

March 10, 2026

To: The State of Rhode Island General Assembly
Re: Senate Bill S-2208 and House Bill H-7271

I am writing in support of both bills and urge you to pass them. As I understand these bills, they are designed to support the UCAP School in Providence by giving more Rhode Island districts the opportunity to send students who would benefit from UCAP's remarkable (and needed) program. This change would create an opportunity for more Rhode Island students to take advantage of the program and for UCAP to have a level of flexibility that will ensure its continued success for the coming years.

I assume you are aware of the school's history at serving underserved, lower-income students. But if you are not, I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the basic story — for it contains all you need to know to support the bills. Founding in the late 1980s by Rhode Island Educator Rob DeBlois, UCAP was set up to address the drop-out problem in Providence and nearby communities by offering a brand-new kind of public-school program — an accelerated learning model that engages at-risk students in ways mainstream schools could not. The independence of this public school (predating the charter school movement) enabled the smart, talented, morally driven staff to create a program that prioritized engagement in learning. As we know from the research, students learn best when they feel fully engaged, and they feel fully engaged when they feel cared for and respected by the adults in their lives. UCAP has leveraged this kind of engagement to such a remarkable level — and has continued to innovate the program over the years to ensure the engagement of all its students. Today's leadership and faculty at UCAP are different from the original staff, but they are equally knowledgeable and passionate about and committed to the work of supporting their students' intellectual and social-emotional development. Under Lynn Prentiss's current leadership, UCAP has been thriving and growing in important ways. By passing these bills, you can ensure that the future of the one, small, powerhouse of a school will remain bright.

If you take a student-led tour of UCAP, as I and many others have, you'll be struck by how poised the students are, how empowered they feel by their new experiences with learning, how much they support each other in this process, and how much they admire the faculty and staff that make it all possible. (I know I was not half that poised at their age.) This is a true learning community.

When I last checked, the statics indicated that at-risk students had about an 80% of dropping out of school before graduating from high school. From the start, UCAP has assured that those who transfer into the school would have a far higher chance of successfully completing high school, with many going on to find success in college and beyond. In fact, the school more than flipped that statistic, ensuring an 80% or higher success rate. You'll be hard-pressed to find a school

program anywhere in the nation that has reached this level of success with this population of students year after year after year.

It's hard to keep this letter short; there are so many reasons to support UCAP. Suffice it to say that UCAP is a highly affordable way to solve a statewide (and national) problem of struggling and at-risk students. It is highly successful in its mission and has a track record any school would covet. It has talented leadership (past and present) that leverages its independence to reshape the program and innovate as needed, and yet it reports to and works with the districts it serves to ensure public oversight. It has the deep support of families in those districts. It has broad community support from area corporation as well hundreds of concerned and caring citizens who take pride in have such a school in the community.

Honestly, I wish there were a version of UCAP in every city in nation. Until then, the smart move is to pass these bills and ensure that UCAP can continue to thrive and serve the state and its citizens well.

Michael Brosnan

Exeter, NH

Author of *Against the Current* (a book about the early years of UCAP)