

**Response To Program Review
K-12 Weston/METCO**

Weston Public Schools

April 6, 2009

**Submitted by: David Fuller, Director
Weston/METCO Program**

In my capacity as Director of the Weston/METCO program, and on behalf of the students, parents, supporters and members of the Weston/METCO staff, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to Dr. Cheryl Maloney and the Weston Public School Administration for allowing our program to participate in the review process. This event marks the first time in the history of our program in Weston that we have had this opportunity. It is a clear indication of the level of support, respect, and commitment that the Weston Public School system has continued to demonstrate towards the program.

In this program review response document, I will address the Review Committee's overall evaluation of the program and will respond to the suggested recommendations for program improvement. The Review Committee's findings were formulated from the following four questions:

D). Does the Weston/METCO program provide full and equal access academically, co-curricularly, and socially to enable METCO students to participate at the same standards as students from the Weston community?

I believe that the focus on academic improvement, equal access to the curriculum, and opportunities for social involvement for our METCO students have been the enduring expectations from METCO staff, students, and parents from the program's inception. Although the majority of METCO students have made accomplishments in these areas, there are students that need ongoing support, which involves additional tutoring, support programs and mentoring.

I agree with the assertion that more statistical analysis of data relating to METCO students and programs is necessary to fully track student progress and better refine program decisions and design. This data will give a clearer indication of the success of the academic and social programs currently in place and, if needed, modifications to these programs to ensure success. The model that has been initiated by the High School History Department in recognizing the need for more METCO student participation in Honors and Advance Placement level courses could be a benefit to other departments. Specifically, in recognizing students with potential for success, recommending the students, supporting their transition, and thus establishing a cohort to be participants in upper level classes. This would eliminate the need for the override process that was necessary in past cases. In taking next steps, our METCO professional development day will focus on data collection, analysis, and use within the program.

In regards to the numbers of METCO students currently in Special Education, I agree that there is a disproportion in numbers, especially at the High School level. However, all but one of the current High School students began receiving services prior to entering High School. At the elementary level, METCO students have access to and participate in a number of early interventions, including Math support, Ready Recovery and GRASP. For some students, they are subsequently deemed in need of Special Education services. However, student exit performance in terms of MCAS and college placement indicate that the Special Education process has supported METCO student achievement. Next steps

involve a discussion with Regis Miller, Director of Students Services, to study IEP data and discuss areas where there may be shared concerns or questions about the identification of students of color for Special Education.

The report addressed the question of fragmented communication between High School METCO staff and the Guidance Department. One of the crowning achievements of our program has been the success of our METCO students in the areas of college placement and the subsequent matriculation process to college. I am surprised that there is a feeling of disconnect and miscommunication between our departments as the METCO program has always regarded the work of the Guidance Department in support of our students to be meaningful, compassionate, and productive. The statistics are proof of this success. Annually, members of the Guidance Department have been invited to address METCO students and parents in informational sessions to give their expertise regarding college placement and the scholarship process. METCO staff has always been afforded an open-door policy regarding communication with members of the Guidance Department, and there is often daily communication with counselors to address specific issues pertaining to students. The students are given support by METCO staff, but students are constantly reminded of their responsibility to meet with their counselors on a frequent basis. I will begin a dialogue with the Guidance Department for the purpose of establishing an atmosphere that promotes better understanding and clearer communication. This process will ensure that our students will continue to be supported in a productive way.

II). Is the METCO program working successfully to address the achievement gap?

I agree with the Review Committee's conclusion that the Weston/METCO program has been proactive in supporting initiatives to address the achievement gap. Indicators of this work include:

- S.O.A.R. program;
- High School Summer Preview Sessions;
- Summer Reading Program for elementary students;
- Homework Clubs; and
- Student – Faculty Mentors.

Although this work has been productive, a more inclusive assessment of student progress in the form of data analysis is necessary. The Weston/METCO staff will be utilizing their annual Professional Development Day activity to generate ideas for collecting this data for all METCO students.

III). Is the Weston/METCO program and its support staff working effectively with other departments in support of METCO students district-wide?

The Committee has recognized the long-standing partnership between the METCO program and the various departments throughout the district. The culture of success that has been the signature of the METCO program can be attributed to the commitment and dedication of the faculty and staff working in a

cohesive effort with METCO staff, students, and families. Despite this positive background, there remains the challenge of creating better communication between the METCO staff and the Guidance Department in regards to course selection and curriculum issues that affect METCO students. The issue of course level recommendations and program expectations for METCO students should be a priority for discussion. I agree that anti-racism/diversity is an on-going process and needs to be a district priority as a means of self-reflection and support which affects all students.

IV). Does the Weston/METCO staff introduce and facilitate opportunities for all METCO students to embrace and celebrate an atmosphere of diversity?

The Administration recognizes the importance of embracing diversity in the classroom, in the student body, and in the faculty and staff.

- The infusion of METCO students in the elementary music program.
- *Shades of Grey* performance recognizing the civil rights struggles.
- *METCO Voices* video which gave listeners an opportunity to hear the feelings of a wide age level of students as they gave a personal glimpse of their METCO journey.
- The recognition of Black History and achievement through the eyes of Boston and Weston students who participated in Black History Month presentations system-wide.

These are clear indicators of the need for recognizing and respecting diversity. I agree with the Committee's contention that despite the gains, there is more work to be done in the areas establishing a more diverse staff and developing cross-cultural curriculum initiatives.

I am in agreement with the review report that the most equitable way to sustain our program, especially in tough economic times, is to embrace the notion of support. This support comes in the form of contacting alumni, former parents, participating families, and long-standing supporters from both the Boston and Weston communities. It is our hope that we can continue to support our students despite the budget restraints that we currently experience.

I thank the Review Committee and the Chair of the Committee, Dr. Emmett Price III, for their participation in the review. I feel their assessment of the program was fair and equitable and gives the METCO staff suggestions and recommendations for improvement which will serve as a conduit for future growth.

Respectfully submitted,

David Fuller, Director
Weston/METCO Program