

**William G. Foulkes
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May 13, 2024

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House, Room 306
Providence, RI 02903

Chair Abney:

As the former Chair of the RI Council on Postsecondary Education and a former member of the RI Board of Education, I strongly support H7771, “Making an Appropriation of \$500,000 to the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner for the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education.”

I met with the leaders of the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education (RISPE) in 2017, when they were just beginning. RISPE’s mission—to recruit, train, and retain high-quality teachers of color; to accelerate teacher certification; and, to increase the number of ESOL certified teachers—matches the pressing needs of our state public educational system. I advocated for their approval as fully independent nonprofit postsecondary organization and that measure passed unanimously in 2019.

According to Brown’s Annenberg Institute, our state public school system confronts the following five trends:

- The number of English learners has doubled in the past decade, and schools are struggling to serve MLLS (multilingual learners)
- Pandemic recovery efforts are continuing with learning loss and high levels of absenteeism for MLLs
- Educator staffing shortages are acute in supporting MLLs
- The broader teacher workforce does not reflect the diversity of the student body
- With 39% of the teacher workforce over 50, we must prepare the next generation of teachers.

In its short five years of work, RISPE has begun to address these challenges:

- 41% of the state’s 111 certified ESOL educators were prepared by RISPE
- 77% of the new educators certified through RISPE’s programs are people of color

- 100% of RISPE elementary teachers are still teaching in Rhode Island's elementary schools.

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Through its programs—the ESOL Certification Program, the Elementary Accelerated Teacher Certification, and the Multilingual Learner (MLL) Endorsement Program—RISPE offers proven solutions to the state's most immediate needs . These offerings have been developed quickly and effectively due to its outstanding leadership team, and its ability to work with all stakeholders in the state educational system.

I urge you to support this important allocation of funds through H7771. RISPE has already proven its effectiveness and this investment by the state will have outstanding returns in improving the education the state's children receive in its public schools.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William G. Foulkes