

A tough act to follow

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As many lament Cortines' resignation, Giuliani says he wants direct input in the selection of a new chancellor

By REGINALD PATRICK
ADVANCE CITY HALL BUREAU

A tough, no-nonsense business type would be an ideal candidate to head up New York City's one-million student school system, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani said yesterday.

And the mayor thinks the board of Education should consult with City Hall before actually naming a replacement for

Schools Chancellor Ramon Cortines, who plans to step down in October.

"I don't think the search for a chancellor should necessarily be confined to educators," Giuliani told reporters at City Hall. "It could be someone from the corporate world, someone who understands how to run an \$8 billion system, who can stand up to the pressure, to people arguing, protesting and calling names. We need someone who is strong and willing to make changes, to take on the bureaucracy."

Giuliani said he had no particular candidate in mind, but insisted that the city's financial contribution to the Board of Education made it mandatory that City Hall have final sign-off on the person eventually picked for

Cortines

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the \$195,000-a-year job.

"The mayor should have a principle, major role in the selection of the chancellor," Giuliani said. "Twenty-five percent of the city's budget goes to the Board of Education. It's one of the most important things this city does. The people hold us accountable for this (how the school system operates)."

Teachers' union president Sandra Feldman said the mayor's criteria for chancellor was off-base.

"We need someone who understands education. That person might want to bring with him or her someone from the corporate world who can deal with budgets or administration, but primarily the chancellor should be an educator," said her spokesman, Ron Davis.

The mayor continued to deny that recent run-ins with Cortines over everything from school safety to the education budget had forced the chancellor's exit.

"This is a strong school system," Giuliani said. "The chancellor post is a desirable job for a person who is strong and willing to make change."

But even some of the mayor's

biggest supporters, including former Mayor Edward I. Koch, expressed misgivings yesterday.

"The mayor is totally responsible for Cortines resigning," Koch maintained. "And I think he shot himself in the foot. I don't think he can be re-elected if the Hispanics turn against him."

Koch said Giuliani's handling of Cortines betrayed a decided lack of interpersonal skills.

"On substantive issues the mayor is good, but he doesn't seem to know how to deal with people," Koch said. "When you deal with the mayor it's like dealing with Dr. Frankenstein's monster."

Former Mayor David N. Dinkins, the Democrat Giuliani defeated, charged that Cortines had been "bullied out."

"There's no question but there was a strategy to get him out," Dinkins said.

Giuliani yesterday flatly denied there had been any plan to get rid of Cortines.

"All I did was state my positions honestly and openly," Giuliani said. "I'm an elected official and people are entitled to know my views on the school system."

Asked why he thought Cortines had opted to quit, Giuliani replied, "I have no insight into what's going on in his mind. You'll have to ask him."

Meanwhile a cross-section of officials gathered on the steps of City Hall early in the afternoon rally in support of Cortines.

"The city is losing a fine educator and I'm concerned that search for a new chancellor will be hampered," said Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger, a Democrat and possible mayoral candidate.

At a City Hall press conference earlier in day supporters of Giuliani's call for the police to take over school safety, the Island Republican Assembly, Robert Straniero said Cortines had demonstrated a major flaw not coming to grips with the crime problem in the classroom.

Advance writer Laura D'Amico contributed to this report.

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