to attend larger schools. At UCAP, we are able to provide them with a safe and supportive environment during some of the most challenging years of their development.

Second, we take the time to understand each student's learning style and meet them where they are academically. We help students grow by emphasizing the importance of education and how it can open doors for their future. Our students work hard not only for themselves, but also because they want to make their families and teachers proud. They know their teachers genuinely care about them because we prioritize building relationships with both students and their families.

Third, UCAP provides an inclusive environment where we are able to accommodate students' individual needs. Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are included in general education classes more than 85% of the time, with the support of a special education teacher in their ELA and math classes. This collaborative model ensures that all learners receive the support they need to succeed in their core academic subjects. In addition, UCAP supports Multilingual Learner (MLL) students at all proficiency levels by providing appropriate services, including English Language Development instruction and push-in support within classrooms. These services help language learners develop their English skills while also ensuring they can access their academic content and succeed in their classes.

Lastly, another important component of UCAP is the opportunity for students to accelerate their education. Students are able to move ahead one grade level through our accelerated learning model. For example, a student may enter UCAP as a seventh grader and, after two years, transition into high school as a tenth grader. Similarly, students who enter as eighth graders may complete one year at UCAP and move directly into tenth grade. This model was intentionally designed to help reduce the dropout rate by re-engaging students who may have fallen behind academically and giving them the opportunity to catch up, regain confidence, and continue their education on a successful path.

These supports are the reason UCAP has been able to change the lives of so many students over the past 37 years.

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,  
Carolina Almonte, MLL Teacher  
Cranston, RI