



Project Choice Campaign

Boston's METCO Program **Lessons** for the **Hartford Area**

Prepared for the Sheff Movement coalition
by Erica Frankenberg

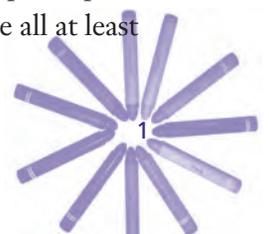


The racial segregation and inequality of the Boston metropolitan area is well-documented. This is true when examining residential patterns,¹ the workforce,² and educational access and opportunity.³ The tumultuous school desegregation battle that was waged in Boston gained national headlines in the 1970s, and decades later large shares of Boston area minority residents report that they feel unwelcome⁴ in a Boston metropolitan area that is overwhelmingly white. Given this landscape, perhaps it is not surprising that Boston's urban-suburban school desegregation program—begun by black leaders and parents as “a partial and temporary remedy” to the segregated, unequal Boston schools in the mid-1960s⁵—recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. Its longevity and popularity demonstrate its importance to generations of Boston-area families.

Boston and Hartford are within a short drive of one another. In addition to being the largest metropolitan areas in New England, the two metropolitan areas are similar demographically.⁶ At least two out of every three residents in both metro areas are white. The Hartford metro has a slightly larger share of Hispanic residents than Boston. Both central cities are surrounded by extremely white suburbs, which are in sharp contrast to the overwhelmingly minority urban cores. According to calculations from a series of economic indi-

cators (e.g., percent in poverty, median income, homeownership, etc) from the 2000 Census, there were wide disparities between the cities and suburbs of these two metro areas. In fact, both regions were in the bottom quartile of all metro areas across the country in terms of the wide disparity on economic well-being indicators between the suburbs and the urban center.⁷ A notable difference is that the Boston metro area is roughly three times as large in terms of population as the Hartford metro area.

Boston's urban-suburban desegregation program, METCO,⁸ began in 1966, the same year as Project Concern in Hartford. METCO pre-dated Boston's court-ordered desegregation plan, which has since ended. Hartford was never under a court-ordered desegregation order (until the *Sheff v. O'Neill* ruling in 1996 and subsequent orders).⁹ Hartford Public Schools had approximately 22,300 students in 2004-05; 5.3% were white and two-thirds were receiving free or reduced price lunch (a measure of family poverty). The Boston Public Schools had 57,700 students and 14% were white while almost three out of every four students were on free/reduced price lunch. Seventeen percent of students in both districts were English Language Learners.¹⁰ In contrast to Boston Public Schools, participating METCO suburban districts are all at least



70% white, with half of them having over 90% white enrollment.

This case study is organized as follows. First, there is a description of the current structure of the METCO program. Next, there is an examination of METCO's recent efforts at organizing and lobbying to maintain funding and support. There is a discussion of research findings about the program, including suggestions of how METCO could improve. Finally, this case study will conclude with an examination of the lessons of METCO for Hartford. This case study draws on interviews with METCO Inc. staff and board members and review of documents, websites, and data related to the program.

History and Structure of METCO

METCO (which stands for Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity) began in 1966 when over 200 students from Boston attended schools in seven suburban Boston districts. The voluntary program was begun with funding from the Carnegie Corporation, but the state soon began supporting the program. Current demographics of the program are shown in Table 1.¹¹

Like Project Choice, there are several different groups that have roles that are instrumental to the successful administration of the METCO program: the state (particularly the Legislature and the Massachusetts state department of education), METCO Inc., and METCO Directors in suburban districts.

The State's Role

METCO is a state-funded grant program since it qualifies as a program under the Common-

wealth's Racial Imbalance Act,¹³ which funds programs to reduce racial imbalance and isolation in schools. Thus, each year the Legislature must allocate funding for METCO. Every participating suburban district (38 total districts) annually submits a RFP to the state, in which they indicate the number of seats the district will provide for METCO students, which is tied to the funding they request. In 2007, suburban districts were reimbursed \$3,700 for each METCO student they accepted (for comparative purposes, many of these districts may spend up to \$12,000 per student).¹⁴ Additionally, approximately \$1,700 is allocated for transportation per student. In some districts, METCO Inc. is the transportation provider; for other districts, METCO, Inc. provides support to other districts where another group has bid for the transportation contract. The total funding for the program was approximately \$17 million (in fiscal year 2007) and there are now approximately 3,300 students in the program (including 135 students who attend suburban Springfield districts). The Boston Public Schools do not receive any funding for students who participate in METCO, just as they would not for students who attend private schools, for example. Each year, the legislature must choose to renew (and, possibly, increase) the grant but no legislation requires them to renew the funding annually.

Funding is a major reason that the program has not expanded in recent decades—expanding both in terms of students accepted and in the number of suburban districts that participate. METCO Inc. prioritizes closing what they term a “funding gap” before they look to expand the program. Likewise, the state department of education website acknowledges the financial burden on participating districts:



Table 1: METCO Students, as Percentage of District Enrollment & Minority Share, October 2006

| District Name | METCO students, October 2006 | White percent of students | METCO students as Percentage of: | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| | | | District students | Minority students | Black & Hispanic students |
| Arlington | 94 | 81.0 | 2.07 | 10.88 | 25.84 |
| Bedford | 82 | 80.0 | 3.59 | 17.94 | 41.25 |
| Belmont | 126 | 76.1 | 3.38 | 14.15 | 40.73 |
| Braintree | 42 | 85.3 | 0.81 | 5.53 | 12.32 |
| Brookline | 291 | 62.0 | 4.74 | 12.47 | 28.89 |
| Cohasset | 47 | 95.4 | 3.16 | 68.62 | 85.31 |
| Concord | 106 | 82.6 | 5.71 | 32.79 | 65.58 |
| Concord-Carlisle | 72 | 84.2 | 5.73 | 36.28 | 69.91 |
| Dover | 15 | 90.6 | 2.53 | 26.91 | 74.40 |
| Dover-Sherborn | 21 | 92.4 | 1.94 | 25.51 | 60.60 |
| East Longmeadow | 43 | 93.4 | 1.50 | 22.79 | 36.68 |
| Foxborough | 44 | 93.0 | 1.50 | 21.50 | 36.70 |
| Framingham ¹² | 4 | 67.4 | 0.05 | 0.15 | 0.19 |
| Hampden-Wilbraham | 21 | 92.8 | 0.56 | 7.74 | 12.67 |
| Hingham | 39 | 94.0 | 1.03 | 17.12 | 36.68 |
| Lexington | 264 | 68.8 | 4.24 | 13.59 | 54.36 |
| Lincoln | 89 | 69.8 | 7.25 | 24.02 | 38.38 |
| Lincoln-Sudbury | 91 | 87.8 | 5.64 | 46.24 | 78.36 |
| Longmeadow | 46 | 89.4 | 1.43 | 13.47 | 33.21 |
| Lynnfield | 33 | 92.4 | 1.44 | 18.89 | 41.01 |
| Marblehead | 73 | 93.3 | 2.33 | 34.83 | 48.62 |
| Melrose | 120 | 88.2 | 3.40 | 28.83 | 47.25 |
| Natick | 60 | 86.4 | 1.31 | 9.66 | 21.19 |
| Needham | 141 | 86.6 | 2.82 | 21.07 | 49.52 |
| Newton | 415 | 72.0 | 3.57 | 12.74 | 31.30 |
| Reading | 58 | 92.1 | 1.34 | 16.95 | 47.82 |
| Scituate | 58 | 95.5 | 1.80 | 39.98 | 59.97 |
| Sharon | 66 | 79.9 | 1.91 | 9.48 | 25.07 |
| Sherborn | 4 | 91.8 | 0.84 | 10.25 | 40.02 |
| Southwick-Tolland | 18 | 94.9 | 0.95 | 18.54 | 29.54 |
| Swampscott | 43 | 91.6 | 1.77 | 21.02 | 33.96 |
| Wakefield | 47 | 94.2 | 1.35 | 23.21 | 40.79 |
| Walpole | 49 | 92.8 | 1.25 | 17.38 | 25.03 |
| Wayland | 132 | 80.4 | 4.59 | 23.43 | 58.14 |
| Wellesley | 157 | 82.6 | 3.39 | 19.48 | 44.61 |
| Weston | 168 | 78.7 | 7.01 | 32.93 | 84.51 |
| Westwood | 43 | 90.9 | 1.42 | 15.63 | 37.43 |



[G]iven the low reimbursement and the present level funding of the program, it is unclear exactly how a school district could join without additional overall funding to the program itself. Although a school district can ‘withdraw’ from the METCO Program, the decision would only be made after careful discussion and consideration. A school district should meet with representatives of METCO Inc. and the Department of Education before making such intentions public.¹⁵

The state department of education has oversight for the program. In 2003, the Commissioner of Education appointed a separate METCO advisory committee, which consists of representatives from METCO Inc., suburban directors, superintendents, and METCO parents. The state also helps in terms of policy decisions and providing special education services to participating students. For example, the department of education recently streamlined the grant requirements for suburban districts.

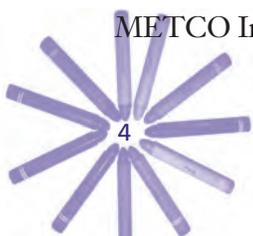
METCO Directors

Participating suburban districts have a full-time METCO coordinator—in some districts they are called a METCO director—who serves as the contact person in the district, coordinator of METCO-related activities, and the liaison for METCO families. METCO directors are employees of the suburban district. According to a recent report, all METCO directors are people of color, which can provide an important role model for METCO students in overwhelming white districts.¹⁶ One role that is common to every director is that they actually place the students in district schools when students are referred to them by METCO Inc. and send out the official accept-

ance letters.¹⁷ They serve as a resource for students making the adjustment from Boston, and for the suburban district to make sure that someone is focusing on the needs of incoming Boston students. Many directors also coordinate matching suburban host families to each METCO student to ease the transition for the Boston family and student into the new district. The directors then are communication assets for the districts but at the same time they also help parents bridge the gap between Boston and an unfamiliar, distant community. According to research discussed later, parental involvement levels in suburban districts are quite high, and this may well be due to the efforts of METCO Directors.

The directors’ roles vary widely by district, partially due to the size of the METCO program in their district—some even have other staff members working with them to coordinate the METCO program on behalf of their district. In some smaller districts, for example, the directors attend parent-teacher conferences. They might monitor students’ progress. The relationship between the directors and the district also varies. However, having directors as a district employee (as compared to having them all as employees of METCO Inc.) allows for the district to build capacity for and take ownership of its METCO program.

The directors are paid out of the state grant money that goes to pay for the students; in fact, having a director used to be one of the requirements of receiving the state grant. Under the new funding and grant guidelines, however, there are relatively few requirements as to how districts use the METCO funds, which includes that districts no longer have to use some of their money to employ a METCO director. However, the commissioner’s METCO advisory committee made having a director a standard



that each participating suburban district should meet. According to interviews, the program is stronger because of the presence of these directors—a statement that was implicitly endorsed by the METCO advisory committee’s suggestion of their continued employment.

There is a METCO Directors Association of all districts’ directors to help provide professional development and other training to enhance the experience of both district and METCO students as a result of the increased diversity in the schools.¹⁸ They also have their own meetings to keep each other informed as to what’s going on in their communities.

METCO Inc.

METCO Inc. is a non-profit organization that has been designated as the service provider by the Massachusetts Department of Education for the Boston METCO program. (Springfield Public Schools is the Springfield-area service provider). In this role, METCO, Inc. handle applications and refers students for placements to suburban communities, provides support services to METCO students, and coordinates advocacy in support of the program’s funding. METCO Inc. receives approximately 5% of the overall funding for the program for serving as a service provider.

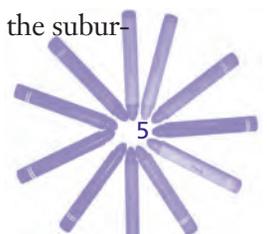
One of METCO, Inc.’s primary functions is to take applications and refer students for placement. The application process begins when parents place their student on the waiting list. Parents can put their child on the waiting list at any point in time: some add their student shortly after they’re born, and some choose to join the list when their child is about to start school. Families are asked to update their contact information every year so that METCO Inc. will be able to reach them when their

child’s name comes up for a placement. The waiting list has approximately 12,000 students. Because of the length of the waiting list—which is several times as large as the number of available spaces in suburban schools—there is little separate publicity or outreach to eligible families. Any minority student who lives in Boston is eligible for METCO. Boston Public Schools describes the METCO program in all its enrollment information and the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) has application information on its website as well.

Each year, METCO Inc. invites about 3,000 students (and their families) from the waiting list to information sessions. These sessions are offered at different times during the day, night, and on weekends to try to accommodate the working schedules of the families. If interested, parents fill out the application and return it, along with supporting information, to METCO Inc. The placement staff then refers student applications to suburban districts based on their availability. The METCO Director/coordinator completes the district’s selection process and actually determines if and which district school the prospective METCO student will attend.

METCO Inc. annually places approximately 460 new students, most of whom are in kindergarten through second grade.¹⁹ The time on the waiting list averages up to five years, though this varies by student’s race and grade level.²⁰ The goal is to try to get the racial composition of METCO students to be similar to that of Boston Public Schools. However, the program is disproportionately African-American: 77% of students are black.²¹

Part of METCO Inc.’s role is, in coordination with METCO Directors, to help build relationships between the families and the subur-



ban districts to help support the success of their students. To provide these support services, they employ two social workers, a guidance counselor, and student services administrators.²² Additional services include providing after-school tutorial programs at METCO Inc., SAT preparation courses, exam school (Boston Latin School exam) preparation courses, elementary summer school, counseling, and student financial aid workshops. Finally, METCO Inc.'s office in Roxbury is a place that students can stay if there are transportation problems and provides classroom/meeting spaces for hundreds of meetings or workshops.

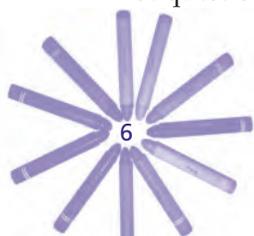
METCO organizing, public education, and lobbying efforts

Lobbying is particularly important for the existence of METCO since it is funded by annual state grant, and is thus subject to the whims of the economy and the political process.²³ To try to maintain political support for the program and thus continued funding to support the program's existence, METCO Inc. coordinates an annual lobby day in which supporters go to Beacon Hill to lobby the state legislature. For this year's lobby day (March 22, 2007), METCO, Inc. (after consulting with the METCO Advisory Committee and legislative leaders to achieve consensus) sent a series of memos to the suburban districts with very specific information about what they wanted increased, information on other discussions they'd had, contact information for who they suggested the suburban constituents to contact, etc.²⁴ METCO's legislative materials also include information about the success of students in their program (with comparison to non-METCO suburban and urban peers).²⁵ According to the program, state legislators did not question the success of METCO, perhaps

due to the inclusion and continued publicity of the success of the students in their program. METCO Inc. also encourages METCO parents to be registered voters, to help increase their political power.

Over 40 years, METCO has suffered or fought off many budget crises, which have reduced services, frozen transportation funds and limited student and district participation at various points in time.²⁶ Since 1992, most years the program has been level funded: eight of the fifteen years there was no increase in funding from the preceding year.²⁷ There have been two years that the funding was reduced, in 2003 and 2004, when the state's economy was not strong.²⁸ Most recently, there were three increases in funding, \$2 million more each year than the preceding year's budget. In other words, METCO's funding seems to depend, at least somewhat, on the economic situation of the state. The current budget proposed by newly elected Governor Deval Patrick in early 2007 did not include increased funding despite the state board of education's recommendation for an increase of \$860,000. However, a legislative amendment has proposed an increase of \$1 million (and subsequently approved by the Governor), falling short of the \$5 million requested by METCO Inc. This amendment was passed with the help of the METCO caucus of legislators. Despite recent funding increases, the program has not expanded into new districts or increased the number of students in the program. Instead, the money has been used to close the funding gap in terms of costs for the districts participating in the program; for example, the extra \$1 million, resulted in an extra \$300 per student for suburban districts in education funding.

There are a numbers of reasons that might explain the recent success in terms of funding in-



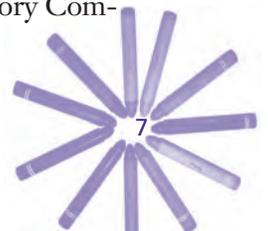
creases, aside from the improving economy. Most notably retention of paid government affairs advisors initially with funds from a legal settlement as well as hiring a Public Affairs Director to coordinate the effort internally. A tactic METCO, Inc. has adopted, which came from their meetings at the statehouse, was to have information demonstrating the success of the program, specifically of METCO students.²⁹ Former Gov. Mitt Romney's staff, for example, asked for documentation of the program's success in their initial meeting—despite the fact that preserving METCO was one of the governor's educational initiatives during the 2002 campaign. In response, METCO Inc. gathered data comparing the achievement of METCO students with Boston Latin students; now their presentations include comparisons with Boston Public Schools students and non-METCO suburban students. In order to provide such analysis, METCO Inc. instituted an annual survey to districts to ask them information about METCO students and all district students (as a comparison). They determine carefully what data they use, and to make sure that they have a strong message based on their data. For example, recent data that has been helpful to present includes MCAS passing rates, college attendance, and high school graduation rate. Particularly with the current policy focus on desegregation waning (and with this, funding for desegregation), it has become important to demonstrate that METCO is also a way to close the achievement gap.

Six years ago, a legislative committee of both urban and suburban parents formed to increase visibility at the State House, supported by grassroots organizing through METCO Inc. The parents have capitalized on the importance of their voice in the policy debate particularly during proposed funding cuts. One of the first things the group did was to try

to craft a coherent message. There was little centralized information going to METCO parents—although METCO Inc. sent letters inviting parents to lobby day, there was not enough specific information about who they should meet with, what they need to ask for, etc. Annual data collected by METCO Inc. is incorporated as part of their message creation and is used to create newsletters and model letters (for parents to send), and as part of METCO's presentation on Beacon Hill.

METCO Inc. began looking into lobbying a few years ago because of a comment from a state senator in a suburban district that METCO's funding was fragile at the Statehouse. Two lobbyists from major political lobbying firms in Massachusetts had done some work informally and proposed to jointly work for METCO. Using money from a legal settlement (with a local radio station after on-air personalities used racist language to describe METCO students), METCO Inc. had seed money to hire lobbyists. They have been able to retain the lobbyists through additional fund-raising and then set up a continuation fund to continue to retain the lobbyists. Part of their settlement with the radio station included having public service announcements aired by the station for two years.

Another key factor in METCO's success was in securing a key ally in the state Board of Education. Following a well publicized slur by local radio broadcasters, METCO representatives attended a board of education meeting several years ago along with a Boston city councilman, who presented a resolution denouncing the radio station (and their slur) and the state's poor funding of METCO. The renewed attention to METCO because of the radio incident helped to galvanize support as well as creation of METCO Advisory Com-



mittee. In the last three years, the Board of Education has consistently recommended increasing METCO's funding, which is ironic due to the fact that METCO was left out of the state's 1992 Education Reform Act. This Act set the foundation level for funding all other students in the state, and METCO's omission can partially explain why it has been hard to increase funding since then. Interviews with METCO staff suggest that the relationships that lobbyists have built with legislators, along with the publicity of the radio incident to focus attention on the program were important factors in the recent funding increases and defeating a proposed funding cut of 40% from the Ways & Means committee of the Legislature six years ago.

Suburban Support

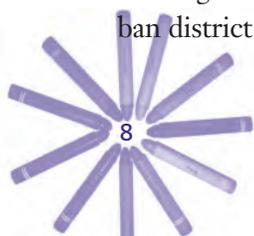
Another source of support for METCO's funding has been from the suburban districts. Although METCO has long had the support of Boston's African-American legislators, it tended to get less support from other Boston legislators who felt that their constituents had many needs to address. There has been a concerted outreach from suburban school committees to their legislators regarding METCO's funding, again using the messaging and specific requests developed for their use by METCO Inc. Because of the wealth of most suburbs participating in METCO, suburban legislators generally have typically fewer requests for aid than urban communities. Further, since the funding per student (\$3,700) for fiscal year 2007 is much less than the average per pupil expenditure in the suburban districts (which averages around \$12,000), the suburban districts and their representatives have reason to advocate for increased METCO funding.³⁰ In fact, a senator from one suburban district who ran as a "friend of METCO"

helped to organize a METCO legislative caucus to bring together representatives from both Boston and the suburban districts to work together across district lines.³¹

Although it is not true in every district, the consensus is that most districts are quite supportive of METCO. One person from a suburban district commented, "METCO makes suburban districts feel good." As discussed earlier, many of the suburban districts are overwhelmingly white and thus value the diversity that METCO brings to their community. The last time a district joined METCO was in 1977, thus participating districts have decades of experience with the program. In the 1970s, in fact, the program grew to its largest size with approximately 3,500 students. State policy and funding availability prevented further expansion.

Since many of the suburban districts were experiencing declining enrollments in the 70's, it is possible that they could have grown the program even larger or expanded to other districts but the state froze funding. With the recent funding increases, there has been a small growth of the program.

Concern about funding is usually the mantra of opponents in suburban district to the METCO program.³² Four years ago, there was discussion in one suburban town about the future of the program. There was a referendum at the annual town meeting as to whether to continue their level of participation in the program as is, diminish participation, or increase participation. This town had one of the highest percentages of METCO students, and they went through a deliberative process of determining how much they perceived that METCO students cost to accept, above what the district received in their METCO grant.³³ The town also hosted a Saturday forum of



community conversations, which were led by mediators and also included invited representatives from METCO families and METCO Inc. Ultimately, the district voted to keep its participation at its current level.

Conclusion

METCO, by many measures, is a successful program and a program for which there is high demand. The fact that it has not expanded significantly in decades (though notably it hasn't declined either) demonstrates the lack of political will for integration programs and the difficulty in obtaining funding despite Massachusetts' Racial Imbalance Law. In order to expand the program, METCO Inc. staff suggested that in addition to demonstrating the success of METCO students, it was important to have people who wanted integrated schools. Other sources of support are having students (both urban and suburban) write about the importance of METCO, draw on support from teachers and parents, and information from the education and social science briefs submitted to the Supreme Court in Louisville/Seattle integration cases about the benefits of integrated schools.

Another point is that METCO historically expanded through a grassroots effort in each town. METCO leaders would go to the meetings of local organizations, churches, and people's homes to talk about METCO. Ultimately, they found that the school committee was the key and since they are elected it's important to demonstrate town support. The school committee in many cases could also serve as the champion for METCO in the town—in other places, it might be a superintendent or even a local resident. It was important, however, to strategically choose which communities they explored expanding to.

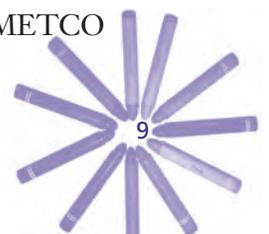
METCO Inc.—not the state—actually goes into the communities. For example, a local community once voted down METCO has recently expressed interest in participating but it is unlikely they would consider expanding to this town. METCO Inc. staff also noted that the state had suggested imposing a similar city-suburban desegregation program with students from Lowell and Lawrence going to Andover (white, rich suburb), which met with resistance because it wasn't a grassroots initiative.

Research findings

In contrast to Project Concern and Choice in Hartford, much of the research on the METCO program has been done in the last decade. In the early years of the program, an outspoken opponent of desegregation, Professor David Armor, studied METCO and his findings of mixed results from METCO students were widely touted including by President Richard Nixon against the effectiveness of busing. Boston's own desegregation strife in the years following METCO's beginning has been the focus of countless research studies and has overshadowed METCO.

Ten years ago, Professor Gary Orfield and a team of graduate students at Harvard, at the invitation of METCO, surveyed parents of all students participating in METCO (a sample of over 2,400 parents, or around three-quarters of all parents).³⁴ They also surveyed students in three of the suburban districts. These two studies focused on three areas: 1) who participates; 2) why they participated or what they perceived to be the benefits of participation and 3) improvements needed. Some of the study's findings included:

1) Participation. In terms of program participants, one quarter of METCO students had been put on the METCO



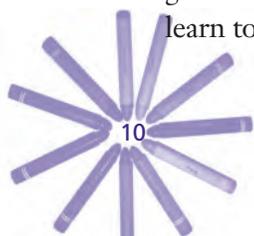
waiting list by the time of their first birthday. Almost a tenth of METCO parents surveyed had been METCO graduates themselves, which could explain their knowledge of the program—though this also speaks to their impression of important benefits that they received as students and the fact that METCO graduates remain in Boston. The experience of friends was another important factor in parents choosing METCO. Over two-thirds of parents were black, though their incomes varied widely, with only one-eighth indicating their household was in the highest income category. Further, only one-quarter said that they would enroll their children in their local Boston Public School if METCO wasn't available—which was mainly those who were in the lowest-income of METCO parents. Nearly one-half indicated that they would send their child to private schools; others indicated they would look for magnet or exam school options (e.g., Boston Latin School). Some parents even indicated that they would move out of Boston if METCO hadn't been available for their children.³⁵

2) Program Satisfaction. Parents generally indicate that they are very involved with the suburban schools (at rates similar to participation with Boston schools of other children) and indicate general satisfaction. Their reasons for choosing METCO were mainly academic related (almost three-fourths indicated this was the most important factor in their decision), though other popular reasons included safety and wanting an integrated education for their child. Over 90% of parents thought that METCO had been a great experience in helping their child learn to get along with students of other

backgrounds; an equally high percentage of METCO students agreed with this assessment. Perhaps contributing to their rosy assessment of interracial relations, 85% of students thought that their experience with host families and other suburban families had been excellent. A lower but still an overwhelming majority of parents thought there was good respect for their child's background in their suburban school; although students were less likely to agree with their parents on this point. Further, parents reported some discrimination, though few felt it was serious, particularly among faculty and staff. The highest "serious" discrimination reported by students was from the suburban police.

3) Recommendations. The lack of faculty diversity was a major recommendation by parents and students although a large majority of parents believed that their children's teachers were very good. Over 40% thought hiring more faculty and administrators of color was the highest priority (although, of course, this is beyond the control of the METCO program). Other suggestions included more diversity awareness training for teachers, late buses, after-school training, and METCO person on school boards.

According to METCO Inc.'s research, approximately 250-270 students graduate annually and many of these students attend selective four-year colleges. However, their annual surveys also show that a lower percentage of METCO students are in AP classes than suburban district students, passing MCAS at advanced (vs. proficient) rating, etc. This leads to concerns that the expectations for METCO students (either implicitly or explicitly) are different than for district students. Gathering



data helps to monitor such discrepancies, and could allow the districts who report this data to METCO Inc. to examine why these disparities exist.

Susan Eaton's more recent qualitative study drew on interviews with 65 African American METCO graduates to understand the effect that the program had on the lives of these participants, and builds on prior desegregation literature about the long-term outcomes of attending desegregated schools.³⁶ Like the Orfield study, Eaton describes the ambitions of many METCO alums who were interested in what they perceived to be better educational opportunities in the suburban districts. She notes the contrast to the benefits of METCO touted by many white, suburban supporters of the benefits of integration that the program creates. Although it is likely that most METCO families believe that desegregation is important, it is not the primary motivating factor, particularly since participating in the program incurs serious costs (albeit not financial) for students and their families.

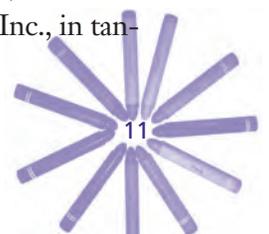
Eaton's narrative displays the ambivalence of participation in a program like METCO. Though virtually all alumni agreed (to some extent) that they would participate again or they would want their child to participate in METCO, there was some hesitation. Further, they admitted that they likely would not have answered in the affirmative while they were actually in METCO. Benefits from participating in METCO cited by alumni in Eaton's study included: feeling more comfortable with whites (in college, in the workplace) than they believe they would have been without attending the suburban schools; and access to more prestigious educational and job opportunities. At the same time, there were cultural clashes with white suburbs—feeling as though their

peers stereotyped them. They also reported that there were few instances of black history being taught in their schools. As a result of their participation—and the long bus rides they endured—some felt alienated from their communities. In fact, two-thirds of those interviewed spoke of wanting to attend an all-black college in response to this disconnection with the community. Despite the differences the METCO participants felt straddling the two sides of Boston's color line, nearly two-thirds of the METCO alumni interviewed remain in Boston.

Conclusion: Lessons for Hartford

One of the most notable differences between METCO and Project Choice is the number of participating students. METCO is three times the size of Project Choice. These differences are particularly notable when comparing the number of METCO students and their percentage of each district's enrollment as compared to suburban Hartford districts. In the Hartford area, only one district has more than 100 students; in the Boston area, ten districts have more than 100 students including one district that has over 400 students. In thirteen Boston suburban districts, METCO students constitute over 3% of total district enrollment. In the Hartford region, no suburban districts have Project Choice enrollment reaching 3%. Other significant differences between the programs are the funding per student and the METCO Director employed by each participating suburban district.

What can be learned from the METCO program? Despite recurring funding battles, METCO remains a popular program for suburban districts, among state leaders, and among Boston families. METCO Inc., in tan-



**Figure 1:
Program Attributes of Boston and Hartford City-suburban Desegregation Program**

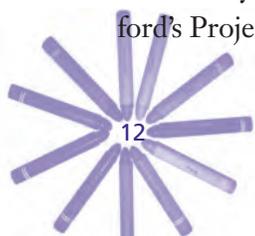
| | Boston | Hartford |
|--|--|---|
| Number of Participating Students | 3,300 | 1,070 |
| Participating suburban districts | 38 | 27 |
| Funding per student to suburban district³⁷ | \$3700 | \$2000* |
| Year Began | 1966 | 1966 |
| Magnet schools/ Intra-city choice option | No | Yes |
| Transportation | Operated by METCO Inc. or by district; reimbursed by state | Operated by CREC; funded by state |
| Support services provided by service provider | Yes | Yes |
| Support services in suburban districts | METCO Director employed by each suburban district | On an as-needed basis |
| Publicity | Annual Lobby Day at State Legislature; coordinated with parents, alumni, suburban supporters | Limited advertising a few years ago by CREC |
| Research on Program | Through annual survey of districts; studies surveying parents and alumni done within last decade | Most research is several decades old |

* Raised to \$2500 in 2007-08

dem with suburban METCO Directors, provide a support network for Boston students and families and help with communication and adjustment in suburban districts. METCO Inc. has engaged in a concerted lobbying and public education effort, which they credit for continued funding increases for the program. Additionally, legislative leaders, state education officials, and even the governor have lent their support to advocating for METCO and increased funding. Except for occasional discussions in isolated districts, participating in METCO is not controversial but is generally accepted. Ironically, this support comes despite the fact that METCO is completely voluntary on the part of the state and local districts—not the remedy to a desegregation case like Hartford’s Project Choice.

The role of research in sustaining public support should not be overlooked. METCO can empirically demonstrate the achievement of participating students and annually gathers data to present to political leaders. Their own research has been augmented by surveys of parents and students as well as an in-depth study of graduate reflecting on the benefits of participating in METCO and the differences it has made in their lives. The alumni association of METCO students provides anecdotes from former students’ experience to supplement data with narratives from students.

Thus, while there are improvements that can be made to METCO, it provides valuable lessons for Hartford as to how Project Choice can be expanded and improved.



Endnotes

- 1 McArdle, N. (April 2003). *Race, Place, and Opportunity: Racial Change and Segregation in the Boston Metropolitan Area, 1990-2000*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University; Logan, J. R., Oakley, D., and Stowell, J. (September 2003). *Segregation in Neighborhoods and Schools: Impacts on Minority Children in the Boston Region*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University; Stuart, G. (February 2000). *Segregation in the Boston Metropolitan Area at the End of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University; Harris, D. & McArdle, N. (2004). *More than Money: The Spatial Mismatch Between Where Minorities Can Afford to Live and Where They Actually Reside*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 2 McArdle, N. (December 2004). *Racial Equity and Opportunity in Metro Boston Job Markets*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 3 Berger, J. B., Smith, S. M., and Coelen, S. P. (April 2004). *Race and the Metropolitan Origins of Post-secondary Access to Four Year Colleges: The Case of Metro Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University; Lee, C. (April 2004). *Racial Segregation and Educational Inequality in Metropolitan Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 4 Louie, J. (April 2005). *We Don't Feel Welcome Here: African Americans and Hispanics in Metro Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 5 Eaton, S.E. (2001). *The Other Boston Busing Story: What's Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 3.
- 6 Data in this paragraph was taken from Census 2000, as displayed on Lewis Mumford site. Accessed on April 30, 2007.
- 7 For Boston MSA, see <http://mumford.albany.edu/census/CityProfiles/Profiles/1120msaProfile.htm>; for Hartford MSA, see <http://mumford.albany.edu/census/CityProfiles/Profiles/3280msaProfile.htm> (accessed on April 30, 2007).
- 8 METCO, which began in Boston and its surrounding suburbs, consists mostly of Boston students, but there are about 100-150 Springfield students who also participate in the program by attending school in suburban Springfield districts. It is administered by the Springfield school districts, and differs from the Boston program in several other ways. Because of these differences, the smaller nature of the program, and the historical roots of METCO in Boston, the Springfield program is not discussed in great detail here.
- 9 There was a 1996 decision in the Connecticut Supreme Court in *Sheff v. O'Neill* finding the state liable, followed by 1997 remedial legislation (Public Act 97-290 "An Act Enhancing Educational Choices and Opportunities") incorporating the Project Concern program into remedy for the state violation and renaming it Project Choice, followed by 2003 court-ordered interim agreement for 1600 choice seats by 2006-07.
- 10 Data on district enrollment taken from National Center for Educational Statistics 2004-05 Common Core of Data, Public School Universe.
- 11 Data on METCO students provided by METCO Inc.; data on district enrollment taken from NCES 2004-05 Common Core of Data.
- 12 It is believed that Framingham is withdrawing from the program, since it has not taken new students in recent years. Framingham is one of the most diverse suburban Boston districts. However, according to interviews, neither METCO Inc. nor the Massachusetts Department of Education has been formally notified of Framingham's withdrawal.
- 13 Connecticut also has a Racial Imbalance Law, though the Connecticut law only addresses within-district racial imbalance.
- 14 Another comparison is the funding for Open Choice students in Massachusetts, in which \$5,000 in funding goes with the student to the district they choose. This choice program, however, does not pay transportation costs.
- 15 "METCO Program Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.doe.mass.edu/METCO/faq.asp?section=b> Accessed on April 26, 2007.
- 16 Zoffer, G. and Palmer, E. (Fall 2005). "Profiles of Interdistrict Transfer and Voluntary Integration Programs in the United States." Edina, MN: Aspen Associates.
- 17 By law, the suburban districts are not allowed to have any screening procedures for METCO students that differ from other district students.
- 18 METCO Directors' Conferences have been open to district teachers as professional development op-

portunities to learn about teaching diverse students.

- 19 By contrast, there were approximately 170 new Project Choice students placed in 2006-07; 124 of these students were in kindergarten through second grade.
- 20 One of the differences in the Springfield METCO program is that students are randomly chosen to participate via a lottery.
- 21 METCO, like Project Choice, tends to be used more often by African Americans. Some officials who were asked about this trend suggested this could be because METCO was begun by African-American activists and is still rooted within Boston's black community. There might also be at least a perception that suburban districts are less likely to have programs and teachers who can educate Latino and Asian students whose first language is not English.
- 22 METCO Inc. has a staff of 19, and also employs an executive director (Dr. Jean McGuire, who has tirelessly led the program for three decades, an associate director, public relations director, placement staff, transportation coordinators, and administrative staff). They also have a 22-person board of directors, which includes NAACP, suburban parents, a METCO Director, and a superintendent. The board includes substantial shares of both Boston and suburban residents.
- 23 The line item in state budget funding METCO is 7010-0012, which includes funding for programs designed to reduce racial imbalance (as defined by the Commonwealth's Racial Imbalance Act passed in the 1970s).
- 24 For 2007 examples see Appendix and "Legislative Alerts" <http://METCOInc.org/legislature.htm> (Accessed on April 25, 2007).
- 25 In order to gather these data, METCO Inc. has promised districts that they will not use the data to compare how students' achievement may vary by district but instead will simply be used in aggregate.
- 26 For example, according to interviews, seven years ago, during a budget crunch the MA Deputy Commissioner and former superintendent of a METCO-participating district, Mark McQuillan, froze transportation funding "in perpetuity"—which has since been amended with the increased funding. McQuillan is the new state commissioner of education in Connecticut.
- 27 It should be noted that level funding actually represents a loss in constant value dollars due to inflation.
- 28 Budget data taken from "METCO Policy Initiatives, updated 1-19-07" available at <http://metcoinc.org> (Accessed March 23, 2007).
- 29 However, the legislature has never allocated funding for a comprehensive study of the performance of METCO students, similar to earlier studies of Project Concern in Hartford. See Eaton, 2001 *supra*.
- 30 At the same time, despite the per pupil discrepancy in funding, the total amount of the METCO grant adds an important source of income for districts to their budget.
- 31 Six to seven years ago there was a moratorium on funding or student increase because of a concern about high transportation costs, which precipitated this response.
- 32 Related, there are sometimes concerns about special education students (who tend to cost more to educate) and meeting NCLB requirements for all subgroups.
- 33 This district differs from some districts in that they are committed to having 2 students per class from METCO while another policy states that anytime class size is more than 20 students, a new classroom must be created at the elementary school level. Thus, in this district, METCO is more likely to cause the creation of new classrooms than in most other districts.
- 34 Orfield, G., et al. (September 1997). *City-Suburban Desegregation: Parent and Student Perspectives in Metropolitan Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 35 On a related question, almost two-thirds of parents said that they would like to live in the community where their child attended school if housing were affordable.
- 36 Eaton, 2001 *supra*
- 37 Note: Hartford also gets funding for each participating Project Choice student at a rate that is roughly equivalent to half of the funding for one student.

Appendix: Example of Legislative Alerts Distributed by METCO Inc.

METCO LEGISLATIVE ALERT

Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc.
METCO, Inc.

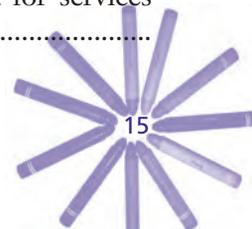
40 Dimock Street 6 Roxbury, MA 02119
(617) 427-1545 ex 11 6 Fax: (617) 541-0550
www.METCOinc.org

METCO Legislative Alert # 1 – 2006/7 **Friday, January 26, 2007**
TO: METCO Superintendents and School Committee Members
From: Jean M. McGuire, Executive Director and Catherine Tang, Public Affairs
Cc: METCO Directors/Coordinators
Date: Friday, January 26, 2007
Subject: METCO March for Equity – Action Requested

The METCO Advisory Committee, the METCO Directors Association, the METCO Superintendents Committee, the METCO Parent Legislative Committee and METCO Inc. have been working together to develop a long-term solution to METCO's perennial funding issue – its complete dependence on a One Year Education Grant. With your help, we believe that this is the right time with the right support in place to request implementation of a funding formula to address METCO's on-going needs. In a letter hand-delivered to Governor Patrick dated January 18th, the METCO family wrote:

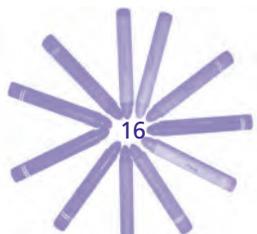
We ask you to address the incredible opportunity that METCO represents for the 3,285 participating students and their over 100,000 suburban classmates in this transforming educational opportunity **by revising the annual grant mechanism of Item 7010-0012 Programs to Improve Racial Imbalance, the METCO program with the incorporation of the following proposed language:**

7010-0012 Programs to Improve Racial Imbalance (the METCO Program)
For grants to cities, towns and regional school districts for payments of certain costs and related expenses for the program to eliminate racial imbalance established under section 12A of chapter 76 of the General Laws; *based upon \$5,000 (in current value 2007 dollars) per actual METCO student as of October 1 of the preceding year with an annual escalation index set to the United States Department of Commerce State and Local Government Price Deflator; the same index specified for Chapter 70 funding in Massachusetts General Laws, adequate transportation and payment for services rendered by METCO, Inc. and Springfield public schools*
\$24,615,313



The help of Superintendents and/or School Committees is requested to solve METCO's funding through the implementation of a fair and rational formula as outlined in the attached letter to Governor Deval Patrick and METCO Policy Initiative. The \$5 million increase in FY 2008 resulting from incorporation of the above formula would address the majority of program needs as identified by the METCO Advisory Committee convened by the Commissioner of Education. In the past three years, the METCO program has received \$12 million in new funding. Your support is needed to change the funding mechanism, which has hamstrung this vital program for nearly 40 years.

1. **Please contact your Representatives and Senator now** before they submit their budget priority letter for the next fiscal year to House Ways and Means Chair, Robert A. DeLeo or Senate Ways and Means Chair, Therese Murray. **Ask them to include the proposed funding formula language in the METCO Grant (Line Item # 7010-0012) with a funding level of \$24,615,313, a \$5 million increase over last year, as one of their priority items.** All Priority letters are due by Friday, February 9th. House Chair DeLeo's one-to-one meetings with Representatives run from February 12th to March 16th and Senate Chair Murray began scheduling meetings on January 11th and expects to complete them by February 28th.
2. Send a letter to Governor Deval Patrick and his A&F team requesting the implementation of the proposed funding formula with a funding level of \$24,615,313 in his FY 08 Budget Recommendations due out by February 28th.
3. Send a representative to the METCO Legislative Caucus Breakfast scheduled from 10 am to 11:00 am in the House Members Lounge at the State House on Wednesday, February 14th. The Massachusetts Legislative METCO Caucus was formed to raise awareness and increase clout in the halls of the State House.





Thanks to Mary Pettigrew of ampersand graphic design for assistance with the design and layout of this report, and to James Baker (James Baker Design, Hartford) for the Project Choice Campaign logo.



Project Choice Campaign

An initiative of the
Sheff Movement coalition

**Quality Integrated Education
for All Children**