THE SCITUATE METCO PROGRAM

METCO

Frequently **A**sked **Q**uestions

Q: Exactly what is METCO?

A: METCO, which stands for the **Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity** is a state funded, voluntary educational desegregation program designed to eliminate racial imbalance through the busing of children from Boston, MA and Springfield, MA to suburban public schools in the 38 communities where the program operates.

Q: What is the mission and purpose of METCO?

A: METCO's mission is to provide, through professional leadership and voluntary citizen action, the development and promotion of quality integrated educational opportunities for urban and suburban students in the Greater Boston and Springfield communities, and to work toward the expansion of a collaborative education program with urban and suburban school systems. It's purpose is to provide the opportunity for an integrated public school education for children of color from racially imbalanced schools in Boston and Springfield by placing them in suburban schools, offer a new learning experience for suburban children, and facilitate understanding and cooperation between urban and suburban parents and other citizens in the Boston and Springfield metropolitan areas.

Q: How long has METCO been in existence?

A: Since 1966

Q: What does the word 'METCO' stand for?

A: METropolitan **CO**uncil for Educational Opportunity

Q: How is METCO funded?

A: The program is funded by a grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Funding must be approved annually by the legislature. There is no guarantee of annual funding.

Q: Are there residency requirements for METCO students?

A: METCO students must reside in the Greater Boston or Springfield metropolitan areas.

Q: Isn't METCO for students from low-income families?

A: Family income is not a determining factor in applying for METCO. The widely assumed misconception that METCO students are from low-income families often stems from the stereotypical generalization that minority families who choose to live in inner city areas are poor. METCO families encompass a broad range of income levels and lifestyles.

Q: How many METCO students are there in the districts?

A: Each district has determined a maximum seat allocation number. METCO students may be admitted at this maximum number but METCO enrollment may also be decreased at the discretion of the districts to compensate for increases in resident student enrollment.

Q: Are resident students denied space due to the placement of a METCO student?

A: No. Placement of METCO students is based on available seating in each school.

Q: Is there a waiting list for METCO?

A: Yes. The number of students varies but as of January 2007, the METCO waiting list was at 15,000 students.

Q: How many students are there in METCO?

A: At any given time, there are approximately 3,300 students participating in district METCO programs.

Q: In which grades are METCO students placed?

A: METCO generally places students in grades K-12; however, decisions regarding grade level acceptance and placement are generally left to the discretion of the districts and can vary annually based on various factors including, but not limited to, individual class enrollment sizes.

Q: Is there a difference between METCO, Incorporated and the local METCO programs?

A: METCO, Incorporated is the service provider for METCO district programs throughout the suburban Boston area.

Q: Where is METCO, Incorporated located?

A: METCO, Inc. is located in the heart of the Roxbury community at 40 Dimock Street, across from the Dimock Community Health Center. The phone number is (617) 427-1545. You can also access their web site at www.metcoinc.org.

Q: Are there support systems in place for METCO students in the receiving districts?

A: METCO districts usually employ a Director and a Coordinator to act as a liaison for the district, the transportation provider, METCO students, and METCO parents. There may also be other support staff including, but not limited to, bus monitor(s), secretarial staff, aide(s), and tutor(s). Members of the METCO staff, while generally hired by the individual districts, are usually paid exclusively from the METCO grant funds. In many METCO districts, the formation of voluntary Host Family or Family Friends relationships are encouraged in order to provide students with a support network within the district. In order for students to participate fully in their district's educational experience, academic and/or athletic late buses might be offered with funds provided through the METCO grant, by the district, or through charitable/academic/parent organizations within the towns.

Q: Will my child be the only person of color in the classroom?

A: Unfortunately, since many METCO programs across the Commonwealth are relatively small in student numbers, and since the minority population in receiving districts is usually minimal, it is not unlikely that a child could be the only person of color in his or her classroom. However, participating METCO districts try to maintain a heightened sensitivity to the concerns of all students in general, and METCO students and their families in particular, and continue to establish and implement programs and policies that help alleviate alienation and isolation of all students within their population.

Q: Do METCO districts hire and train minority teachers and staff?

A: All participating METCO districts stringently adhere to the Equal Opportunity Employment guidelines.

Q: What is expected of METCO parents?

A: Despite the distance to a participating community or other personal circumstances, METCO parents are expected to participate fully and willingly in their child's total academic and social growth experiences. It is expected that parents will make themselves available to attend all scheduled meetings and functions at their child's school, pick up their children at school should the need arise (for instance, in the case of sudden illness or school suspension), provide transportation to and from school in the event of an emergency or bus suspension, and attend at least four scheduled METCO parent-run meetings during the course of the academic year.

Q: Do parents get to choose which METCO community their child is enrolled in?

A: Parents are not given a choice of which community their child is chosen for; however, a parent can decline placement for any reason and ask to have their child placed back on the waiting list. Placement preference, by community, may be given to siblings at the discretion of the Director/Coordinator. Placement in the case of siblings is still based on waiting list eligibility and available seating.

Q: Are there criteria for accepting students into METCO?

A: Since schools in the participating METCO districts are public schools and do not have entrance requirements for resident students, then, by law, any student whose parent signs him/her up for METCO is eligible for placement. No child can be denied placement by any participating district for reasons of attendance, behavior, or special needs - except in the case where a student receiving services and accommodations through an IEP (Individual Education Plan) requires a placement that the district does not offer.

Q: Do METCO students need to have a specific grade point average to qualify to participate in the program?

A: No. METCO is open to any student whose parents wish to enroll them. Students are placed on a waiting list and chosen for placement as their waiting list number comes up. Since METCO was designed to help achieve racial balance in the participating districts in which the students are placed, the majority of students on the waiting list are minority students; predominantly of African, Hispanic, and Asian descent.

Q: Are Special Education students eligible to participate in METCO?

A: Students with special education needs are eligible to participate in METCO if the accommodations and services needed by that student are offered in the participating district.

Q: What happens to a METCO student on an Individual Education Plan who needs accommodations that cannot be met in the participating district school?

A: The rules governing Special Education are subject to frequent change; therefore, current guidelines posted on the Massachusetts Department of Education web site, located at www.doe.mass.edu, should be consulted on an individual, case-by-case basis. In general, as of the date of this FAQ compilation (July 2007), if it is determined by the members of the participating district Special Education Team that the district cannot offer services and accommodations based on a students' Individual Education Plan, and if Boston Public Schools is in agreement with the findings of the district Special Education Team, then the METCO student, with the help and support of the participating district, the METCO Director/Coordinator, Boston Public Schools placement personnel, and METCO, Incorporated,

will be re-entered into the Boston Public School system in a placement which can accommodate his/her needs.

Q: Are students with behavior issues allowed to participate in METCO?

A: Yes. Since schools in the participating METCO districts are public schools and do not have entrance requirements for resident students, then, by law, any student whose parent signs him/her up for METCO is eligible for placement. No child can be denied placement by any participating district for reasons of attendance, behavior, or special needs - except in the case where a student receiving services and accommodations through an IEP (Individual Education Plan) requires a placement that the district does not offer.

Q: What happens if a METCO student has excessive absences or is considered to be an 'under-performing' student?

A: METCO students are held accountable to each school system and must follow the rules, and accept the resultant consequences, established by their district. It is important to note that students who are participants in METCO are drawn from the general population of Boston and Springfield resident students. They are not drawn from any talent pool of the best and brightest students from the Boston or Springfield areas. METCO students should not be held to a higher standard than their resident counterparts, nor is less expected of them due to any circumstance, real or imagined, that may be perceived on the part of anyone inside or outside of the district.

Q: Can a METCO student be asked to leave a program if his/her parents are not active participants in their child's education?

A: No. Students are not held responsible for the behavior and/or lack of involvement of their parents; however, parents are reminded that close and consistent contact with teachers, principals, and school administration, along with frequent, active involvement in <u>all</u> aspects of their child's academic career, usually leads to better grades and fewer behavioral issues. Parents are strongly urged to attend all school meetings and other functions, and to regularly volunteer in their child's school.

Q: Under what conditions can a METCO student be terminated from the program?

A: METCO students are held accountable to each school system and must follow the rules, and accept the resultant consequences, established by their district. METCO students are subject to the same rules and regulations, included those governing suspension and expulsion, as any other district resident student.

Q: Is it true that some METCO students must be ready to board their bus by 5:30 AM?

A: Bus routes are prepared by each individual district based on school opening times. In general, students attending high school (and sometimes junior high as well) through METCO board buses between 5:00 and 5:30 AM.

Q: What is the total length of a METCO student's day?

A: The length of the day for a METCO student varies based on his or her participation in outside/extracurricular activities. A high school METCO student who is a member of the basketball team may be up at 4:15 AM to catch a 5:30 AM bus. Court time might be scheduled for 5:30 PM but the late bus, in order to accommodate all athletes, may not arrive for transport back to Boston or Springfield until 9:30 PM. Therefore, the student will likely return home around 10:15 PM. During the course of this busy day, the METCO student might have an opportunity to grab a bite to eat, do a little studying, watch some television, catch a little sleep, or just relax thanks to a resident Host Family or local friends.

Q: Since METCO students have to get such an early start, does the program provide breakfast?

A: This varies from district to district, depending on the available funding and whether or not districts provide breakfast for all, either on their own or through state funded breakfast program, for students receiving free and reduced lunches. In some cases, where funding is not adequate to cover the cost of food and/or personnel, individual staff, district METCO personnel, local organizations, parents, and districts themselves have implemented programs to ensure that METCO students are able to start their day with a nutritious breakfast.

Q: Are participating districts given any reimbursement for educating METCO students?

A: Participating school districts usually receive a portion of the METCO funding for professional staff salaries in that district. The amount is determined by each district, generally based on a reimbursement formula, and usually includes the salary of at least one professional staff member.

Q: Wouldn't my town save money by getting rid of METCO?

A: Each district has its own way of determining the cost impact of the METCO program based on what individual districts offer students above and beyond what may be paid for through the METCO grant. Generally speaking, since METCO student placement is based on available seating, and since METCO students are dispersed in classrooms throughout the school system, unless a district is subsidizing METCO grant funding (ie. paying METCO staff salaries or subsidizing transportation or office costs, etc.) it is unlikely that elimination of the METCO Program would result in cost saving measures. On the contrary, because participating school districts usually receive a portion of the METCO funding for professional staff salaries in that district - the amount of which is determined by each district - the district would lose this money immediately upon termination of its participation in METCO. Additionally, the loss of the positive social impact that the METCO program provides cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

Q: What is the METCO placement procedure in my district?

A: Placement procedures vary among districts. Answers to specific district placement procedure questions can be obtained by contacting the METCO Director/Coordinator in each district. A list of districts and Director/Coordinators can be found at www.metcoinc.org/communities.html. All families interested in participating in the METCO program must begin be filling out an application at the METCO, Incorporated office located at 40 Dimock Street in Roxbury, MA. The Placement Department may be reached by phone at (617) 427-1545.