



Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education

Organizational Testimony in Support of SB 2077

Apr 8, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE) submits this testimony in strong support of SB 2077, which would grant voting rights to the Student Advisory Council Chair and Rhode Island Teacher of the Year on the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

At ARISE, we work alongside Southeast Asian youth and families across Rhode Island to advance education justice, youth leadership, and meaningful civic participation. Through this work, we have seen firsthand that students and educators are often closest to the realities of our schools — yet too often, they are excluded from decision-making power.

SB 2077 is an important step toward aligning representation with power. While students and educators may currently serve in advisory roles, this bill ensures their perspectives are not only heard but meaningfully incorporated through voting authority. Specifically, the legislation would make the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year and the chair of the Student Advisory Council voting members of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, rather than non-voting participants.

Students experience the impacts of education policy every day. From curriculum decisions to school climate policies to resource allocation, these decisions shape young people's futures. Granting students a voting seat recognizes that youth are not merely recipients of education policy — they are stakeholders and leaders in shaping it.

Similarly, the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year represents educators who are deeply engaged in classrooms across the state. Teachers bring practical knowledge about what students need, what supports are missing, and how policy decisions translate into real classroom conditions. Ensuring teachers have voting power strengthens policymaking with grounded expertise.

At a time when students across Rhode Island are organizing around issues including school safety, mental health supports, culturally relevant curriculum, and equitable resources, it is critical that governance structures evolve to reflect democratic participation. Youth leadership should not be symbolic — it should be substantive.

This bill also reflects Rhode Island's broader commitment to civic education and youth leadership. If we aim to prepare students to participate in democracy, we must also model democratic governance by including them in decision-making spaces.

SB 2077 moves Rhode Island toward a more inclusive, representative, and effective education governance system — one that values the voices of those most directly impacted by education policy.

For these reasons, ARISE respectfully urges the Committee to support SB 2077.

Thank you for your consideration.