

Charter school fraud exposed in Rochester, New York

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16 December 2014

The New York State Department of Education (NYSED) and the state's Board of Regents recently approved an application for a charter school in Rochester, New York to be named "Greater Works Charter School."

Thanks to state approval, the school was slated to open in 2015 and planned to accept 100 ninth-grade students in its first year and then later expand to include approximately 400 more students from all high-school levels. Out of 51 organizations that submitted proposals to the state education department, four were granted charters to open, among them Greater Works.

Announcement of the school's future opening first appeared in Rochester's *Democrat and Chronicle* newspaper. In the initial article, the school's founder and lead member on its charter application, 22-year-old Ted Morris, billed himself as an "educational consultant" with a Master's and Doctorate's degree in Education, which he claimed to have earned online from Concordia University in Chicago. Morris also claimed to have served as the CEO in a local non-profit organization.

Within days of the school's announced approval, Morris' professional and educational backgrounds were exposed as shams. Morris has no background in education nor does he possess a college degree of any kind. Furthermore, Morris admitted to using the online classified website Craig's List to find additional board members to serve on the board of trustees for the charter school and assist him in submitting the school's application to the New York State Education Department.

With Morris's lies and non-existent qualifications exposed, state officials quickly moved to distance themselves from the story. The state Board of Regents Chancellor Meryl Tisch claimed in the *Democrat and*

Chronicle, "When it comes to the board, it comes with an endorsement from (NYSED) and the local regents. What we hear is whether ... they've put together a sound application. There's a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes, and I think people in (NYSED) need to address that with you."

Meryl Tisch's brother-in-law Andrew Tisch currently serves on the board of directors for K12, an online learning company that is attempting to open a charter school that will base its instruction largely on the use of the company's own software and website. In its 2014 annual report, entitled "Putting Students First," K12 reported revenues of \$919.6 million and an operating income of \$55.1 million.

Likewise, Greater Works in Rochester planned to put a large emphasis on educational software and online learning, ensuring that the same Wall Street investors who support charter schools in the state and across the country would reap huge profits through their investments in educational software companies like K12.

Bill Clarke, director of the New York State Department of Education's charter school office, refused to address the Greater Works debacle at all in the press.

Ted Morris, the school's founder, was forced to resign quickly after the exposure. The school board initially planned to carry on without him but was forced to withdraw its application by NYSED after growing criticism and interest from the press in exactly how the state's charter school application process works.

Morris' treatment is in sharp contrast to the daily victimization of teachers whose lives are destroyed by punitive tests and the subsequent "value added measures" used to close schools and fire teachers. This is a damning indictment of the process whereby the

Obama administration and Democrats and Republicans at every government level are dismantling public education and handing schools to various wealthy investors and corporate hucksters.

Rochester, like many other cities in New York and across the country, has experienced a rapid growth in charter schools in recent years. Six publicly funded but privately run high schools are currently operating in the city with plans for more. Their expansion continues while longstanding public high schools are forced to shutter their doors and lay off teachers to make room for charter schools. Such schools are entirely supported by Wall Street investors often posing as “non-profit” organizations and seeking to turn education into a new source of revenue.

As the Greater Works case demonstrates, the forces behind this movement have no real interest in the education of working class youth other than to maximize the profits extracted from the process.

The story of Ted Norris is particularly damning but far from unique. Over the last several years scandals involving charter school operators have emerged in Michigan, Ohio, Florida and dozens of other states.

In the Rochester case, state authorities, either through deliberate action or criminal negligence, failed to scrutinize Norris’ highly dubious claims that he completed after leaving high school at the age of 16 his Bachelor’ s and Master’s requirements and his Doctoral theses in under six years, and all on line!

This only shows that state educational regulators, more and more influenced by corporate interests, are willing to hand public money and school buildings to virtually any politically connected scam artist with a plan to “reform” education.



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