

# Superintendent's consulting work raises concerns

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Mike Miles is known as a dynamic superintendent in a small [Colorado](#) school district. But it's another role, that of education consultant, that worries some of his future bosses and constituents in the [Dallas Independent School District](#).

Miles' company, Focal Point, trains teachers and principals, holds education conferences and does other work with school districts, mainly in Colorado and [New Jersey](#).

Last week, DISD trustees picked Miles as the lone finalist to lead the Dallas district. He now leads Harrison School District 2, which has 11,000 students and covers part of [Colorado Springs](#).

The former Army Ranger and diplomat has led an overhaul in Harrison, including changing the way teachers are paid and evaluated. That's made Miles something of a rock star in school leadership circles. He's traveled the country speaking about his work in Harrison.

Miles is also sought after for his work at Focal Point, where he's one of four partners.

For instance, the company has received \$312,000 in federal grant money the past two years to help turn around two of Colorado's lowest-performing elementary schools, according to news reports. The work includes training teachers to be better instructors so they can raise student achievement.

The Paterson School District in New Jersey approved a three-year, \$385,600 contract with Focal Point last year, Paterson district records show. The New Jersey Department of Education has paid Miles and Focal Point about \$90,000 since 2009, according to a department official. That work includes training principals from low-performing schools to better evaluate teachers and motivate employees.

Miles declined to say how much he earns from consulting. His Harrison job pays a base salary of \$194,616, plus up to \$45,000 for meeting certain goals. His contract in Dallas has not been finalized; former DISD superintendent [Michael Hinojosa](#) had a base salary of \$328,000.

Miles said he spends a couple of days a month on consulting during the school year, more when school's not in session. He said he expects to do less consulting in Dallas, which has 157,000 students.

Some Dallas trustees and taxpayers prefer he drop the consulting altogether.

“This district needs a lot of TLC, and we really need to get somebody that’s willing to put this district first,” trustee Bruce Parrott said.

Mike MacNaughton, chairman of a watchdog group called Dallas Friends of Public Education, agreed.

“We’re not paying for a part-time management consultant. We should be paying for a full-time superintendent,” he said.

Miles said he understands that Dallas trustees may want to restrict his work. And while he doesn’t want to leave the company, he would if trustees required it.

“I hope they don’t want me to just leave Focal Point, period,” Miles said. “But if that’s what they require, I’ll do that.”

Some Dallas school leaders and residents are leery of moonlighting superintendents given past controversy. For example, Mike Moses was a paid consultant for Bracewell & Patterson, a Houston law firm, when he became DISD’s superintendent in 2001. He then urged DISD trustees to give the firm more work, and they did — more than \$700,000 worth over the next three years.

Moses and trustees said they saw no problem with the arrangement. But after *The News* wrote about it in 2004, Moses said he would stop the consulting.

Since 2007, Texas law has banned superintendents from working for companies that do business with their district. Superintendents must also get board approval every time they want to do paid consulting. The board must vote in public.

Rep. [Scott Hochberg](#), who wrote the law, said it was intended to avoid conflicts of interest and make the board and the public aware of any moonlighting.

“This is a big job. How in the world can you have time to do other things, particularly in a district like Dallas?” said Hochberg, a Houston [Democrat](#).

Miles said Focal Point has never done work in his district, nor would he want that.

Miles’ contract in Harrison says the school board must approve consulting work that lasts more than two straight days. He’s not required to use vacation days.

The consulting has never been an issue because Miles always gets the job done as superintendent, school board president Deborah Hendrix said.

“In fact, we’ve found it’s been quite valuable because he’s been able to see other districts and other things that have happened around the country,” Hendrix said.

School boards typically set ground rules for moonlighting in the superintendent’s contract. Many boards in North Texas allow their superintendent to do paid consulting, with prior approval. Some boards require superintendents to use vacation time for outside work.

Richardson ISD's board is stricter than most: it forbids the superintendent from moonlighting.

That's been the policy since 2004, board president Kim Quirk said. The board, she said, "wanted to make it clear that the superintendency was a full-time commitment."

Miles said he's already turning over some of his duties to others at Focal Point as he prepares to lead DISD.

"Dallas ISD is a much bigger district," he said. "I expect I'll be spending 24/7 before I even start officially."

## AT A GLANCE: Focal Point LLC

Formed: 2006

Employees: four partners, nine associates

Mission: Created to hold education conferences for rural school districts in Colorado that couldn't afford to travel to big conferences in [Denver](#) and elsewhere. According to the company's website, "Focal Point has helped teachers and administrators in over 50 school districts work more effectively and raise student academic proficiency."

Website: [www.focalpointed.com](http://www.focalpointed.com)

SOURCE: Mike Miles & Focal Point