

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sara Braganca, 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.

I have heard UCAP described countless times as “magic” and it didn’t take me long to understand why. In my work with the students here, I have learned that they come to UCAP because they felt lost in larger middle schools, sometimes due to mental health struggles and learning differences, and sometimes due to learning English as a second language. Students regularly report feeling like the UCAP staff genuinely cares and are eager to collaborate in an effort to support the students. As a result, we have the honor of watching them grow and build confidence for academic and social successes they never thought possible. Students have frequently stated they feel hopeful and individually supported, which they had never experienced from previous schools. At UCAP, the students feel seen and heard for who they are, their goals suddenly feel reachable, and their futures become hopeful. I have never seen such a nourishing environment within a school and I know it will be very difficult to find this environment again if we lose it. The benefits of the UCAP environment are so deeply appreciated by students and their families, and they are devastated by the news of the school shutting down. Particularly the seventh graders who will now be expected to resume in the larger middle schools that felt threatening; schools they were eager to escape from. The message they are receiving tells them their safety doesn’t matter and their success isn’t important. Please don’t steamroll all of their dreams, especially since they’ve all worked so hard for them.

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,

Sara Braganca, LICSW, MSW
The UCAP School Social Worker
Providence, RI