

# **Opinion: New Bedford teachers are not roadblocks as Mayor Mitchell suggests**

“New Bedford’s three middle schools have been remade. The students, parents and educators at those schools, along with the whole community, should feel proud and excited as they begin the new school year.

So it was extremely disturbing to hear Mayor Jon Mitchell portray teachers as roadblocks when it comes to making changes in our schools for the benefit of students. Far from obstructing change at the middle schools, teachers instead were instrumental in devising plans now in place to address the needs of students attending those schools. And each school has a plan unique to its needs.

Furthermore, because school administrators wisely recognized the value of using collective bargaining to implement changes, every single teacher working in the middle schools ultimately had the opportunity to review and vote on the plans affecting them.

With that kind of participation and buy-in, I am confident that students at the middle schools will have an excellent experience this year. The teachers and their principals had a hand in shaping the plan, and they know exactly what to expect.

When it comes to designing education plans, who better to involve than educators?

Apparently, Mayor Mitchell believes that the New Bedford Educators Association should have a limited – if any – role in planning to meet the needs of our students. The mayor put on quite a show on Beacon Hill last week, testifying in favor of

a bill seeking to give school administrators the power to create so-called “innovation zones” that place schools into the hands of un-elected boards and outside the control of the elected School Committee.

Welcome to the privatizing of our public schools. Even though voters overwhelmingly rejected an expansion of charter schools at the polls last year, those who want to restrict teachers’ autonomy and allow private interests to operate public schools think they have found a new means of accomplishing that.

In his comments in Boston, Mayor Mitchell blamed “the union” for blocking his attempt to set up such a zone for New Bedford’s middle schools. What in fact happened is that it was the teachers who stepped up and said, “Let’s work on this together.”

Thankfully, that is what happened.

The plans that were collectively drawn up for our middle schools have not even had a chance to take hold, and yet Mayor Mitchell was already insinuating that they are flawed. That notion is an insult to every single person who took the time to study the issues, examine programs in place in other districts and engage in dialogue to reach learned consensus.

Mayor Mitchell instead parrots the claims of privatizers who like to point to schools in Springfield that have been placed in “empowerment zones.” There is absolutely no data to show that any great improvements have taken place yet in those schools; even the operators of the schools in Springfield’s empowerment zone say they are waiting to see the impact of their plan on student achievement.

I urge Mayor Mitchell to support the work that is underway in all of our schools, and to trust our teachers to do their jobs.”

– Lou St. John of New Bedford is president of the New Bedford

Educators Association.