

MIAMI-DADE SCHOOLS

Forum deals with bond issue

Miami-Dade schools alumni and principals and members of New Birth Baptist Church attended a forum to learn about a proposed bond issue.

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Miami-Dade schools chief Alberto Carvalho took his campaign for a \$1.2 billion bond issue to a church forum near Opa-locka, facing questions about how inner-city communities and minority-owned businesses would benefit from the program.

Dozens of community leaders and Miami-Dade schools alumni spent three hours Monday night at New Birth Baptist Church discussing the Nov. 6 referendum, which aims to raise money for school repairs and technology. They questioned the superintendent about how the money would be spent — asking for cost estimates and timelines for inner-city projects — and honed in on how local businesses could gain more work.

“Is there anything in writing that’s going to guarantee African-American jobs?” asked Cuthbert Harewood Jr., dressed in work boots and jeans.

Carvalho recognized a history of “economic injustice” and promised equity in spreading the work around, estimated at about 18,400 jobs.

Acknowledging “a cycle of broken promises,” Carvalho said the urban core would see 70 school projects in the first three years of the bond.

The forum is part of a series of presentations to educate voters about the bond proposal, which aims to raise money to repair or replace aging school buildings and upgrade educational technology. A political action group, Building for Tomorrow, was handing out pamphlets outside the church Monday.

Other questions raised during the forum: How did the district come up with the \$1.2 billion figure, since the projects posted online have no cost estimates? How can access turn into signed contracts? And how will job training be incorporated?

Jaime Torrens, chief facilities officer, said it was “premature” to list cost estimates for individual projects.

Carvalho said the district is in the process of revising rules and outlined several proposals, including:

- Waiving the bonding requirement for work under \$200,000 — though community members had pushed for a higher threshold of \$300,000.

- Expediting a disparity study approved by the School Board. It will first focus on capital projects and look at any disparity of the district’s contracts with minority- and women-owned businesses.

School Board attorney Walter Harvey told the crowd that with the proposed changes, “You’ll see a difference.”

The Rev. Bishop Victory T. Curry acknowledged that some people had criticized him for having Carvalho and defended the event.

“Let’s get it all out. We’ve got a decision to make, and it’s a big decision, and it’s worth it to be here, Lord have mercy, until 10 o’clock,” he said.



CARVALHO