

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Andrea Joseph, and I am a former staff member and current board member of the Fund for UCAP, the fundraising entity that provides enrichment programs and capital needs for the students of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has benefited thousands of students who have needed accelerated learning and a smaller, structured, supportive environment for 37 years.

Every year at the closing ceremony, students stepping up to enter high school have a consistent refrain: 'At UCAP, you didn't give up on me when I was ready to give up on myself.' This is a powerful reason you should support this legislation. Needless to say, I am proud to have been a part of this unique and essential school since 2006.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Andrea B. Joseph

Providence, RI

Anne W Connor
3 Regency Plaza, Apt 811
Providence, RI 02903
401-808-6356

By Electronic delivery to lynnp@ucap.org

March 9, 2026

RE: RELATING TO EDUCATION -- COOPERATIVE SERVICE AMONG
SCHOOL DISTRICTS — H7271 (S2208),

Dear Senator Bell and Representative Lombardi:

The proposed bills would strengthen and modernize UCAP's law, allowing additional districts to refer students and ensuring that access to UCAP is based on student need. These bills bring the legislation for UCAP closer to a state-run district.

I have visited the school and witnessed the commitment of faculty and excitement of its students.

Thank you for your consideration of my support for H7271 (S2208)

Sincerely,

/s/ Anne W Connor

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Bonnie DeBlois, and I am on the Fund for UCAP Board and the wife of the founder and past director of UCAP, Rob DeBlois.

UCAP was founded by Rob in 1989, long before alternative education models were available in Rhode Island. The mission of the school is to serve urban students who face challenges both in their everyday lives, and in school. UCAP is designed to help middle school students who have fallen behind catch up to their peers, and graduate from high school on time.

Because of its many unique attributes, UCAP has had extraordinary success over the years. Thousands of students who were likely to drop out of school have graduated from high school, or attained their GED. UCAP students not only enjoy small class sizes and individualized instruction with the opportunity of acceleration in grade, but they also enjoy a welcoming, supportive community with offerings of after school, weekend and summer experiences. These are experiences like sailing, swimming, skiing, hiking, camping, cooking, and trips to Washington DC and New York city, that many have never experienced before. When speaking about UCAP, students, staff, alumni, and supporters always mention "community" as an outstanding feature which is often absent for these students in traditional public schools. It is this sense of community which engages students, thereby motivating them to realize and then reach their potential both in school and in life!

S-2208/H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island. UCAP is still in many ways unique, offering opportunities to deserving middle school students who have faced many challenges in their young lives - opportunities which are not available to them in traditional public schools.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Bonnie DeBlois Fund for UCAP Board Member
Seekonk, MA

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Bryna Hebert, and I am a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

I am also a Licensed Mental Health Clinician, parent, and grandparent, and I know how important it is for a child to find a good fit in school so they will stay in school, benefit from the learning, and become a productive member of society. Not every child fits into a large school that is designed for the masses, and we in Rhode Island have decided time and time again that these children still count and deserve a high quality education. UCAP has been that alternative for many students.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support for this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Bryna F Hebert, LMHC

Pawtucket, RI

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Haley Bergantino, and I am a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

I have seen firsthand the difference UCAP makes. The program helps middle school-aged students feel like they truly belong, giving them a sense of independence and confidence while supporting them academically so they can reach the grade level of their peers. It is so important to set students up for success early, and UCAP provides a unique opportunity for them to accelerate their learning while receiving the individualized support they need.

I have also worked with UCAP leadership for many years and have consistently seen a positive, student-centered environment. Students enjoy attending UCAP—they are engaged, excited, and genuinely happy to be part of the school community. That kind of enthusiasm for learning is invaluable and speaks volumes about the program's impact.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Haley Bergantino
West Warwick, RI

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)



March 18, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Charlotte Boudreau, and I am a Youth Development and Education Consultant. I have worked as a kindergarten teacher and in Out of School Time Programming (OST) for over 30 years.

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island and has served students who need accelerated learning in a smaller, structured environment for 37 years. The need for a program like UCAP has not diminished but has become even more necessary. Public schools are struggling in a way UCAP is not. Students need an environment where they are respected, helped to feel productive and taught the skills they need to know to become successful after graduation.

Having worked as a consultant at UCAP for the last 4 years I can attest to an atmosphere where students are truly excited to be in school and OST! Administration, teachers and staff always put their students' needs first. They help them succeed at their own pace to be able to learn the foundation of what they are learning before moving on to the next step. This is done without compromising what they need to learn.

The OST program, funded by RI Department of Education, provides additional opportunities for students to participate in multiply programs including Science Exploration, Cooking, Intro to Piano, Computers, Art, Maker's Space and Sports. Providing hands-on programming allows students to try new things, be challenged and become independent thinkers.

[Senate Bill S-2208](#) and [House Bill H-7271](#) strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island. Students and families need to know they have a choice and voice as far as where they want to go to school.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Boudreau
Youth Development and Education Consultant
North Smithfield, RI

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Charlotte Harvey, and for the past six years I've served on the board of the Fund for UCAP, the school's fundraising arm.

As you likely know, UCAP was founded 38 years ago as a safety net for children who were already falling behind in middle school, which put them at high risk not only academically but personally.

When I first met UCAP students and alumni, twenty-some years ago I was blown away by the transformation these children described. Clearly, they had blossomed under the individual care and challenges their teachers offered. Having accelerated academically, they came to appreciate their own abilities.

People often ask if UCAP is a charter school. It actually predated the development of charters and is governed by the superintendents of participating school districts. In today's educational world, that's no longer a viable structure.

S-2208/H-7271 is a critical piece of legislation for UCAP's long-term sustainability. It would clarify governance and admission structures and allow additional school districts to refer appropriate students. The legislation ensures that UCAP can continue serving students who need an alternative path to success. For decades, UCAP has helped young people who were at risk of falling behind move forward with purpose. Supporting this legislation will help ensure that future generations of students continue to have access to this life-changing opportunity.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Harvey

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kenneth Clauser and I am a board member of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

I was a high school teacher for 37 years at the Wheeler School in Providence and taught one of UCAP's graduates, Leidy Valencia who is now a lawyer in Chicago. I saw first-hand the difference that UCAP's approach can make in a student's life. This personal, challenging program offers young people who are willing to work hard the opportunity to succeed and to develop confidence. There needs to be a place in Rhode Island for a school like UCAP that provides these opportunities for our most vulnerable children.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Clauser, board member the UCAP School

Barrington, Rhode Island

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dan Corley, and I am a board member of the Fund for UCAP and a donor of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). In addition, my oldest grandchild is the fifth generation of my family to be born within a couple miles of St. Joseph Hospital, where I was born. I know the neighborhood.

My relationship with Rob DeBlois, the school's founder, goes back to his visiting Community Prep School in 1987 and deciding that he would like to turn the summer program for public school students that he had founded, Spirit, into an actual public school. UCAP was founded in 1989. I helped him think about it.

We were close friends shortly after he visited Community Prep, and worked on a number of projects throughout our professional lives. These projects included strengthening both UCAP and Community Prep, creating a group for leaders of small schools to get together and discuss how to best improve their schools, and introducing charter school legislation in Rhode Island. UCAP was basically an independent, public school serving those who most needed the help and Community Prep was an independent, private school serving a group of students who reflected the diversity and economics of the public school populations. We thought that we were a good pair of educators to take on the task of bringing charter schools to this state.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island. I know that Rob would be delighted to envision the school that UCAP can become under this proposal.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Dan Corley
Founder and Head of School of Community Prep School
31 Westmore Street
Providence

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

We are ardent supporters of Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). Each spring, we look forward to attending the UCAP Spring Social, where we have had the chance to witness the school's steady, thoughtful progress firsthand. What has impressed us most is the incremental yet unmistakable growth — not only in the school's physical environment, but especially in the students themselves. Year after year, we've seen UCAP's commitment to its mission reflected in the confidence, determination, and achievements of the young people it serves. We remain continually inspired by the impact this school has on its students and the community.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

We respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Nancy and Chris DiMinico
Chelmsford, MA

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Gina Paone, and I am a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

I am a school nurse who has had the privilege to work alongside Tamara, the school nurse for UCAP. We share an office and I have personally seen the positive impact that this school has had on many students' lives. So many students are thriving and truly enjoy the UCAP school experience. Tamara goes above and beyond to understand each of their individual life experiences and listen to their stories. These students need people in their lives who take the time and truly listen and care like her. She has a way of being able to speak with the students about their health and well being where they truly listen and engage with her. This is because she genuinely cares about each and every individual and has made a positive impact in many children's lives.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Gina Paone, BSN,RN

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mary Galvin. I am a resident of Smithfield RI and a member of the Board for the Fund for UCAP Committee, the fundraising arm of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

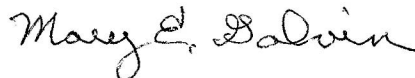
UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

Despite struggling in elementary school, through the support of my parents and some excellent teachers, I was able to obtain a graduate education. This enabled me to have a career in science and research that went way beyond what I could have dreamed of as a child and instilled in me a commitment to ensuring that others have the chance to reach their potentials. As the Dean of the College of Science at the University of Notre Dame I developed a program for students who wanted STEM careers but entered with weak science and math preparation. Watching these students flourish was exhilarating. When I joined the Board at UCAP and meet and heard the stories of UCAP's students, I again encountered that same flourishing and excitement in the UCAP students. They have been taught to love learning and believe in themselves and their potential. This would not have happened in another school and there is no better gift we can provide.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Mary E. Galvin

Fund for UCAP, Member of the Board

Dean Emeritus College of Science, University of Notre Dame

March 17, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Gary Friedmann, and I am a Board Member of the Fund for UCAP whose primary mission is to raise, hold, and invest funds solely for the benefit of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

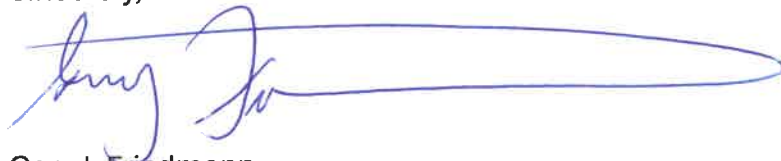
UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

I have been a Board member of the Fund for UCAP since its inception. I have had the opportunity to visit the school on numerous occasions and always leave extremely impressed with the passion and dedication the educators have for serving the students of UCAP. The interactions that I have had with students are more impressive. It is amazing to see the progress that they make and the confidence that they exhibit during their presentations and the many tours that I have taken of the school.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary J. Friedmann", followed by a long, horizontal, sweeping line that extends across the width of the signature area.

Gary J. Friedmann
North Kingstown

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is William Huling, and I am proud to be a former board member of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). Having witnessed UCAP's impact firsthand, I can say that its mission and approach remain as relevant and vital today as when it was founded in 1989. At that time, alternative education models were not widely accessible in Rhode Island. For 37 years, UCAP has opened doors for students who benefit from an accelerated pace of learning and a supportive, close-knit environment.

What drew me to UCAP was the unmistakable sense of unity and shared purpose that infuses every aspect of the school community. UCAP stands out as a safe, encouraging environment where students are empowered to aim high. Through a steadfast commitment to equitable outcomes, the school delivers accelerated learning and a wide range of extended learning opportunities, all while weaving social and emotional learning into the daily experience of every student.

At The UCAP School, academic excellence is more than a goal—it's a journey built on personalization, dedication, high expectations, a growth mindset, and thoughtful goal setting. These principles foster a genuine love of learning. Equitable outcomes are at the heart of the UCAP experience, inspiring creativity and challenging the community to embrace diversity, honor individuality, and deliver a curriculum that is both meaningful and culturally relevant. UCAP's model demonstrates that accelerated learning is not only possible, but it's also transformative—helping students graduate on time, build grit, and realize that they are capable of overcoming any challenge.

The school's extended learning opportunities take education beyond the classroom, encouraging students to explore their interests, build connections, and envision their future in high school and beyond. Social and emotional learning is a daily practice that strengthens students' resilience, nurtures healthy relationships, and cultivates the skills needed for personal well-being and empathy. These values form the bedrock of success for every member of the UCAP community—students, families, staff, and community partners alike.

The proposed legislation, S-2208 / H-7271, is crucial for UCAP's continued success and sustainability. By allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions processes, this legislation aligns UCAP with today's educational needs and ensures it will remain a stable, accountable public option for Rhode Island families.

I respectfully urge your support for this important legislation so that UCAP can continue to serve as a beacon of opportunity and achievement for students across our state.

Thank you for your consideration.

William H. Huling
Franklin, MA

March 9, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jenna Chandler-Ward, and I served as an instructional coach in 2024-2025 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 witnessed first-hand how students engaged with and grappled with difficult content at UCAP. It is my belief that it is the nature of the program, the outstanding educators and the family atmosphere that UCAP gives their students, that allows for transformational learning to happen.

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,

Jenna Chandler-Ward
Education Consultant
Providence

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Corsentino, and I am a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

As an OST Program Manager I have had first hand experience in how paramount programs such as the one at UCAP are for the students and community. By supporting them financially, we enable students to learn and grow in an environment that fosters their individuality and supports academic needs in a safe space. These OST opportunities are integral for many families and help to keep students engaged far beyond the school day.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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Jess Corsentino
Program Manager- 21st Century Community Learning
Pawtucket School Department
286 Main Street, Pawtucket, RI 02860
Office: 401-305-7715

March 9, 2026

RE: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Keith Goryl, and I am a board member of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

While I have only been in the role for a little less than one year, my board involvement with UCAP has given me the opportunity to see first-hand the positive impact that the school has on its students and the local community, and I am in awe of the dedication and support that is provided daily by UCAP's administrative staff and faculty. It is truly inspiring!

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Keith Goryl
Lincoln, RI



Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kyleen Carpenter, and I am a longtime Providence resident, longtime community partner of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP), and a longtime educational leader in the State of RI.

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

In the late 1990s, I began working in the SPIRIT Educational Program which was a summer program established by UCAP's founder, Rob Deblois, in conjunction with City leaders and independent school leaders in Providence and surrounding cities. The first time I met Rob, I was utterly astonished at his dedication to the most vulnerable youth in the City of Providence and beyond (to Central Falls and Pawtucket), and I vowed to dedicate my future educational career to the same youth. In the late 1990s, I worked with other SPIRIT staff members to co-found a charter public high school, Blackstone Academy Charter School, that opened its doors in 2002. I've been co-leading BACS since that time, 24 years. Quite frankly, the thousands of students that we have served over the past 2+ decades would not have had the experience to grow and thrive at BACS without the inspiration of Rob and his staff at UCAP.

To shutter UCAP would remove a critical and significant lifeline to struggling students in Providence. Having worked in urban education for decades, I can attest that youth in 2026 are facing challenges that they never have before: post-pandemic learning loss, severe mental health struggles, community violence, and threats to immigrant communities. Right now would be the exact wrong time to cut this opportunity off for the youth of our City.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Kyleen Carpenter, Head of School, Blackstone Academy Charter School, Pawtucket, RI 02860
Resident of Providence 1993-1997, 2009 - present

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kimberly Hunt, and I have been a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP) since its inception 37 years ago.

My brother-in-law, Rob DeBlois, had the vision to found UCAP in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island. I have witnessed how students who need accelerated learning in a smaller, structured environment can thrive when given that opportunity.

The success of UCAP is nothing short of extraordinary. The dedication of the professionals, and the support of the community, have delivered outstanding results for these young people and their families. Reducing the probability of students dropping out of school, and increasing the probability of their academic success, and therefore lifetime opportunities, is priceless.

S-2208/ H-7271 strengthen UCAP's long term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Hunt
South Kingstown, RI

March 9, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lynda McCoy and I am a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and for 37 years it has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment.

I have seen UCAP's success first-hand over the years, through my service on the Fund for UCAP Board and other committees, and through my personal relationships with UCAP staff. UCAP is a special place that puts its students first, and its students succeed despite personal hardships and obstacles. Those students need the learning environment that UCAP provides, and I hope you will vote to continue that.

S-2208 and H-7271 strengthen UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students, and by clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Lynda McCoy
20 Dorset Rd
Pawtucket, RI 02860

March 10, 2026

Subject: Support for S-2208/ H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee.

My name is Linda A. DeConti, LICSW and I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and a Certified School Social Worker in RI who is a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). I am writing in my capacity as a School Social Worker to express my strong support for the development and continuation of UCAP, which is a small, accelerated learning environment that was founded in 1989. This school has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured school setting.

Through my work supporting students with a wide range of social, emotional, and academic needs, I have observed that many students struggle, not because of a lack of ability, but because the structure of traditional classrooms does not adequately meet their learning profiles. Large class sizes, limited individualized attention, and rigid pacing can create significant barriers for students who require additional flexibility, relationship-based support, and targeted instruction. From a social-emotional and mental health perspective, schools such as UCAP can significantly reduce student stress, increase school engagement, and improve overall well-being. These outcomes not only support academic achievement but also promote healthier developmental trajectories for students who may be at risk of disengagement or dropout.

A small, structured learning environment offers an important alternative. These programs allow for lower student-to-teacher ratios, increased opportunities for individualized academic support, and stronger relationships between students and staff. For many students who have previously disengaged from school due to academic frustration, behavioral challenges, or emotional stressors, this type of setting provides the safety, predictability, and encouragement necessary for reengagement in learning. When students feel seen, supported, and understood, they are far more likely to participate in school, build positive relationships, and develop the resilience necessary for long-term success.

Accelerated learning opportunities within UCAP are particularly valuable. When students are able to work at a pace that acknowledges both their past challenges and their current potential, they often experience renewed confidence and motivation. Providing opportunities to recover credits, close academic gaps, and make meaningful progress can be transformative for students who may otherwise feel discouraged about their academic future.

For these reasons, I strongly support the continuation of UCAP as part of a comprehensive continuum of educational supports. Providing diverse pathways to success ensures that schools are able to meet the needs of all learners, particularly those who have not thrived within traditional educational models. S-2208/ H7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority.

This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting innovative and responsive educational programming that prioritizes student engagement, well-being, and academic success. I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Linda A, DeConti, MSW, LICSW
Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker
Certified School Social Worker-Warwick Public Schools
Warwick, RI
Phone: 401-447-1500
Email: ladc63@yahoo.com

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee

My name is Gib Conover, and I serve as a board member and was the previous Board Chair of the Fund for UCAP Committee (FFU), the fundraising arm of The UCAP School.

I urge you to pass **S-2208/H-7271** which will enable the UCAP School to continue to serve some of RI's neediest students

Each fall, students arrive at UCAP at a critical point in the educational career. To be admitted to UCAP they're not meeting the academic standards for their grade level and some have already been held back a grade. Many have begun to believe that they simply can not be successful in school. They face a high probability of dropping out when they get to high school.

The first step of UCAP is to show these students that they can succeed. Every teacher at UCAP gets to know every student. There are social workers and guidance counselors to help the students work through problems that originate outside of the school. The students recognize that they are in a place that really cares about them.

UCAP also runs the BeyondU program after school, weekends, and summers. This exposes the kids not only to non-academic skills but also introduces them to parts of the greater community via many field trips. Many times siblings and parents accompany the students. Each year there is an overnight trip for 7th graders and a multi-day trip to Washington DC. All of this is provided at no cost/extremely low cost to students/families

In June of every year, UCAP holds its' graduation ceremony. This is an opportunity for kids to say, in their own words, what the UCAP experience has meant to them. Their stories are amazing: the changes in their attitude, the changes in their outlook, not only for school, but for life. They talk about how much they've learned and how excited they are to be going to high school and beyond. These kids are now on path to realize their potential.

The students of RI need UCAP. Again, I urge you to pass **S-2208/H-7271**.

Sincerely,
Gib Conover,
FFU Board Member

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mackenzie Sweet, and I serve as a Special Education 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.

As a special educator, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the profound impact that the resources and supports at our school have on students' growth. Over time, I have seen remarkable improvements not only in academic learning, but also in students' behavior, confidence, and overall engagement. Students who once struggled to participate are now actively involved, building skills that will serve them far beyond the classroom. These changes are not accidental, they are the direct result of intentional programming, dedicated staff and student commitment. I urge you to consider the real, human impact of this decision and to support this bill so that we can sustain and expand these positive outcomes for all students.

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,

Mackenzie Sweet, Special Educator
Providence, RI

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Marcie Cummings, and I am a board member of The Fund For UCAP of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

Years ago I had the opportunity to hear Rob DeBlois speak about his founding of UCAP. His singular vision, passion and tenacity were evident in his presentation. Inspired by Rob, I immediately signed up as a volunteer for UCAP. I am now a Board Member. I firmly believe that Providence needs a school like UCAP. It has provided so many students with a second chance to flourish, academically and personally. Closing UCAP would constitute a tremendous loss for the Providence community, particularly for the students it serves.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Marcie Cummings

Kingston, Rhode Island

March 17, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Muriel Ouellette and I served as the School Secretary for 35 years 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.

Within all my years at UCAP, I can tell you the one thing I heard most from the students. It was how fortunate they were to be able to attend our school. So many students told me that they never would have made it in their traditional schools. Some of the reasons why they loved our school was the small school setting, the one on one and the way everyone at UCAP treated them. This was something the bigger schools couldn't give them. They felt lost and behind and were on the path to failing. But UCAP changed them! Given the opportunity to choose UCAP and start fresh was a life saver to them. It was a second chance to try again. Many wished there was a UCAP High School as well. So, I beg you to reconsider and let UCAP remain open. Please let students choose that small setting and the fresh new start to find themselves again and leave there a better person and ready for success in High School and beyond.

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,
Muriel Ouellette
Glendale, Rhode Island

My name is Alicia Fernandes and I live in Providence, RI I am the parent Kasimira Freeman a student at the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

I am writing to strongly support S-2208 / H-7271. UCAP has made a difference in my child's life.

Before UCAP, my child struggled in traditional school settings after attending one of the local Charter School since Kindergarten with a constant struggle with her grades as well as not having the one on one support she needed I decided to transfer her last year to UCAP for 8th grade. I have never seen my daughter so excited and proud to attend school. She went from failing math for all her academic years to now excelling with an A in all classes including Math. My daughter missed 9 days in her last year at the Charter School from constantly feeling not included and bullied and just overextended to missing only 1 day of school this current school year with a note from her physician because she was ill. She truly loves and has embarrassed the experience she has had at UCAP this year. I feel every student in need of access to this amazing school should be able to continue to attend.

At UCAP, they have found structure, support, and confidence.

The possibility of students being forced to leave UCAP because of changes in district participation is deeply concerning to families like mine. Students who are succeeding deserve stability, not disruption.

This legislation would allow UCAP to continue serving students based on need and would provide long-term stability for the program. For families like ours, that stability matters.

Please support S-2208 / H-7271 to protect students and ensure UCAP can continue its important work.

Thank you for your consideration.

**Sincerely,
Alicia Fernandes
Providence,RI**

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Noah Agostini: I am an assisting facility manager at UCAP and a co-owner at OceanState & Cleantech Services. Through my role, I have worked directly within UCAP's environment alongside board members and staff, giving me firsthand insight into how this program operates and the impact it has on its students.

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for decades.

What stands out most about UCAP is the level of structure, collaboration, and purpose within the program. It is not just a school – it operates as a unified team where staff, leadership, and students are all working toward a collective goal of growth and success. There is a balance that UCAP achieves that is incredibly difficult to replicate: students feel supported, understood, and secure, while still being held to a standard that pushes them to improve and take accountability.

From my experience inside the facility, I have seen how creating a structured and supportive environment directly impacts behavior, focus, and progress. Students are not only given the opportunity to learn – they are placed in an environment where they feel safe enough to actually do so.

Without programs like UCAP, it is difficult to imagine where many of these students would end up. The impact of this program goes far beyond academics – it provides direction, stability, and a sense of belonging that is critical during formative years. From both a community and operational perspective, the value of UCAP is undeniable.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and by clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational needs and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Noah Agostini

Co-Owner, OceanState & Cleantech

Rumford, RI

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Nicole Robison, and I live in Providence. I am writing as a parent of a scholar enrolled in the Urban Collaborative Acceleration Program (UCAP) to strongly urge you to reconsider any plans to dissolve your collaboration and to show my vigorous support **S-2208/ H-7271**

UCAP has been life-changing for my child. In a traditional mainstream public school setting, my daughter would have gotten lost—academically, emotionally, and socially. The structure and pace of a large, conventional school did not meet her needs, and she was at risk of falling behind. UCAP provided her with an alternative educational environment that truly works for her.

This program recognizes that not all scholars learn the same way. UCAP offers individualized support, understanding educators, and a learning model that allows students to grow at their own pace while still being held to high expectations. Because of this program, my child has regained confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging in her education.

UCAP being forced to close would take away a vital opportunity for students who depend on alternative pathways to succeed. Many of these scholars are not failing because they are incapable—they are struggling because the traditional system does not fit their needs. UCAP fills that gap and ensures students are supported rather than left behind. Closing this program would remove a vital resource for students who already face systemic barriers in education. Rather than being pushed out or left behind, these scholars are given a chance to re-engage with learning, earn credits, and work toward graduation in a supportive and understanding environment. The program plays a key role in promoting equity, reducing dropout rates, and helping students build confidence in themselves and their futures.

As a parent, I want my child—and all children—to have access to an education that meets them where they are and helps them reach their full potential. I respectfully ask the department to consider the real impact this decision would have on families like mine and to keep the Urban Collaborative Acceleration Program open.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to supporting all students.

Please Support **S-2208/ H-7271**

Sincerely

Nicole Robison

Providence, RI

Parent of a UCAP Scholar

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Nelson Delva, and I am a supporter/community partner of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

UCAP is important because it helps kids and families access real opportunities-like getting involved in a boxing program where they can learn, grow, and feel part of something positive. When youth have support that removes barriers, they're more likely to show up consistently and take part in activities that build confidence. Boxing also creates a safe, structured environment where kids can focus on skill-building, teamwork, and personal goals. With programs supported by UCAP, kids don't just attend classes-they gain mentorship and the chance to develop habits that last beyond the gym.

Staying active is essential for kids, both physically and mentally. Regular movement helps strengthen coordination, stamina, and overall health, but it also supports emotional balance by giving energy a healthy outlet. A boxing program naturally encourages routine-warm-ups, technique practice, conditioning, and cooldowns-so kids learn that showing up matters. Beyond fitness, the consistency of training can help kids feel more confident and in control of their day-to-day lives, because they know they're working on themselves every time they come to practice.

Boxing is also a powerful tool for mental health and discipline. Training requires focus, patience, and respect-kids learn to follow directions, handle corrections constructively, and work through challenges step by step. Over time, they build resilience, improve impulse control, and develop confidence through effort. I'm also proud to share that my assistant is a UCAP alumni, and she's happy to see UCAP still going strong-excited to be able to help where she once went to school. Her journey is a reminder of how support can turn into impact, and she brings that same motivation into the gym every day.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Nelson Delva, Owner of New World Jungle Fitness
Pawtucket, RI

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Neida Gilmete, and I serve as the School Counselor 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 been employed at UCAP for about 5 years. It has been more than just a job for me. I have had great experiences with staff, students, and families. And I have really flourished and grown in this position. I have enjoyed working with students from Providence and their families. I have made great connections with community workers and families. This school is very special. I have never worked at a place where students' best interest is a priority. We treat each student as an individual and meet their specific needs. We are able to provide a safe environment for students with high needs academically and social-emotionally. I have seen this school go above and beyond for students and be able to implement more than I have ever seen other schools do. We are special and we need to be able to continue this for our students and our families.

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,
Neida Gilmete
School Counselor
Providence, RI

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Oluabukola Akinruli, and I live in Providence, RI. I am the parent/guardian of a student at the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

I am writing to strongly support S-2208 / H-7271.

UCAP has made a difference in my child's life.

Before UCAP, my child struggled in traditional school settings. The large classroom size and lack of individual attention made it hard for my child to focus and stay engaged.

At UCAP, they have found structure, support, and confidence. The possibility of students being forced to leave UCAP because of changes in district participation is deeply concerning to families like mine.

Students who are succeeding deserve stability, not disruption. This legislation would allow UCAP to continue serving students based on need and would provide long-term stability for the program. For families like ours, that stability matters.

Please support S-2208 / H-7271 to protect students and ensure UCAP can continue its important work.

Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely, Olabukola Akinruli, Providence, RI.

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Paula DeBlois, and I serve as the Chair of the Fund for UCAP Committee (FFU), the fundraising arm of The UCAP School.

UCAP was founded more than 36 years ago by my brother-in-law, Rob DeBlois. Rob had many career options, but he knew he wanted to dedicate his life to providing others with the same opportunities he was fortunate to have growing up. He believed that one way to achieve this was by creating an educational experience that would help young people succeed in further education and in life.

Rob recognized that a school offering personal attention, a safe and caring environment, and after-school programs driven by students' interests could make a profound difference. Such a setting would not only keep students safe, supervised, and nourished, but also show them that they matter and that people care deeply about their success.

To bring this vision to life, Rob consulted with educational experts from across the country, including nationally acclaimed educator Ted Sizer. The collaborative model UCAP was built upon was innovative at the time. Prior to the existence of charter school legislation, Rob successfully worked to have legislation passed that established the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

Thirty-seven years later, sustaining the collaborative model has become increasingly difficult. The superintendents of participating school districts serve as the board overseeing the school. Today's superintendents are already stretched thin, and taking on additional governance responsibilities has become increasingly challenging.

S-2208/H-7271 would strengthen UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and by clarifying governance and admissions structures. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP can continue serving students who need an alternative path to success. For decades, UCAP has helped young people who were at risk of falling behind rediscover their confidence, complete their education, and move forward with purpose. Supporting this legislation will help ensure that future generations of students continue to have access to this life-changing opportunity.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Paula DeBlois

Fund for UCAP Board Chair



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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Peter McLaren and I have served in various capacities in science education ranging from classroom teaching, education policy, and professional development at the local, state, and national levels for over 30 years. For the past four years I have served as a Science Education Consultant at the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP), located at 75 Carpenter Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

In 1994, during my tenure as a middle school science teacher in East Greenwich, Rhode Island I first became acquainted with UCAP through its strong reputation for effectively supporting students who faced academic challenges. As a teacher, I consistently sought to understand how schools across the state implemented innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and UCAP quickly distinguished itself in that regard. I was profoundly impressed by the school's ability to provide accelerated and personalized instruction to students who had struggled in traditional educational environments. I learned that UCAP served learners who often require substantial academic and social-emotional support, and the school was intentionally designed to meet those needs with precision and care.

A specialized school, such as UCAP is particularly effective for students at risk of failing or dropping out because it provides a more personalized and supportive environment than a traditional setting. Smaller class sizes, flexible instructional models, and strong teacher–student relationships help ensure that students feel recognized and capable. UCAP offers social-emotional support, counseling services, and early-intervention systems that address challenges before they intensify. Though my work at UCAP as a consultant I saw, firsthand, what I became aware of back in 1994, a school that provides individualized attention, emotional support, and meaningful academic pathways can greatly support students to remain engaged, confident in their abilities, and progress successfully toward graduation.

I fully support of S-2208 / H-7271. I feel it would modernize UCAP's statutory framework and allow additional districts to refer students. Passage of these bills will provide a clear legal structure that guides practice and protects the rights and well-being of the students it serves and ensures that access to UCAP is based on student need.

I close this letter with two simple questions...If not UCAP then who? Who will take up the cause to support these students? Since 1989 UCAP has been a proven model for making a difference for students who, so often, are either ignored or forgotten. UCAP students deserve continuity and stability. I strongly urge you to support this legislation and safeguard a proven public education model that has served Rhode Island's students effectively for decades.

Sincerely,
Peter J. McLaren



**NEXT GEN
EDUCATION, LLC**

Executive Director, Next Gen Education LLC

Email : mclarenpeterj@gmail.com

Direct: 401-419-8785

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Phillip Silva and I served as a School Counselor and Social Studies Teacher for 26 years 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.

UCAP is more than a school; it is home. During my time there, I saw the turnaround of hundreds of students who were at risk of dropping out. Students become connected personally to their teachers and the school community. Year after year, students from previous years would return and describe how the school had given them a second chance and the confidence to succeed in school. Arguably the most enjoyable day of every one of my years there was closing ceremonies. Students and their families would share emotional and heartfelt stories about their time at UCAP. Inevitably, I would leave the day filled with pride in the work we were doing at the school. I would recommend any individual attending this event to experience the true spirit of the school.

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,
Phillip Silva, [M.Ed.](#)
Attleboro, MA

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ruth Marris Macaulay, and I am a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

I am retired after 34 years as a middle and high school teacher and department head. I was also a mentor teacher for 20 years in the teacher education program at Brown University. I have seen firsthand what a difference focused and individualized instruction in small groups can do to help students whose needs are not easily met in large public-school classrooms. UCAP has an impressive record of helping such students to succeed in the classroom and through its after-school programs which I have enthusiastically supported. Why on earth would it make sense to return students to an environment in which they formerly failed to thrive? The issue appears to be about the allocation of funding rather than the needs of the students. The time is ripe for a thoughtful and compassionate approach that has long-term results, not for slick, cost-saving “efficiency” measures that do not invest in the future. Different students have different needs, an issue recently addressed by former Providence mayor Jorge Elorza in an editorial in the New York Times, advocating for a shift in thinking about education: “Instead of a top down model that delivers a one-size-fits-all experience, we need an open, dynamic system where educators have the freedom to design new schools- and parents have the power to choose among them.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/17/opinion/democrats-students-school-choice.html> UCAP is one of those dynamic schools of which we have far too few.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP’s long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This-legislation reflects today’s educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Ruth Marris Macaulay (Ms.)

East Providence

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee

My name is V Raffini, and I currently serve as a performing artist that helps with yearly graduation ceremonies. I was also an educator who taught elective classes at UCAP from 1990-2015.

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.

In these times, I have made some great relationships between families and students. Because UCAP was started in the community and had remained here, as well as many of the facilities that live here as well, I believe is one of the strongest reasons that these strong relationships are able to develop and grow stronger. I have former students, who graduated from decades ago to right now that still call and reach out to me. UCAP has taken care of, nurtured, and looked out for all of their students with caring and understanding. These qualities are not found in other learning institutions and that is just a couple of reasons why UCAP is unique and so important.

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,
V Raffini
E.D. Violet's Village
Community Health Worker
Providence RI 02907

Richard G. Horan

March 11, 2026

Re. Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

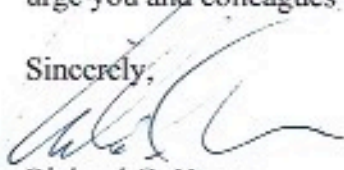
My name is Richard Horan, and I am a long-time supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). I write in support of the proposed legislation cited above.

I have been very close to the UCAP story since its founding in 1989, based upon a lifelong and close personal friendship with UCAP's founder, Rob DeBlois. I watched from close range as Rob launched UCAP, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island. I was particularly impressed with Rob's willingness to target one of the most challenging unmet needs in the education field, i.e. middle school students at risk of dropping out. I watched with great admiration as Rob marshalled the support among collaborating communities to build support for the UCAP model. Equally impressive was the initiative Rob took to engage the private sector, commencing with the effort in 1995 to become the first public school in RI to undertake a \$1 million capital campaign, ultimately purchasing and renovating a permanent home at 75 Carpenter St. in Providence. Later in time, the effort expanded when UCAP launched a \$3.5 million capital campaign to acquire adjoining buildings, thereby transforming the UCAP School to become a leading model for alternative education, both in Rhode Island but also on the national stage. The continued engagement of the private sector in what has evolved to become a testimony to the possibilities of public/private partnerships and the value proposition they represent in Rhode Island's educational sector have proven to be an enduring contribution to the communities being served.

I also watched from close range as Rob positioned himself for the inevitable succession that would be required as he retired from his founding role. In this connection, I was particularly pleased to see the appointment of Lynn Prentiss as Executive Director in 2021. I have known Lynn since before her enrollment at the University of Rhode Island, when she worked as Rob's special assistant. In that role, Lynn developed a fundamental understanding and appreciation of Rob's founding vision for UCAP. I followed with interest her college career at URI and later her pursuit of a Masters in Education at Johnson & Wales. I was thrilled to learn of her appointment at UCAP, quite confident that the organization could not have found a leader more capable of fulfilling Rob's founding vision. Suffice it to say, there is not a leader better-suited to serve as steward to the State of Rhode Island's continued support for UCAP.

Given the success story that UCAP has represented since its founding, and given the exceptional leadership in place going forward, I believe continued support of UCAP represents as compelling an opportunity for continued support as one might imagine in our state's educational sector. I urge you and colleagues to consider carefully the importance of maintaining support.

Sincerely,



Richard G. Horan

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Riana Fedeli, and I serve as the Director of Development and Communications 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 school settings. Our students often require intensive academic and social-emotional support, and UCAP was built specifically to meet those needs.

Each day, I have the privilege of supporting and working at an organization that serves young people who often have not found success in traditional school environments. At UCAP, students find the missing pieces to their education: small class sizes, individualized instruction and the support needed to rebuild confidence in themselves and their education. I have seen firsthand how powerful UCAP's impact on students is. Students who once felt disconnected at school now enjoy participating in class discussions, group activities, field trips and after school programming. When students attend UCAP, they know they are our priority. They know they are safe. They know we want them here.

In my role, I work closely with community partners and donors who believe deeply in UCAP's mission. Our success is not only the result of educators in the classroom, but also of the community that believes in our students and the work we do daily. The investments they make in our school reflects a shared understanding that students who need a different educational setting deserve a stable, loving and well supported program. Supporting UCAP means supporting a proven model that gives students the second chance they need to succeed.

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 respectfully urge you to support this legislation to protect a proven public education model that has served Rhode Island students for decades and will help ensure that generations of students continue to benefit from the opportunities only UCAP can provide.

Sincerely,
Riana Fedeli,
Director of Development and Communications
Providence, RI

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Samantha Armstrong, and I served as a Science Teacher at the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP) from February 2012 through July 2014.

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.

During my time at UCAP, I was new to my career in teaching and new to the district. The staff and students at UCAP welcomed me with open arms, just as they have done countless times before with anyone who walks through the doors. The opportunity to work several school years with the teachers and staff at UCAP changed my outlook on life and directly influenced the success I have had since. These people are the epitome of excellence in teaching. They give students access to curriculum that they often have not felt successful with previously. They encourage and support students in ways you will not see in other schools or districts across the state. In fact, I learned more in my three years at UCAP than I have learned from any other cohort, in any other setting, since. And that just scrapes the surface of this school. The students are at the center of everything they do and all decisions they make. These students come to UCAP for myriad reasons, but they often center around a failing of traditional educational practices to reach them. For many, UCAP is where they begin to see themselves as capable, successful and productive in academic settings. These successes are reflected in the successes of so many of the UCAP alumni, who have become productive community members decade after decade. Future students also deserve the chance to live up to their potential, and UCAP wants to be there 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,

Samantha Armstrong
Science Teacher- Smithfield High School
Resident of Exeter, RI

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Stephanie Brooks, and I am a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

Last year, I had the opportunity to take a student-led tour of UCAP, where several students shared their love for the school and their dreams for the future, including their career aspirations and hopes to contribute to the Providence community. It was clear to me that UCAP is providing students with a strong foundation that will support not only their individual success, but the continued strength of the Providence community.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support in this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Brooks

North Providence

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sarah B. McCann. I live in Providence and I am the parent/guardian of a student currently at the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

I am writing to strongly support S-2208 / H-7271. UCAP has made a great difference in my child's life.

Before UCAP, my child struggled in traditional school settings; She did not enjoy school. She struggled both socially and academically. Because of that, her whole attitude towards the process of learning and acquiring knowledge suffered. She was very shy & insecure socially, as well as with her academic confidence. She did not find joy in the learning process; she only felt defeat.

Since starting at UCAP, she has blossomed into a strong, confident, secure young teenager who has found purpose & meaning in her community. She has begun to realize her capabilities, her potential & all the gifts she brings into the world.

She is the third of my children to attend this program, as well as my brother. UCAP holds a very special place in our hearts.

The community there is SO VERY CRUCIAL, in helping children learn to overcome their struggles. Not only do I support everything being done at UCAP, but I also think many Providence schools could learn from their model of the importance of social/emotional health & growth. I'm sure any one of you, who knows anything about child & even human development would agree that in order for anyone to be able to grow into their greatest potential, healthy social/emotional development needs to be present. At UCAP, THIS IS HAPPENING EVERY DAY! It is clear, from the very first experience with incoming families, to the multitudes of opportunities for family involvement, to the quality of the caring & devoted staff they hire. These factors are essential for building a program where young teens feel they matter and can thrive. Not just if they can repeat academic facts, but they are allowed to question, be curious, get excited and be authentically themselves and all these things are valued & celebrated, not discouraged.

At UCAP, these young teens have found structure, support, and confidence.

The possibility of students being forced to leave UCAP because of changes in district participation is deeply concerning to families like mine. We value the education our children receive greatly and feel that UCAP does an amazing job of meeting our child's needs in every aspect of her development. We have no doubt that she will emerge from UCAP ready to face the next chapter of her life with confidence and a thirst for knowledge.

Students who are succeeding deserve stability, not disruption. These students have worked so hard to get to where they are at and PPSD pulling their support for this program sends the message that all the effort, all the vulnerability, all the chances these kids have taken to get as far as they have come, are not valued.

Our job, as a society, is to work to the best of our ability to make the world a better place. UCAP makes these children want to be the best version of themselves. Isn't that what we should want for our children, to want to be the leaders of tomorrow? Personally, I support that 100%!

S-2208 / H-7271 would allow UCAP to continue serving students based on need and would provide long-term stability for the program. For families like ours, voting yes to support these bills sends the message that stability matters.

Please support S-2208 / H-7271 to protect students and ensure UCAP can continue its important work.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Sarah B. McCann
Providence



Save The Bay Center
100 Save The Bay Drive
Providence, RI 02905

P: 401-272-3540
F: 401-273-7153
SAVEBAY.ORG

March 30, 2026

To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this letter of support on behalf of Save The Bay for the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

Save The Bay has been a partner with the teachers and students of of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP) for over a decade. UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island, and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years. This educational model equips students with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Save The Bay has been providing hands-on marine science education to the students of UCAP during the school day, afterschool hours as well as in the summer. Our experience with the staff and students of UCAP has been nothing short of excellent. The staff truly care about their students and look for ways to challenge them by providing real world experiences that connect them with their community.

Sincerely,

Bridget Prescott
Director of Education

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

Joan and Paul Sorensen
157 Waterman Street
Unit 4
Providence, RI 02906

March 13, 2026

Senate Education Committee
House Education Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith St
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

We write to express our strong support for pending bills S-2208 and H-7271.

UCAP provides students in the Providence School System essential instruction in basic skills: reading, writing, mathematics, and more. Working with cohorts of equally unprepared students UCAP teaches these students respect for education and for one another. In turn this raises self-esteem and points the students in proper directions for their future. The positive return UCAP provides to the students and consequently to the Providence community is enormous.

We urge you to support S-2208 and H-7271. These are important pieces of legislation.

Yours sincerely,



Joan Sorensen



Paul Sorensen

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 roaster. 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

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Stephanie Alvarado-Ross, and I serve as an instructional support staff and in-house substitute 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.

The small, tight-knit UCAP community ensures that each student receives the kind of individual attention from teachers that they deserve. I have seen students flourish at UCAP like they could not anywhere else. The number of students who consistently return to visit UCAP is testament to the impact of the school.

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,

Stephanie Alvarado-Ross, Instructional support and In-house Substitute
Providence

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jeff Guillemette], and I served as an English 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.

Twenty years ago, I began my career at UCAP. Our founder, Rob DeBlois, championed a vital mission: providing a second chance to students who had struggled in traditional public schools. We worked tirelessly to build the trust necessary to break through deep-seated barriers to achievement. While the work was emotionally demanding, the rewards were immense; through small classes and structured support, we watched students replace hopelessness with life-altering success.

Rob's vision proved that when a student is truly seen, their potential is limitless. The proof is in our alumni: many of those once-struggling students have since found success as lawyers, medical professionals, military personnel, small business owners, and even teachers, which are outcomes that once seemed unreachable. Closing UCAP would dismantle a proven pathway for those most at risk of falling through the cracks. In an era of unprecedented challenges for our youth, losing this support system doesn't just fail our most vulnerable students, it diminishes our entire community.

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,
Jeff Guillemette
5th grade ELA/SS teacher
Cambridge, VT

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tom Ahern, and I am a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

I began working intimately with UCAP soon after its founding, helping this pioneering school during its first decade or so, with fundraising and other communications.

Be proud, Rhode Island. UCAP was a "charter school" *before* charter schools were fashionable. Thanks to UCAP, our state can legitimately claim to be a cradle of America's charter-school-type methodology (smaller classes, challenging—i.e., unborring—curriculum, more one-on-one teacher-time, etc.). It's another Rhody "first"—what Slater's mill was to the industrial revolution, UCAP has been for middle-school education in urban settings.

UCAP is one of a kind. In a professional career now approaching 4 decades, I've worked with countless schools, in every English-speaking country. Honest. I've never encountered a more compelling story than UCAP's. Trying out new ideas, new ways to teach. That school housed a tough audience: ultra-high-risk kids with no demonstrated interest in school. Their brains were fine, yet they were failing to thrive in the system.

Rhode Island can claim that story with pride before an admiring world. Consider the obstacles overcome:

- UCAP was always very exclusive. To get in, a new student had to be of middle-school+ age and already a notorious failure in the classroom. Turning around such students is baked into UCAP's reason for existence. And it is notably successful at that delicate, complex task, building good learning habits, forgiving but strict about things that matter. UCAP prepares unlikely people to ultimately graduate high school, that next big step toward launching a functioning adult, welcome in society and our economy.
- This, too: UCAP's founder, Rob Deblois, is a major RI education hero in many books. He was born to money (lucky, and he knew it). He had a swimming accident as a young man that left him in a wheelchair, paraplegic for the remainder of his 65-year lifespan (*very unlucky*). Yet Rob wanted to do something spectacularly good for the world...such as turn around young lives. The kids in UCAP were mid-adolescent, from all sorts of backgrounds, with one thing in common: an education off the tracks, going nowhere, headed for drop out. Very likely thereafter for them: no high school diploma, the basic ticket into any kind of decent job or the military.

From his wheelchair, Rob, founder and boss, deftly managed it all. He was recognized often for this achievement. He was the principal of UCAP until 2019 and passed away in 2020.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation, in Rob's memory. And thank you.

Sincerely,

Tom Ahern • Foster, RI

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is TeLisa, Richardson, and I live in Providence RI. I am the parent/guardian of a student at the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

I am writing to strongly support S-2208 / H-7271. UCAP has made a difference in my child's life.

Before UCAP, my child struggled in traditional school settings for example, he didn't feel like he fit in or could be himself. Although I sent him into the 6th grade two grades ahead, he was promoted having done nothing to the point teachers didn't know he was able to read or write. He felt as though he had to show he was tough to survive instead of simply being allowed to be smart and continue learning.

At UCAP, my son has found structure, support, and a little more confidence.

The possibility of students being forced to leave UCAP because of changes in district participation is deeply concerning to families like mine. Students who are succeeding deserve stability, not disruption.

This legislation would allow UCAP to continue serving students based on need and would provide long-term stability for the program. For families like ours, that stability matters.

Please support S-2208 / H-7271 to protect students and ensure UCAP can continue its important work.

Thank you for your consideration.

**Sincerely,
TeLisa Richardson**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Thomas V. Stepka, and I serve as a former educator 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 worked with many needy students who needed extra help in reading. Students who came to UCAP were reading significantly below grade level. I bonded with many of these students. One even asked if he could live with me. I still keep in contact with some former students. I have watched them mature into adults. This is the result of their UCAP education and their relationship with the UCAP staff.

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,

Thomas V. Stepka
12 Birchtree Drive
Johnston, R.I. 02919



Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alexandra Castillo, and I am the Director of Programming at The FLY Initiative. We have worked with of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP) as community partners providing personal finance workshop to their 8th graders.

UCAP was founded in 1989, long before alternative education models were widely available in Rhode Island and has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured environment for 37 years.

As someone who grew up in Providence, RI and never left the state. I know through personal experiences how helpful UCAP has been to the youth of Providence. Not only did my friends or family members benefitted from being students at UCAP, my high school shared space with UCAP and I got to see all the resources they poured into their students to succeed in high school.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Alexandra Castillo,
Director of Programming
The FLY Initiative
Providence, RI

Tim Hotchner

110 Whittlesey Road
Woodbury, CT 06798
Tim.Hotchner@gmail.com
(917) 941-2854

Subject: Support for S-2208 / H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tim Hotchner. I am a 1995 graduate of Brown University, a documentary filmmaker, and a life-long advocate of Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program. I am writing in strong support of S-2208 / H-7271.

I first walked into UCAP as a twenty-year-old undergraduate looking for a story about an educator who was making a difference. What I found was something far more extraordinary: a school that had chosen, as its entire mission, to fight for the students everyone else had given up on.

At the head of that school was Rob DeBlois—a quadriplegic who knew something about overcoming adversity and who had built UCAP on a simple, radical premise: that a child who has been held back a grade is not a lost cause. That child is a candidate for acceleration. Rob is gone now, but that premise endures with Lynn Prentiss, and it has changed the lives of more than a thousand young people in Rhode Island.

After graduating from Brown, I moved back to Providence and spent over a year embedded at UCAP to direct a documentary called *Accelerating America*. The film follows three students—Jason, Yazmine, and America—through a make-or-break year at the school. I watched Jason, a boy who had been told he was stupid, discover that he was anything but. I watched Yazmine, who could not walk through a hallway without swearing at a teacher, end up in college studying criminal justice. And I watched America, a fourteen-year-old in foster care whose family had left the country without telling her, fight every day just to show up.

These are the students UCAP serves. Not the easy cases. Not the ones with two parents at home checking homework. The ones for whom getting to school each morning is, in itself, an act of courage.

For thirty-seven years, UCAP has been the last line of defense for these children. Its teachers do not micromanage; they coach. Its counselors spend their summers visiting students at home so they understand what each child carries into the classroom. The school runs after-school programs, Saturday school, vacation camps, and field trips—not because it has money to burn, but because these kids need more than a few hours of

academics to survive. And it works: UCAP graduates are significantly more likely to finish high school than their peers in the Providence schools.

I have spent my career telling stories about people and institutions that do hard things well. UCAP is the best example I have ever encountered. The idea that Providence would withdraw its students, and that this school—this irreplaceable school—could be allowed to disappear because of a structural funding gap is, to me, unconscionable.

S-2208 / H-7271 would modernize UCAP's enabling law, allow additional districts to refer students, and ensure that access to the school is based on student need. This is not a radical proposition. It is a practical one. It is the kind of legislation that keeps a proven institution alive so it can continue doing the work that no one else will do.

Rob DeBlois used to say that people of influence need to think of these kids as *their* children—not other people's children. I have carried that with me for thirty years. I respectfully urge you to carry it into your vote.

I urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Tim Hotchner

Director, *Accelerating America*
Brown University, Class of 1995
Woodbury, CT

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chelsea Galley, and I serve as the seventh grade math 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.

We see students every day who have struggled in their other school environments. I hear kids talk about what their schools were like that they came from - constant fights, cutting classes, and chaotic environments prohibited them from reaching their full potential. At UCAP, students do not fight. At UCAP, students are held accountable for being in class every day and trying their best. At UCAP, we see kids striving towards their goals and slowly start believing in themselves. As an educator, I live for the “ah ha” moments that kids experience when they finally understand something. I see this happen daily at the UCAP school. I have never experienced this in other places.

The UCAP school is truly a special place. The principal knows every student by name and by story. The administrators are directly involved with the students every day. The students know there is always a person they can turn to if they need support. The UCAP school strives to make it so that every student has a trusted adult in the building.

Though my time at the UCAP school has been brief, this is only my second year here, I have so valued the time I have spent in this community. I have grown so much as a teacher and as a person from being in this environment. I am supported here so that I am able to better support my students. I am pushed to be better so I can require the same from my students.

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,
Chelsea Galley, Seventh Grade Math Teacher
Providence, RI

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lois Gendreau, and I am writing on behalf of a family that I mentor. I live in South Kingstown and the family lives in Providence. The family that I mentor has a student who attends the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

I am writing to strongly support S-2208 / H-7271. UCAP has made a difference in my child's life.

Before UCAP, this student that I have been mentoring since he arrived in Rhode Island, struggled at a traditional middle school setting. He did very well in the public elementary school where he was nurtured but in the very large middle school he felt lost. He experienced bullying and was not progressing well in his academics, despite working very hard.

At UCAP, he has found structure, support, and confidence. He has smaller class sizes and is supported with his language development and adjusting to life in the United States. As his mentor, I have found excellent communication with his advisor and other teachers, giving me feedback that is helpful for me to be able to encourage and support his learning and social emotional development.

The possibility of students being forced to leave UCAP because of changes in district participation is deeply concerning to families like the one I advise. Students who are succeeding deserve stability, not disruption.

This legislation would allow UCAP to continue serving students based on need and would provide long-term stability for the program. For families like this young man's, that stability matters.

Please support S-2208 / H-7271 to protect students and ensure UCAP can continue its important work.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lois Gendreau

South Kingstown, representing a family in Providence

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Vivienne O'Dwyer Donohue and I am a resident of Middletown, RI. I write in **strong support of S-2208 / H-7271**. I have been serving on the Event Planning Committee for the Fund for UCAP since 2023 and previously served as the Director of Development at the UCAP School from 2015-2018.

The Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program was founded in 1989 by Rob DeBlois and a group of enthusiastic educators. The UCAP School has partnered with neighboring school districts to identify students who need more personalized learning and smaller classroom sizes, ensuring students receive the educational resources that they need so they may move on to high school feeling more confident. For over 20 years, the Beyond U Program has extended the school day offering enriching activities after school, on the weekends and throughout the summer.

The UCAP School holds a very special place in my heart! I learned so much from Rob DeBlois when I served as the Director of Development for UCAP. I loved raising support for the Beyond U Programs and was honored when I was asked to join the event planning committee for the annual spring fundraiser. The Beyond U Program has such a positive impact on students! Some of the kids have overcome challenging obstacles and hardships to simply get to school. It always amazed me the transformation that would occur throughout the school year and seeing first hand how a learning environment filled with love, and educators who truly care impacts students.

S-2208 / H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority. This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Vivienne O'Dwyer Donohue
Middletown, RI

Hello, my name is Billy Gonzales. I am a Network Manager for Fall River Public Schools and a former UCAP student, class of 2003.

I attended UCAP for two years, and I can confidently say it was one of the best educational experiences I have ever had. Looking back, UCAP's approach to teaching and learning was truly ahead of its time.

One of the most impactful aspects of UCAP is its small classroom environment. Because of the smaller size, educators are able to give students the individual attention and support they need. Students feel seen, heard, and understood. There is also a unique culture at UCAP where students are not required to address teachers formally by their last names. This may seem small, but it builds stronger relationships, mutual respect, and a sense of community. I was able to build meaningful connections not only with my peers but also with my educators.

Academically, UCAP had a lasting impact on me. The way Lynn and BK taught essay writing and structure stayed with me long after I left. In fact, I used those same skills in college and earned an A in my writing course because of what I learned at UCAP. That speaks volumes about the strength of their curriculum.

Another standout feature is the ability to work at your own pace. This approach teaches responsibility, independence, and accountability. Skills that are essential in the real world. Instead of feeling like a traditional school where you simply follow instructions, UCAP empowered me to take ownership of my learning, while still providing consistent support through its advising system.

UCAP also goes beyond traditional academics. The after-school programs exposed me to real-life skills such as cooking, languages, and other valuable experiences. It is a well-rounded environment that prepared me not just for school, but for life.

Most importantly, UCAP fulfills a critical role for students who need a second chance. I had fallen behind due to being out of the country for an extended period of time. This was difficult for me, both academically and socially, as I found myself older than my classmates and feeling out of place.

UCAP gave me the opportunity to catch up. Not only was I able to make up for the year I had lost, but the mixed-grade environment also helped prepare me for high school in a way that traditional schools could not. It rebuilt my confidence and set me on the right path.

I truly cannot speak highly enough about UCAP. It is more than just a school, it is a lifeline for students who need support, flexibility, and a chance to succeed. Programs like UCAP should not be questioned; they should be recognized, protected, and used as a model for other schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Erin Oliver, and I serve as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment and the Director of Special Services 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 started working at UCAP in 2006 as a special education teacher under the Founding Director, Rob Deblois. I was inspired by UCAP's mission and quickly realized how special and unique the school is for our community. Over the last 23 years I have seen well over 1000 students come through these doors, including parents and then their children, and multiple members of families, such as siblings and cousins. There have been years when our waiting list was miles long and we couldn't accommodate all the students who wanted to attend. The reason for all of this is that UCAP is a school like no other. Our small size, wrap-around services and private funding allow us to truly meet our students' needs, resulting in significant gains in school achievement and attendance. Our data shows significant growth in both areas and students overwhelmingly report positive feelings about our school community. UCAP has been doing this work for 37 years and is a model for how schools can work with high need students.

Closing UCAP's doors would create a gap that no other school in our area is designed to fill. 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,

Erin Oliver, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Special Services
Warwick, RI

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Amanda Lutrario, and I serve as a 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 have worked in multiple settings in and outside of public education for over ten years. This is truly the best school I have ever worked at. The staff and administrators truly care about the students. We work extremely hard to bridge the academic gaps and meet the social needs of all our students. Our smaller setting and intentionally chosen yearly trainings ensure we are able to meet very specific needs. Our teams meet weekly to look at and address student work, growth, and needs so we can make adjustments to instruction and support. We work hard to ensure no student falls between the cracks which is an unfortunately common situation in a large public school with less supports.

Graduated students return to visit each year and tell us how much we have helped them, how much they learned with us, how much their skills have improved while at UCAP, how they are better with their attendance, or how prepared they felt entering high school. As an eighth grade teacher, I also teach the accelerated program. This allows students who have been retained in grade to complete two years of academics in one. These students are at a higher risk of dropping out of school and UCAP helps them get back on track. These students are in a learning environment that will help them adjust to their next placement.

The UCAP school helps students of every kind: social needs, MLL, Special Education, Acceleration, etc. I know we do solid work here and every single student who comes to us will see growth in at least one area of need. There is a real need for The UCAP school and the student we serve deserve to have the very best provided for them in a safe school environment they know and trust.

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,
Amanda Lutrario, Social Studies Teacher
West Warwick