

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Exactly what is METCO?

A: METCO, which stands for the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity is a one-way, 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 communities where the program operates. Funded by the State Legislature under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 76; 12A and administered by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the METCO program is the second oldest voluntary inter-district school assignment program in the country dedicated to increasing diversity and reducing racial isolation.

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 schools systems. Its 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 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 Council 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 students participating in METCO?

A: Students in METCO must reside in the 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 students in METCO are from low-income families often stems from the stereotype that racial 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. Students in METCO may be admitted at this maximum number; however, METCO enrollment may also be decreased at the discretion of the districts to compensate for increases in resident student enrollment. The current METCO enrollment in Wayland is 136 students.

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

A: No. Placement of METCO students is based on available space 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 across the Commonwealth.

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 local METCO programs?

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

Q. Are there support systems in place for students participating in METCO in the receiving districts (i.e. Wayland)?

A: METCO districts usually employ a Director to act as a liaison for the district, the transportation provider, students and parents. In Wayland, the staff consists of a K-12 Director, a high school coordinator, a middle school coordinator, an elementary school coordinator, academic dean, academic tutors, an administrative assistant, bus driver, and bus monitor. 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 information of voluntary Partner 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, including academic enrichment and athletics, late buses might be offered with funds provided through the METCO grant, by the district, or through charitable/academic/parent organizations within the towns. And of course, students in METCO enjoy the same access to all districts services as resident students.

Q: Who is in charge of transportation?

A: The Wayland METCO Program currently contracts with First Student Bus Company to provide transportation services for K-12 students in METCO. Questions regarding transportation should be directed to the Wayland METCO Program Main Office at 508-358-3755.

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 students in METCO 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: What is expected of parents of students in METCO?

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 students in METCO 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 racial 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 student in METCO 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 Elementary and Secondary 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 (March 2010), 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 student's Individual Education Plan, and if Boston Public Schools is in agreement with the findings of the district Special Education Team, then the student in METCO, 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 the 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 accommodation 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 'underperforming' student?

A: Students in METCO 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. Students in METCO should not be held to a higher standard than their resident counterparts nor is less expected of them to 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 student in METCO 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 all 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 student in METCO be terminated from the program?

A: Students in METCO are held accountable to each school system and must follow the rules, and accept the resultant consequences, established by their district. Students in METCO 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 students in METCO must be ready to board their bus by 5:30 AM?

A: Bus routes are prepared by each district based on school opening times. Depending on the district, some students may board buses as early as 5:30 AM. In Wayland, the earliest bus pick up time is approximately 6:25 AM.

Q: What is the total length of a typical day for a student participating in METCO?

A: The length of the day for a METCO student varies based on his or her participation in outside/extracurricular activities. Some students may begin their day by waking up at 5:30 AM, catching a bus at 6:25 AM and returning home by 3 PM. For those students participating in extra-curricular activities, they may return home as late as 7 PM.

Q: Since 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 programs for students receiving free and reduced lunches. In Wayland, students are not provided breakfast through the METCO Program. In Wayland, there is a grab and go option for elementary students.

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 students in METCO are dispersed in classrooms throughout the school system, unless a district is subsidizing METCO grant funding (i.e. paying METCO staff salaries or subsidizing transportation or office costs, etc.), it is unlikely that elimination of the METCO program would result in significant 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 for resident student and families that the METCO program provides cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

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

A: Participating school districts may receive a portion of the METCO funding for professional staff salaries in that district. The amount if necessary is determined by each district. In Wayland, a portion of the grant is provided to the district.

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

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

Q: Who can I contact if I have questions about the Wayland METCO Program?

A: Tony Laing, Ph.D., K-12 METCO Director
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