

We Have Fought Racial Segregation Before, We Can Fight Racial Segregation Again

Statement before the Rhode Island State Legislature

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To the distinguished members of the Rhode Island State Legislature

Good afternoon. My name is Ian Rowe.

I come to you today as a Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where I focus on education and upward mobility, family formation and adoption. I am also a representative of The Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR), a nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing civil rights and liberties for all Americans, and promoting a common culture based on fairness, understanding and humanity.

I am also a member of 1776 Unites, a black-led, nonpartisan, and intellectually diverse alliance of writers, thinkers, and activists crafting solutions to our country's greatest challenges in education, family, culture, and upward mobility. It was launched in February 2020 by civil rights movement veteran Robert Woodson and a number of black leaders who acknowledge America's history of racial discrimination, yet recognize the pathways taken by millions of black people past and present who are not bound by a defeatist ideology. The scholars and activists leading *1776 Unites* are determined to spark a movement to liberate tens of millions of Americans to become agents of their own uplift and transformation by embracing the true founding values of our country.

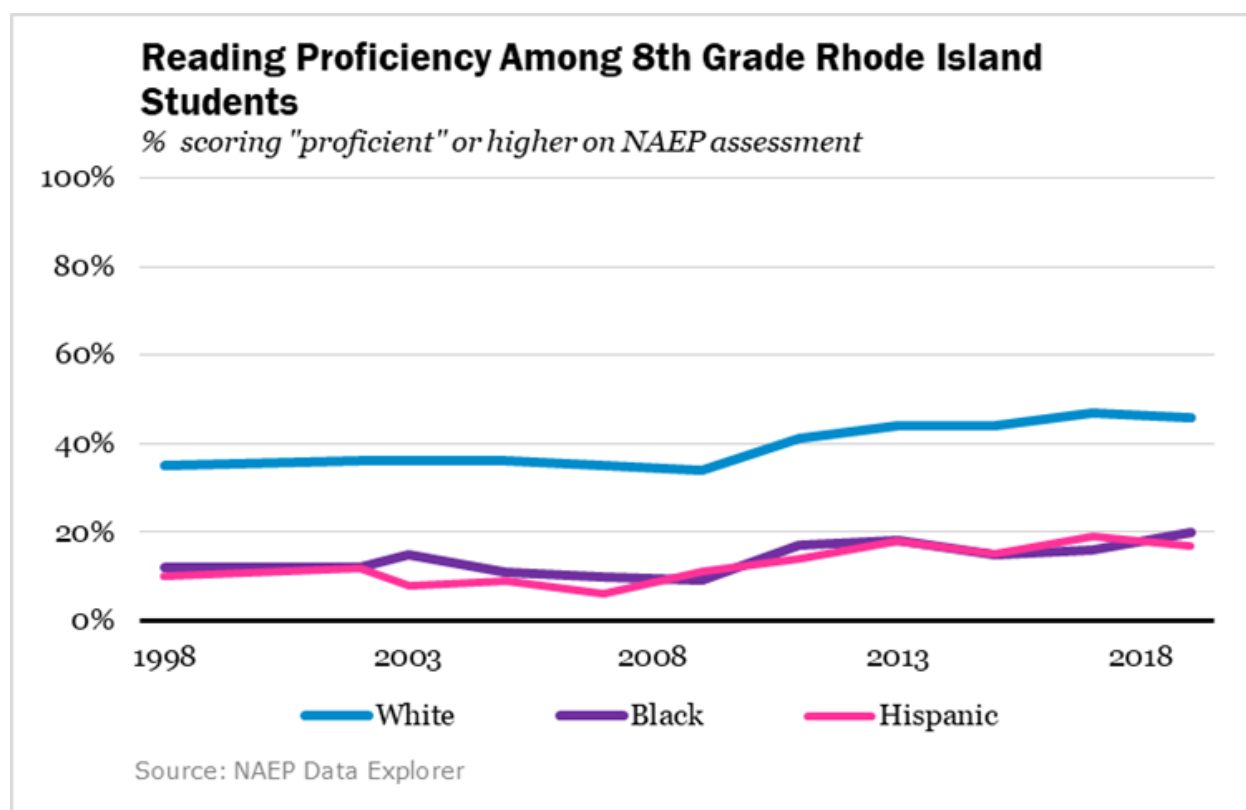
But primarily I come to you as an educator. I myself am a proud product of the New York City public school system kindergarten through 12th grade, and a graduate of Brooklyn Tech High School, Cornell University College of Engineering and Harvard Business School. I am the founder and CEO of Vertex Partnership Academies, a new network of character-based, International Baccalaureate high schools, with the first campus to open in the Bronx in 2022. For the past 10 years, I was CEO of a non-profit network of public charter elementary and middle schools in the heart of the South Bronx and the

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Lower East Side of Manhattan. Our faculty had the solemn responsibility to educate more than 2,000 students—primarily low-income, black and Hispanic kids—whose parents chose our schools because they wanted their children to develop the skills and habits to become agents of their own uplift. We had nearly 5,000 families on our waiting list, all desperate for their kids to receive a high quality education.

Similar to parents throughout Rhode Island, many of our families in low-income communities may have faced racial discrimination and other challenges in their own lives and fear that their children might as well. But they knew that a great education can make a huge difference. They knew their children might face closed doors because of America's legacy of slavery. But they also knew that, because of America's legacy of black excellence and resilience in the face of slavery and discrimination, hundreds of doors are now open. And young people of all races have the ability to open their own doors if they are prepared to capitalize on the opportunities at their fingertips.

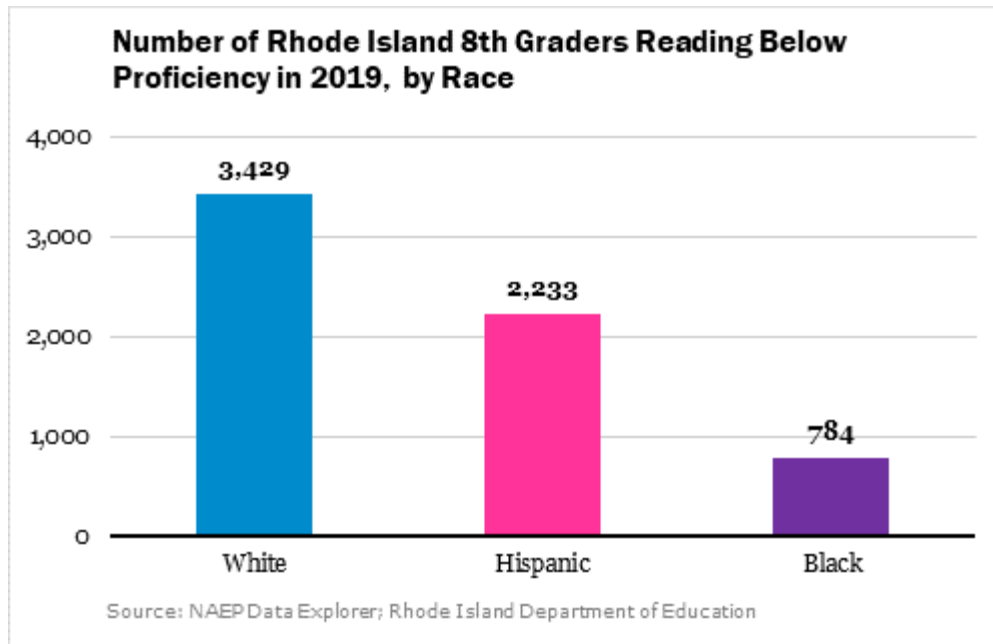
In preparing for this testimony, I pulled 8th grade NAEP reading proficiency scores for Rhode Island students since 1998. As is the case with most other states, in each year since the Nation's Report Card was administered in Rhode Island in 1998, less than half of Rhode Island's white students in the 8th grades scored NAEP proficient in reading. The sad irony is that closing the black or hispanic to white achievement gap, without improving outcomes for *all* students, would mean black and hispanic student outcomes would grow from sub-mediocrity to full-mediocrity in terms of reading.



This is very important right now as we as a country and in Rhode Island are having critical conversations about race and racial disparities. I know you are considering a bill that defines and prohibits the dissemination of certain divisive concepts related to critical race theory in education.

The same laws that we used to combat segregated water fountains, are the same laws that we can use to fight against segregation that typically happens under a critical race theory regime. None of these practices are going to help the nearly 3,500 white 8th grade students, nor 2200 hispanic students, nor the 784 black students, that were not reading at proficiency in 2019.

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Increasingly, American institutions — colleges and universities, businesses, government, the media and even our children’s schools — are enforcing a cynical and intolerant orthodoxy. This orthodoxy requires us to view each other based on immutable characteristics like skin color, gender and sexual orientation. It pits us against one another, and diminishes what it means to be human. In many instances, we see faculty forced into professional development or students in their classrooms divided by race, and forced to confess their status as oppressor or oppressed. That is the forced and dehumanizing racial segregation that will happen under critical race theory.

Today, almost 70 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* ushered in the Civil Rights Movement, there is an urgent need to reaffirm and advance its core principles. To insist on our common humanity. To demand that we are each entitled to equality under the law. To bring about a world in which we are all judged by the content of our character and not by the color of our skin.

It’s important that our kids know they live in a good, if not great country, one that is not hostile to their dreams. Millions of kids of all races have embraced founding ideals

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around family, faith, hard work, entrepreneurship and education to move from persecution to prosperity. We acknowledge that America is not perfect, but we want to confront the inequities we face ***united rather than divided***.

I would like to close by first reading Martin Luther King's address at the Centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. Here is what he said in the opening paragraph: "If our nation had done nothing more in its whole history than to create just two documents, its contribution to civilization would be imperishable. The first of these documents is the Declaration of Independence and the other is that which we are here to honor tonight, the Emancipation Proclamation. All tyrants, past, present and future, are powerless to bury the truths in these declarations, no matter how extensive their legions, how vast their power and how malignant their evil." Dr. King was prescient in predicting the advocates for critical race theory who seek to bury the truths in these documents.

And finally, in Chapter thirteen of de Toqueville's *America*, he said "The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults." I have always found that statement compelling because it resonates with the notion that America is always in pursuit of becoming a more perfect union. While the founders laid out inspiring ideals, we are in constant effort to fully live up to them. But how we have made steady progress is through uniting around a common set of ideals; civil discourse; constructive disagreement, and a strong foundation in civic understanding.

Thank you.