

EDUCATION | BOOKER T. WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

Magnet school to unveil new planetarium

BY CRYSTAL CHEW

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Booker T. Washington is on the verge of unveiling a newly renovated planetarium, which will be the centerpiece for the school's new astronomy magnet program that will begin in August.

The facility is the first of its kind at a Miami-Dade school, which the school hopes will encourage more interest in its program as the deadline to register is approaching.

The expansion of the planetarium was embraced by Florida International University's Education Effect initiative, a university community school partnership between Miami-Dade County Public Schools and FIU that began in 2011 at Miami Northwestern Senior High School in Liberty City. The partnership was recently expanded to Booker T. with a \$1 million investment from the Lennar Foundation.

"This planetarium means



CHECKING IT OUT: Jaimesha Taylor, 16, watches a special presentation in the renovated planetarium.

more STEM for students. More science. More technology," said Shaakira Hardy, planetarium director and lead teacher for the upcoming astronomy magnet program. "We want to open up more STEM opportunities for this community."

The astronomy program aims to offer students a challenging curriculum exposing students to critical thinking, technology, mathematics, science, research opportunities and Ad-

vanced Placement, while earning college credit through FIU.

It will complement the engineering magnet program that began this year.

"We should be a school system that serves all students and all parents, and we do that through choice," said Schools Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho, who believes magnet schools enable that ability.

"That's why they're called magnet programs," he said.



MATIAS J. OCNER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

LEADING THE WAY: Miami-Dade County Public Schools Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho introduces Shaakira Hardy, the planetarium director at Booker T. Washington High.

"They attract the attention of students and parents alike."

Magnet programs draw students based on their talents and interest while also being a way for students to choose a desired school.

"It is our hope that it will increase our enrollment," said William Aristide, Booker T's principal. "This is great opportunity to help our students with their education, help them to look at a career path that is going to benefit them and just provide that opportunity that they normally wouldn't

have."

The planetarium has been in existence for 25 years, but until recently it sat as a storage unit.

Three years and \$450,000 later, a new high definition digital projector with state-of-the-art sound and lighting will take students from the surface of Mars to the bottom of Earth's oceans.

The projector cost approximately \$250,000. It has an 1,850 pixel system and came with a plethora of programs that the schools plans to utilize in the astronomy program.

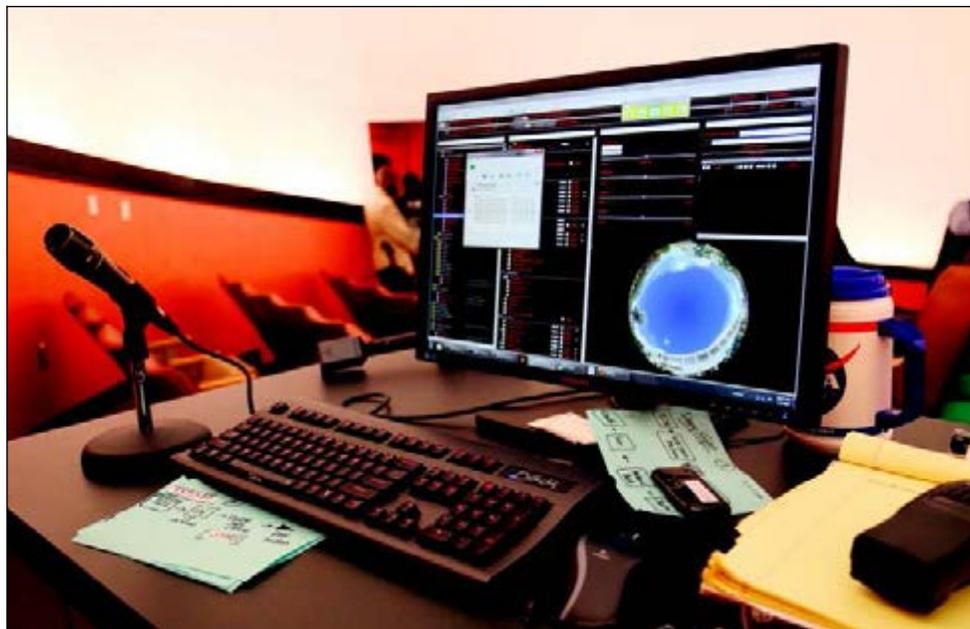
Additional plans for the planetarium include educational programs for elementary and middle school students like exploration field trips to the planetarium, professional development for teachers and community outreach programs.

"I think a big reason why students don't want to go into fields in technology or engineering is difficulty and they require a lot of effort," said Angelo Fajardo, 17, senior at Booker T. who wants to study technology, physics and computer science abroad.

"But by having the planetarium here and showing students real applications, they can be motivated to pursue further studies."

The planetarium's official unveiling will be on Jan. 29 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The deadline to register for enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year magnet programs is Jan. 15. Students can apply to a maximum of five schools. To learn more, visit www.miamimagets.org.



ONLY THE BEST: The new planetarium will be the centerpiece for the school's new astronomy magnet program that will begin in August, and will include state-of-the-art equipment.

