

May 13, 2024

To the Members of the RI House Finance Committee:

I am writing to express my own support for H7771, "Making an Appropriation of \$500,000 to the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner for the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education," and I am asking you to do the same. Continuing to fund RISPE beyond the 2024 fiscal year is the obvious right choice for Rhode Island. The decision before you as it pertains to this specific piece of legislation represents an opportunity for Rhode Island to further define itself as a state that considers public education of an outstanding quality a human right. This is an opportunity to show that Rhode Island is willing to take bold steps to strengthen public K-12 education and close staggering equity and achievement gaps, specifically for our students of color and students living in urban, high-poverty communities.

As a former classroom teacher, current executive director of the Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE) at Roger Williams University, and someone who has worked to support improving public education for over 25 years, I know firsthand the importance of RISPE's work. Furthermore, as an elected member of the Cranston School Committee, I can also speak from many different angles about the challenges we face as Rhode Islanders when it comes to closing equity gaps in the classroom in the midst of an anachronistic policy environment that perpetuates systemic racism and inequity in the schools our children attend every day. Let's fix this!

Our public school districts desperately want and need a pipeline of teachers of color that champions anti-racist, transformational curriculum and teacher training because they've seen the success of similar programs in cities like Boston, New York, and Chicago. Since its founding, the need and support for RISPE in our community has only gotten more intense; Rhode Islanders know that RISPE has the potential to change the lives of chronically underserved children in Rhode Island for the better and to create opportunities for aspiring teachers of color to enter the field. This work has taken on a new resonance in the wake of the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and in the midst of a growing teacher shortage. In collaboration with Rhode Island's urban public schools, RISPE will diversify the educator workforce, close equity gaps, and further our shared goal of ensuring every student in Rhode Island, no matter their race or what neighborhood they live in, has access to a high-quality public education.

In closing, Rhode Island's children are relying on us to improve our public schools, and the education our kids receive in public schools will be a determining factor in the success or failure of their entire lives. Your support for H7771, "Making an Appropriation of \$500,000 to the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner for the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education," and, as a consequence, for RISPE, proves your willingness to take bold action to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,



Keith Catone, Ed.D.
Executive Director, CYCLE
Roger Williams University*

*affiliation shared for identification purposes only