* The charter school industry sees New Bedford as a pot of gold for its investors

It is imperative that state Education Commissioner Jeff Riley not recommend approval of the proposed Innovators Charter School, and that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education reject the application regardless of Riley’s recommendation.

The charter school industry is no friend to the students and families of New Bedford and surrounding communities. Instead, we are a pot of gold for investors and education entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, that pot is filled with public funds meant to be used on educating all of the children in our communities.

We must never forget that charter schools are ultimately private businesses first, schools second. The now shuttered City on a Hill charter campus in New Bedford is a reminder of that. City on a Hill abruptly closed in 2020 when the finances did not work in its favor. The charter school abandoned students and families, who were left scrambling to amend education plans. It was a very predictable conclusion, which is why I so vocally opposed the opening of the school, which occurred in 2014 when I was president of the New Bedford Educators Association.

In the case of Innovators Charter School, there is nothing at all innovative in the proposal. You’ll find plenty of STEM programs in our public schools. You’ll find pathways to early college in our public schools. You’ll find extensive support for the delivery of developmentally appropriate curriculum. And the public schools have a more veteran teaching staff and a richer array of on-site support staff.

Public school educators like myself easily see through the empty promises of charter schools. We bristle whenever someone accepts as unchallenged, that another charter school is necessary.

In my opinion what is necessary is to end the charter school charade and for state education officials to support the truly public schools that educate all students and that are responsive to the students and families they serve, not to business interests and boards of directors

Lou St. John