

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Stefani Espinal, and I serve as a 8th Grade science teacher 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 began my journey at UCAP as a teaching partner after I was not offered the opportunity of science teacher because I did not have the certification. I took the offer and ever since then I think of how my passion for teaching became of this. I fell in love with the minds and personalities of students that attend the school. They are all unique in their own ways but all want to do better in life academically and socially. Middle school is the most awkward and rewarding time for students because they are figuring themselves out. So at such a challenging time for the scholars, UCAP gives them a place to explore their identity, build strong relationships, and be in a supportive environment. I've been at UCAP for 3 years, in that time I've met some of the most amazing scholars who with consistent encouragement and personalized help have overcome the fear of not succeeding academically. By the end of the term, I've witnessed students successfully complete their coursework and proudly share their progress with their family and friends. I have past alumni students who come and visit weekly because I treat them as their own individual person and make them feel seen. Not one student feels invincible or like a number on a roster. UCAP is a second home for a lot of students and taking it away will be like taking away a safe place. Through personalized instruction, strong relationships, and a supportive environment, scholars who struggle with social anxiety and academics, find confidence to significantly achieve in life. It's a privilege to have the opportunity to teach students at the UCAP.

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,

Stefani Espinal, 8th grade Science teacher
Johnston, RI