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ELECTIONS

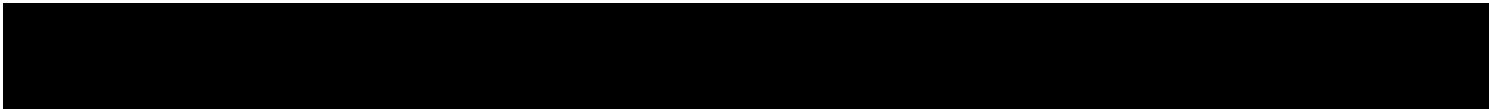
Miami-Dade voters overwhelmingly approve school district's measure to boost teacher pay


BY SOMMER BRUGAL

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Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Dr. Jose L. Dotres, spoke to the media about the passing of Referendum 210, a measure to boost teacher pay, during an event at iPrep Academy in Miami on Nov. 8, 2022. BY **DANIEL A. VARELA** 

At about 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Miami-Dade public school leaders cheered the outcome of the district’s \$400 million plan to increase property taxes to boost teacher pay and support school safety.

The referendum, which faced an uphill climb as voters were already reeling from higher prices for food and gas and a rapid rise in interest rates, passed with about 65% of the vote with nearly all the county’s 1,049 precincts reporting.

SCHBRD REF AD VALOREM SAFETY AND SECURITY

CHOICE	PERCENT	VOTES
Yes	65.14%	426,444
No	34.86%	228,204

1049 of 1049 precincts

[Source: Miami-Dade County](#)

“Tonight is a night of gratitude for this community,” said Miami-Dade Superintendent Jose Dotres. “This is not about the school district. This is about what our school district provides to our incredible community.”

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The referendum called for asking property owners to boost their tax bill from from .75 to 1.0 — or \$100 for every \$100,000 in assessed taxable property value — to generate \$400 million over the next four years. This referendum extends the 2018 measure, which [passed with more than 70% of the vote](#).

The school district's watch party, held at iPrep Academy, a magnet school across the street from district headquarters, was full of district officials, board members and community members. Guests began buzzing almost immediately, when early counts indicated a more than 63% approval rate at about 7:30 p.m., or 30 minutes after polls closed.

ELECTION DIFFERENT FROM 2018 MEASURE

This year's campaign differed from the one in 2018, the first time the district turned to voters to support teacher pay and school safety.

For one, the 2018 referendum came just nine months after the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Broward County, which led to the deaths of 17 students and faculty members, making school safety a top priority for South Florida voters. But it also came before a pandemic that closed schools, sparked a parents' rights movement and, later, set off a growing distrust of school boards and even teachers by some parents.

[READ MORE: Miami-Dade school district asking people to pay more for teacher pay — or 'bleak' future](#)

The previous campaign was also led by different individuals. Four years ago, Karla Hernandez-Mats, United Teachers of Dade president, was one of the main faces seen throughout the campaign. This year, however, she was seemingly [absent from referendum-related events](#), campaigning instead alongside Charlie Crist, the Democratic nominee for Florida governor, as his running mate.

The reason, she said at the time, was to avoid mixing messaging and partisan politics in what should be a non-partisan issue. Others, though, said her presence was missed from the campaign.

On Tuesday, Tony White, first vice president of United Teachers of Dade, said "it's an even more satisfying victory, considering we were going up against a concerted effort on the other side to actively campaign against the referendum."

Moreover, he added, "with the ongoing teacher shortage and educators already priced out of the local housing market, the school district would have lost additional educators and been forced to start eliminating programs in our public schools."

TAX INCREASE FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

Perhaps the greatest challenge the district faced, however, was its request to increase a homeowner's property tax rate from .75 to 1.00. The increase was needed, district officials said, because a 2019 Florida law required school districts to share a portion of the revenue generated from the referendum with charter schools.

In Miami-Dade, that portion is about 25%; the referendum passed Tuesday ensured traditional public schools received the same amount of funding, despite having to share.

Nevertheless, some were against the tax increase and pointed to the already high cost of living in South Florida. The Miami-Dade Republican Party [encouraged voters to vote 'No'](#) on the ballot question and two of the School Board members-elect, Roberto Alonso and Monica Colucci, who both won their races in the August primary, campaigned against the referendum. Gov. DeSantis and his lieutenant governor, Jeanette Nuñez campaigned for Alonso and Colucci.

Alonso and Colucci are to be sworn in on Nov. 22. And there may be a third newcomer to the board. School Board member Christi Fraga, who ran for Doral mayor and earned about 41% of the vote, will head into a runoff election against Claudia Mariaca, who garnered about 30% of the vote in Tuesday's election. If Fraga wins the runoff, Gov. Ron DeSantis is expected to appoint her successor.

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DISTRICT DODGES 'BLEAK' FUTURE

Ahead of this year's vote, district officials, including Chief Finance Officer Ron Steiger, had warned of a "bleak" future should the referendum fail.

For one, the district would have been out \$300 million come June 2023 when the 2018 referendum sunsets and teachers could have seen a 15-20% decrease in their supplemental pay, or what they make beyond their base salary.

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District officials were also concerned with staying competitive in teacher pay with surrounding districts. In August, Broward County [voters said yes to doubling their property taxes](#) to boost teacher pay.

On Tuesday, though, those concerns were dispelled and district officials breathed a sigh of relief.

"The renewal provides an opportunity for us to be competitive in an environment where talent is needed across many different industries," Dotres said. "Tonight we are able to compete in this very tight market so our teachers and police officers can remain in our community."

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