

Community reaction is mixed a day after Dallas ISD trustees name superintendent finalist

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Published: 03 April 2012 11:24 PM



A day after Mike Miles was named the finalist for the [Dallas ISD](#) superintendent job, community members scrambled to assess his attributes while he answered some concerns.

The pros: his military experience, a strong stance on issues and a stint as a U.S. diplomat.

The cons: his consultant work, lack of experience at a large school district and controversial support for tying teacher pay to student achievement.

Board President Lew Blackburn said that trustees anticipated some of the concerns but that Miles' leadership skills and focus on campuses were among attributes that aligned him with the traits sought by the board.

"As we went through everything, he seemed to pop out at the top. He quickly became one of the front-runners," Blackburn said of Miles, who is superintendent of Harrison School District 2 in [Colorado](#) Springs, Colo.

Trustee Bruce Parrott said another attribute is that Miles has served his district for six years, demonstrating stability.

Trustees are scheduled to officially hire Miles on April 26, pending contract negotiations, with a start date of July 2. Blackburn said some trustees will visit Miles' district in the next two or three weeks.

Miles said he will make visits to Dallas before July to "get to know the lay of the land."

In an interview Tuesday, he addressed concerns about his background.

Pay for performance

Miles said it's too early to tell whether he will recommend a teacher pay-for-performance system in DISD as he did in Harrison. He noted that DISD is revising its teacher evaluation system, and he wants to learn more before making recommendations.

"Every system is different; every district is different," he said. "I don't want to move too fast."

Blackburn said trustees want to hear more about pay for performance. But teacher unions typically don't support plans that compensate teachers based on student achievement.

Rena Honea, president of Alliance-AFT teachers association, was careful in discussing Miles' work, saying she is still evaluating it. But she said that she hopes any accountability system is fair to teachers.

"My hope is that he will be open to meeting with us representatives and truly listening to what the people that are in the trenches every day working with the students, and the parents and the community members have to say about the process of educating kids," Honea said.

Michael MacNaughton, chairman of the watchdog group Dallas Friends of Public Education, expressed a willingness to support Miles but was concerned about Miles' support of the pay-for-performance plan in the Harrison district.

"We all want to support the new superintendent, but his limited teaching and curriculum development experience, coupled with his predilection for putative teacher evaluations based on test scores and financially unsupportable pay-for-performance initiatives in his home district, are not encouraging," MacNaughton said.

Consultant work

Dallas resident Mary Ann Climer, who has long followed district issues, said she is concerned that Miles does consultant work on the side, saying it could conflict with his DISD job.

"I think he'll have plenty to do all day with DISD that he'll need to put his consulting work aside," said Climer, who noted that she's still researching his past.

Miles serves as an educational consultant and motivational speaker for school districts and other public organizations around Colorado. He said that he does the work through a for-profit company, Focal Point, where he is a partner.

He said he won't have as much time to do consulting work but would like to do an occasional presentation or give a keynote address if the board approves. He said he wants to remain a partner at Focal Point.

"The short answer is I plan to not leave the company, but I won't be doing the consultant work that I did before," he said.

Blackburn said that superintendent contracts typically allow at least 10 days a year to do such things as consulting. He said such matters would be detailed in Miles' contract. And he was doubtful that Miles would have much extra time.

"I just don't know if he's going to have a whole lot of time to help other school districts because Dallas is going to be a big order," Blackburn said.

Parrott was more direct: "I expect this superintendent to give 100 percent; I do not expect him to be doing consulting."

District size

Blackburn addressed concerns that Miles is coming from an 11,000-student district to one with 157,000 students, which entails managing more employees and overseeing a larger budget.

He said the size of the Harrison district was not a concern mainly because the school board was open to hiring a nontraditional candidate, even one with no superintendent experience. "So, why would we put a cap on the size of a district for a current school superintendent?" he said. "We were looking for a leader."

Miles said he is qualified for the DISD job and noted that the board thinks so, too.

"Sometimes people look at size and complexity," he said. "I look at systems and leverage points."

Community activist Jesse Diaz said he expects that anyone who has run a school system would have some detractors.

"Anybody that is taking action is going to have critics," he said. "Let's everybody try to work around him; let's give him a chance."