

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Katie Cowherd, and I previously served as a Teaching Assistant, Assistant to the Director of BeyondU, and Substitute at the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP) during the 2022-2023 school year.

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 wore many hats during my time at UCAP, and so had the unique opportunity to interact with students in different environments and classes throughout their school day. I saw firsthand how UCAP worked to challenge, support, and enrich every single student. I saw students grow an incredible amount between the day I met them in August and their last day of school in June. UCAP is able to offer a unique level of support in the classroom to really make sure that kids are being supported. When I was at UCAP, every class of students had a TA, ensuring that no student was invisible, and increasing the amount of help that was available to them throughout their day. We were able to get to know students and provide emotional and social support as well as academic. Our classes became families. In such a tiny community, students were able to make real, impactful relationships with the adults and students around them. People forged strong friendships, and were able to lean on the adults around them no matter what was happening at home. In the smaller classes, I was able to spend a lot of time working with struggling students who might have been left to their own devices in a larger setting. I was able to work with students on processing their frustration and anger about school, and help keep them out of trouble. I watched in real-time as students learned to break their own behavioral patterns and mature as students and human beings. I remember vividly working with the different adults at UCAP and being so impressed by their dedication to the development of every student and their well-being. UCAP is a place that really believes in the ability of every student and provides a unique opportunity for them to change.

In the BeyondU program, kids had the chance to deepen their bonds with each other and explore new opportunities. I watched kids become interested in rock climbing, gaming, cooking, and learn to play basketball with their friends. They had the chance to have experiences they would have never had in another kind of school setting. I saw how motivating this program was for students to stay on track in class and watched them learn to be good teammates, group mates, and friends.

UCAP is an incredible, unique place. I have never seen a school that was able to combine such a small setting with that wide range of opportunity in the way that UCAP has. For many of the students I worked with at UCAP, this was the place where they finally felt that they were not invisible to their teachers, and were able to think of themselves as learners. I worked with students who began to interrogate their own concepts of their futures, and learn to aim higher for themselves. I saw students start to believe in themselves.

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,

Katie Cowherd, M.Ed. , Special Education Teacher
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