

# Workshop targets minority business

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assist small firms with navigating the contract compliance requirements for doing business with the district and thereby increase the district's pool of minority contractors and subcontractors.

Meetings are designed to teach Eligible Business Entities (women, minority and disadvantaged businesses) all about the district's bidding, application and hiring policies.

Contract guidelines presented by compliance coordinators Leon Webb and LaNee Benton also explain how EBE goals are specifically determined for each contract, and how credit for hiring EBE laborers, suppliers and brokers are calculated.

Though he would not say if the proposed board action would render the workshops meaningless, Webb said it would severely hamper the EBE program's ability to increase participation.

"If it passes, we'll be going back 50 years," he said.

Shirley Kersten, representing Maxim General Contracting, said the workshops are valuable for majority-owned firms because it helps keep paperwork in order. She said only the firm's owner would be able to say what the proposed board action would do to the company's ability to hire EBE subcontractors.

Ralph Bangs, director of the University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research, who also attended the workshop, said he is working with district M/WBE Program Director Paula Castleberry to increase outreach to minority

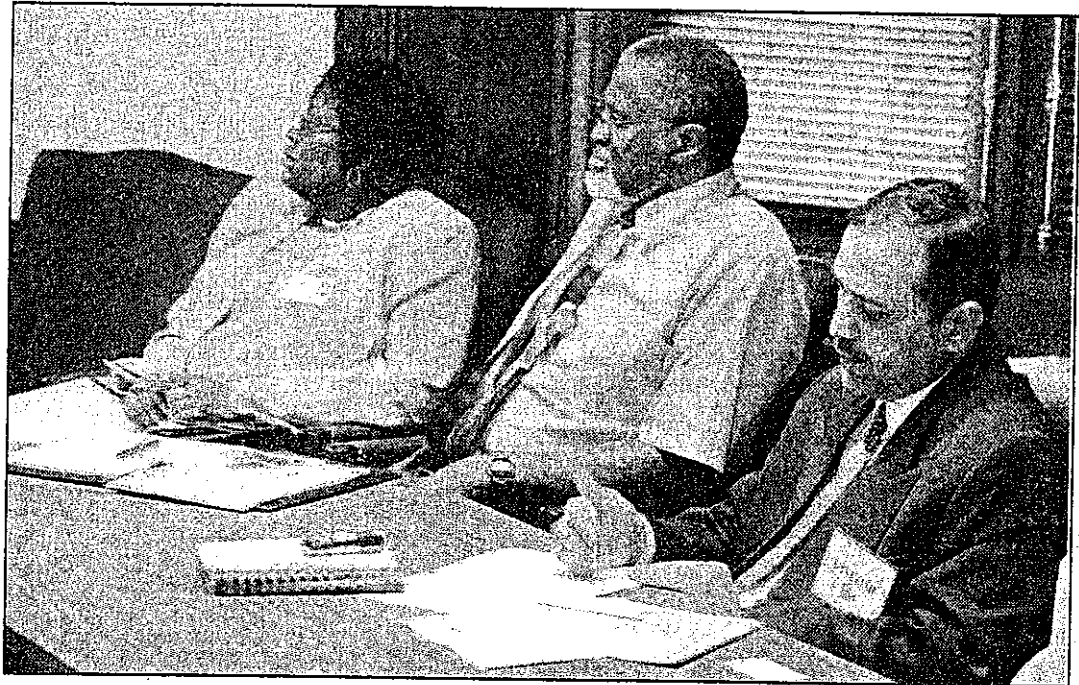


PHOTO BY KENNETH NEELY

**GETTING THE BUSINESS**—Participants in the Business Opportunity Workshop sponsored by the Pittsburgh Public Schools get pointers on how to get contracts with the board.

businesses.

During the June 22 school board meeting, Castleberry said the labor agreement would effectively destroy the EBE program.

The proposed Project Labor Agreement was tabled during the June 22 meeting as several minority business owners and contractors attended to express their opposition.

In exchange for giving an unspecified number of trade union apprenticeship slots to school district students, the district would give all contracts in excess of \$25,000 to union firms or those that replace 90 percent of their workforce with union members.

African American Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Doris Carson Williams said after the meeting she was stunned to learn acting Superintendent Andrew King had not read the agreement.

She also was surprised to learn the agreement would apply to maintenance contracts, effectively barring small Black-owned cleaning and landscaping firms from doing business with the district.

Though there is nothing in the agreement affecting professional service contracts, Carson Williams said there is nothing to prevent extending similar limitations.

Non-union businesses ac-

count for 80 percent of the contracting firms in Allegheny County. The majority are small, women- and minority-owned firms that could not afford to make union pension and health contributions on contracts as small as \$25,000.

In 2005, the district awarded \$7.65 million in contracts to EBEs. That represents 22 percent of the \$33.1 million awarded. Had the new policy been in place, the total awarded to EBEs would have been less than \$300,000.

The Project Labor Agreement is scheduled for another vote July 18.

(Send comments to [cmorrow@new-pittsburghcourier.com](mailto:cmorrow@new-pittsburghcourier.com).)

# Workshop targets minority businesses

by Christian Morrow

Courier Staff Writer

The Pittsburgh School District held its first Business Opportunity Workshop for minority- and women-owned firms since the school board tabled a proposal that would give all building trades contracts over \$25,000 to union firms.

Representatives from only four firms attended the June 30 workshop. Of these, only one, Connie Robinson, owner of Better Choices, was aware of the potential board action. Robinson also was the only African-American owner present.

"I just came here to see what was happening," she said. "I think that is crazy."

The monthly workshops were conceived as a device to

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