

**K-12 METCO Program Review
WESTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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Submitted by:
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INTRODUCTION

On Monday, December 15, 2008 and Tuesday, December 16, 2008 a committee of four members was assembled and charged by Assistant Superintendent Amber Bock to accomplish the first formal external review of the Weston Public Schools K-12 METCO Program.

Charge

The committee was charged to collect data and respond to the following four questions in the form of a report to be presented to the Weston School Committee. The charge was articulated as follows:

- I) Does the Weston/ METCO program provide full and equal access to academically, co-curricularly, and socially to enable METCO students to participate at the same standard as students from the Weston community?
- II) Is the METCO program working to successfully address the achievement gap?
- III) Is the Weston/ METCO program and its staff working effectively with other departments in support of METCO students district-wide?
- IV) Does the Weston/ METCO staff introduce and facilitate opportunities for all METCO students to embrace and celebrate an atmosphere of diversity?

Additional subordinate questions were:

- a) Do the Weston/ METCO initiatives, such as after school support and summer school, successfully address the academic and social achievement of METCO students?
- b) Do the METCO parent group and the METCO staff work effectively together to communicate with parents and to develop parent support and participation?
- c) Do our METCO students have adequate access to necessary resources, such as technology, to participate fully in our academic program?

The Committee

The committee was composed of Emmett G. Price III, Ph.D., chair of the Department of African American Studies and Associate Professor of Music & African American Studies at Northeastern University (committee chair); Darby Verre, Guidance Counselor at Newton North High School; Evangelina Diamantopoulos, Bilingual Teacher at Walsh Middle School in Framingham; and Anna Sommers, Educational Consultant. Each of the committee members possesses a tremendous wealth of experience and expertise in the field of education and are each extremely competent educators, researchers and observers.

METCO

According to the publication **A HISTORY OF METCO, The Metropolitan Council for Education Opportunity: A Suburban Education For Boston's Urban Students** by Ruth M. Batson and Robert C. Hayden (Boston, MA: Select Publications, 1987), although METCO was

not formalized until 1966, the need was realized as early as 1963. On September 6, 1966 “two hundred and twenty METCO students grades K-11 take their first ride to classrooms in seven suburban districts” (Batson and Hayden, 1987). For the past 40 years Weston Public Schools has participated in the METCO program. According to the most recent “About Our Schools 2008-2009” brochure (published by the Weston Public Schools), approximately 166 students of color from Boston attend Weston’s schools. Weston Public Schools has approximately 18% students of color.

According to the **METCO, Inc. Parent Handbook** published by METCO, Inc., the purposes of METCO are:

- I) The METCO program was established to provide the opportunity for children from racially-imbalanced schools in Boston and children from isolated suburban schools to learn together in an integrated public school setting.
- II) METCO strives to increase the diversity and reduce the racial isolation in the receiving districts so that the students from different backgrounds can learn from each other in meaningful ways.
- III) The METCO program also provides closer understanding and cooperation between urban and suburban parents and other citizens in the Boston Metropolitan area.

Our Methodology

With a clear historical appreciation for the METCO program and with a concise and well constructed charge, the committee embarked on a comprehensive evaluation of the K-12 METCO Program. Comprised of two sub-teams, the committee spent extensive time at Country School, Woodland School, Field School, Weston Middle School and Weston High School. Each sub-team met with school administrators, staff, faculty and students. At the end of each day the team reviewed collective notes based on the specifics of the charge. Our approach was to examine the program and attempt to identify: how the program could be better and how things that worked might serve as a model for other programs. Subsequent to the site visit we received an email on January 15, 2009 from Courtney Elliston and Kara M. Fleming (Board of Trustees, Roxbury Weston Programs, Inc.); Ingrid Mansfield (Director, Roxbury Weston Preschool) and Karen Peterkin (Site Coordinator, CATCH) introducing the committee to RoxWes. The email provided helpful information and offered an invitation to visit the preschool and CATCH after school program. However, we were unable to accomplish a site visit.

Overall Evaluation

The METCO program in Weston is exceptionally strong and in its present state already serves as a model for other programs that fit within certain similar criteria (most specifically size of district and operating budget for public schools). The overall commitment to the METCO program by the Weston Public Schools is impressive. Weston is unique in the wealth of resources available to support the Boston students and families (examples include after-school programs, an exceptionally-run fleet of buses and academic/social liaisons in all buildings). There is a definitive fiscal, philosophical and emotional commitment to METCO on the part of the Weston community and it is clear that not only do the METCO staff, school faculties and

staffs, parents and students feel well supported by the District, but all the aforementioned constituencies are very invested and dedicated to the program.

Upon our review the entire METCO staff is well-qualified and fully committed to the success of the program. Under the leadership of Mr. David Fuller, the METCO program has developed into a tremendous asset for the Weston Public Schools. Mr. Fuller's leadership is exemplary and his passion for the program is felt across all of the campuses. His April 10, 2008 METCO PROGRAM REPORT allows clear insight into his ability to cast vision, set goals and assess the successes and challenges of the year. Upon our visit, the program in "real life" is consistent with the articulated vision and goals of the report. Mr. Fuller should certainly be commended for building the METCO program to its present state and leading the vision for its future growth.

All three Academic Liaisons (Ms. Ides-Riola M. Lazo, Ms. Theresa F. Dryden and Mr. Howard R. Horner, Jr.) have emerged as incredible resources for school faculty, students and parents and are hugely responsible for the success of the overall program. Ms. Lazo is well loved by her students, alums and the faculty and staff who she serves. Her clever ability to encourage and empower students to want to excel is a huge asset. Her invested time in connecting with parents and families is directly reflected in the academic and behavioral growth of the students. Her extended influence into the Boston communities of the METCO students is a huge asset and underscores the behind the scenes commitment that often goes unnoticed.

Ms. Dryden is another huge asset to the success of the team. Her commitment to the students and to the program is felt and articulated by her students and recent alums. Her creative problem-solving and innovative curriculum development has provided a good catalyst for collegial engagement by school faculty and staff. Together numerous programs and initiatives have been piloted that have allowed the students to not only excel, but identify as belonging to the Field School Community.

Mr. Horner is a passionate, creative and innovative leader who has quickly made a huge impact in the lives of the Middle School METCO students and the overall program. His numerous curricula initiatives and programs, in addition to his work with the Affinity groups, the Homework Club and Black History Celebration, have created a climate of inclusion for the METCO students and the Weston students alike. Mr. Horner is a positive role model whom all of the students of the Middle School look up to and admire (regardless of race, culture, etc.). His development and incorporation of the Habits of Mind Worksheet has already had a dramatic impact beyond the METCO program.

The METCO community coordinator (Ms. Sheila Marrinan Burkus) is an indispensable asset to the entire program and her ability to bridge the Boston and Weston Communities has made a tremendous impact in the effectiveness of the program. She has a challenging task as the liaison between the Boston and Weston families and in developing innovative programs that will entice the students and their families to be active and engaged beyond the school day. Her energy and ability to navigate challenging uncharted terrain have been huge assets to the entire Weston Public School System.

The remainder of this report will offer more specific evaluation and recommendation to the specific areas posed by the official charge of the committee.

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

The committee finds that the Weston/ METCO program accomplishes these goals. However, the following are concerns, recommendations and areas of improvement that will aid the program in even further accomplishing the stated goals.

Weston Public Schools are all focused on helping all of its children (including Boston students) set and reach their goals. There is a clear early intervention to assist students remain in their grade level and to thrive in that level. Numerous staff members articulated a concern regarding the increased focus on test scores, which potentially create a “one size fits all” system of learning. This continues to be an issue across the country; the committee is not concerned about Weston making any changes here. As it was best articulated by one of the school administrators, “We give them equal experiences, but they don’t all come in at an equal place.”

Various programs, such as the Homework Clubs, Reading Recovery, ARP - literacy intervention, the new math interventions and other Topics courses, SOAR, recommended summer reading, have all made a dramatic impact on the success and confidence of the students who participated. The faculty implementing these special programs are working to set clear data points to benchmark student progress including METCO students. This data will be shared in the METCO director’s end of the year report.

Course Offerings and Placement

The committee did express a concern for the small number of METCO students taking advantage of the foreign language courses and the subsequent international travel and exchange programs to France, Argentina, China, Uganda and others. Currently, only 4 students are taking foreign language beyond the two year graduation requirement. It is possible that the interest is not there or perhaps that students are not flexible in their course schedules due to other mandatory course offerings, but it would be a wonderful benefit for the METCO students to be able to fully engage in the foreign language program and international travel.

The committee also expresses a concern for the low numbers of METCO students in upper division science courses. It is the recommendation of the committee to work within the science department to explore ways to respond to this concern. Expanding ways to develop the current pilot program that provided summer school science tutoring is a potential starting place.

The committee supports the director’s concern about the number of METCO students who are not groomed for honors or advanced level courses yet, and were only admitted to these courses on the high school level via an override. In some cases, these students succeeded and it raises the question as to why they were not previously identified and prepared. In other cases, students were unable to manage the increased difficulty of the courses. Here, it appears that the clear

recommendation is that communication between the Middle School guidance counselors and METCO liaison could be strengthened with that of the High School guidance counselors and METCO liaison. Regardless of the contention, it is evident that the trajectory is moving more towards the increase of METCO students excelling in honors and advanced placement courses, perhaps due to the increased preparation offered through the summer programs and after school initiatives.

Special education

The committee is concerned about what appears to be a possible overrepresentation of METCO students involved in special education, particularly at the higher levels. At the elementary levels students are supported by a range of regular education supports, but as they move into middle and high school these supports decline. It appears that at the middle and high school level, students with learning needs not within special education are not necessarily provided the same supports that they were at the lower levels - from specific accommodations that would maximize their individual potentials to excel. This is especially noticeable for the male students with prescribed and/or demonstrated learning difficulties. Special education at times provides the only program option – perhaps leading to the higher numbers of Boston students.

A concern related to access was the inability to provide one on one inclusion tutors for Boston special education students due to METCO funding constraints. Great effort is expended by classroom teachers and METCO staff to support Boston students in their academic life.

Post high school planning process (College search and placement)

Here is an area where better communication between the METCO liaison (High School) and the assigned guidance counselor will clearly benefit the students. It is evident that both have invested stakes in the success of the student(s) and that both spend ample time, energy and resources in presenting students with options, opportunities and insight into possibilities. It seems that in some cases the support overlaps and can in many ways create a conflict within the student regarding which direction to take. More communication and alignment of approach will offer the student a more concrete plan and will give the student a greater sense of unified support. It has been mentioned by a few faculty and staff that many Weston High School students take advantage of third party external college counselors and personal coaches, this should allow the METCO students to be able to access the guidance counselors even more in order to even the playing field.

Social dynamic

There are many factors that complicate the ability of all of the Weston students to thrive socially. Most students (regardless of Weston or METCO) struggle with identity formation and “coming into their own,” during the various phases of adolescence. It is easy to minimize this and undervalue the reality of this often inner individual struggle as we look for social norms and group behavior. Social interaction between children who have known each other all of their lives (regardless of Weston or METCO) are dramatically different from interactions between Middle and High School students who are meeting for the first time and initiate their first interactions

based on their perceived differences. To that end, early immersion is essential as it gives the students from various settings equal footage at the early stages of identity formation and the realization of group dynamics. An anecdotal example of this was given by one of the High School faculty who mentioned that “if a METCO student puts out effort to connect socially with Weston students, then Weston students pick up on that and things work, but if a METCO student does not make that effort, there is very little initiating by Weston students.” This is a troubling reality for some of the METCO students. We need to pay extra careful attention to this dynamic.

Summer support

There have been some great innovative ideas, such as the summer physics tutorial offered to select METCO students at the High School, that have clearly been beneficial and worth the investment in the initial review of student feedback on the opportunity. An added advantage of this program is that incoming 8th graders are introduced to the High School facility and faculty, easing their transition into the school. It is important to figure out how to formally create metrics to “show and prove” the success of the initiative and then to replicate in area such as mathematics and perhaps foreign languages.

Is the METCO program working to successfully address the achievement gap?

The committee finds that the Weston/ METCO program is working successfully to address the achievement gap; however the following are concerns, recommendations and areas of improvement that will aid the program in even further accomplishing the stated goals.

Despite the phenomenal support that Weston offers Boston students, the differences in family life and mere cultural differences can be barriers to academic and social success for Boston students, so there has to be a more concerted effort to allow the METCO Voices to continually encourage innovative ideas towards curriculum development. Most students do not achieve less than peers on purpose, most are in need of something very specific that may be articulated in the subtext of their musings.

Practically, it is evident that more educational interventions should occur at the 4-5 and middle school grade levels to prevent SPED referrals. Perhaps increased access to SOAR and other programs will assist in the early intervention.

It is clear that more creative and clear metrics should be developed in order to continue to make gains in diminishing the achievement gap. More data needs to be routinely collected beyond standardized test scores, quarterly or end of the semester grades and the like. Students have to be assessed in a manner that captures their small individual successes revealing their own ability to excel that may or may not match the standard. Comparative data such as data that mixes the students extra-curricular successes or challenges with academic successes or challenges might be helpful as Weston creates a new method of examining the strengths and weaknesses of each student. Surveys to parents and students that assess perceptions, concerns and suggestions might be helpful in this area as the only way to achieve in diminishing the achievement gap is to partner with all involved to share the responsibility in supporting the student. Metrics can also be extremely crucial in taking the concept of achievement gap beyond the national statistics and

allowing the reality of the gap to live in Weston with Weston-specific numbers. This localizing of the situation allows all interested parties to have a direct interest and impact on resolving and removing the gap.

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

The committee finds that the Weston/ METCO program is working successfully and effectively with other departments in support of METCO students. The following are concerns, recommendations and areas of improvement that will aid the program in even further accomplishing the stated goals.

Tremendous strides have been made over the years to create and nurture relationships with school faculty and staff by the METCO staff. The work, in particular of the liaisons has been exceptional (on all levels). Their ability to allow the students to feel their passion, while setting high standards and attainable goals in tandem with exceptional signs of collegiality across the campuses is wonderful. The ability to advocate for the students to faculty and staff who are also invested in student learning and growth is a very healthy environment and one that needs to be continually fostered.

The work, especially on the High School campus with the Music Department, the English Department, the Science Department, the Art Department and the History Department has been exceptional. Faculty from the aforementioned departments have fully invested in the METCO concept and have created programs, initiatives and curricula, which empowers the METCO students to desire to excel (without creating an “us” vs. “them” dichotomy in the classroom). These departments, their department heads and the faculty within the departments should be recognized for their exceptional commitment and investment in the lives of the METCO and Weston students.

Working with all other departments to share best practices toward supporting METCO students should be ongoing. There is need for next step goals for supporting achievement to high levels in the Foreign Language and Math Departments and there is continued hope in future collaboration.

Work with the guidance counselors on each of the levels has been a healthy and complex relationship due to the inherent overlap of responsibility and the differing approaches. There is concern on the part of Weston faculty and staff of the duplication of services between the METCO office and the guidance office. There is a concern on the part of Weston faculty and staff and a perception by some students that there is an implied and subtle double standard in which METCO students are not held to the same intellectual and behavioral standard. There was no direct evidence on this visit, although enough people articulated it to be a concern.

Communication between METCO director/liaisons and Middle and High school staff around course level recommendations must be strengthened. There should be a shared understanding of why some students should be offered higher level placement, while others need to build skills before such “overrides” put into place.

Continued discussion over the METCO student representation in Special Education in all levels must continue. Although there has been anecdotal evidence of overrepresentation, it is not clear if that is the case or not. Data should be gathered to reflect on this concern.

There is a clear and healthy need for ongoing, long term professional development across system to support faculty and staff understanding of issues of active anti-racism/white privilege/diversity beyond initial anti-bias coursework.

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

The committee finds that the Weston/ METCO program is working successfully to embrace and celebrate an atmosphere of diversity; however the following are concerns, recommendations and areas of improvement that will aid the program in even further accomplishing the stated goals.

Weston Public Schools presents the statistic that 18% of Weston students are diverse, 8% of which are METCO students. From kindergarten through high school the schools and each faculty attempt to project multicultural picture books/ literature, promote multicultural food days and promote social competency programming (such as Open Circle) which aim to embrace and promote diversity. It is clear that diversity is promoted as a construct, but the committee remains unclear about how much of varying cultures do the students at each level know. It is imperative that students are taught specifics about a number of prevalent cultures in order for them to have a working practical knowledge of the rich and vast experiences of varying peoples. With a limited number of 2 or 3 METCO students in certain classes the reality of alienation and ostracization remains. This is a reality that can only be resolved by anti-biased, cross-cultural engagement.

It is not clear whether all of the subject matter curricula embrace diversity as the committee was unable to engage the widespread faculty at that level.

According to students, particularly at the middle school and high school level, more engagement in Boston is greatly desired (by both METCO and Weston students). For diversity to be mutually beneficial, students must be able to openly and honestly experience both settings in a safe and controlled environment. Although the work of the community coordinator is effectively engaging this area, students desire more.

Additional programming dealing specifically with racial identity and identity formation must be explored as it is clear that students not only are curious and openly engaged with the difference, the distinction between cultural identity and cultural praxis is a perforated line that many students are unable to connect. The clearest example is the immersion of white middle class students within Hip Hop Culture. Is being Hip Hop and acting Black synonymous? This is a question that students and faculty of all races and cultures must openly and honestly deal with.

One area that will assist the embracing and celebration of diversity is the continued recruitment and retention of administrators, faculty and staff of color. It is imperative to have adult males and adult females of color. The reality of any commitment in this area is revealed through the

visible and tangible signs of diversity within the organization. An organization committed to diversity without any realized signs of diversity within its organization is only committed in theory and not in practice. Weston Public Schools has signs of growth in this area, but more needs to be done.

The requirement for all newly hired faculty and staff to engage anti-bias training is a wonderful beginning. It is imperative for the district to implement systemic active learning on a continued basis in order to continually reinforce the lessons learned. Mandatory annual professional development days in January and/ or March should be set aside for continued training in this area. Innovative ideas such as a summer leadership academy would lead to a more prestigious opportunity to engage in such training. With continued training, issues such as “why do all the METCO kids sit in the METCO corner in the cafeteria,” will no longer be issues but mere observations; similar to why does “the football team,” or “basketball team,” or “band” or “fill in the blank” sit in the cafeteria together.

The Shades of Grey drama experience at the Middle School was a tremendous accomplishment and a positive, emotionally charged moment for all involved. The committee encourages the faculty, staff and students to continue to develop residual follow-up to this life-changing experience. The students were transformed with this experience, and such a transformation presents the opportunity for long term impact.

The **METCO VOICES** DVD was an excellent initiative to allow select students to speak from their own perspectives and to raise, address and even offer solutions to some of the challenges that they perceive as being important. It is critical to empower the students to have a safe environment to express their concerns and to be heard. It is also imperative to take information such as that presented by **METCO VOICES** and use it an opportunity for faculty and staff to be self-reflective and perhaps self-critical in order that ALL students feel that they belong within the Weston Community.

It is imperative for faculty and staff to use culturally sensitive curricula examples that empower the experience of Boston residents when ever possible. These small attempts to broaden out an often non-exclusive curriculum will make a huge investment in the ability for the METCO students to resonate with the content and to see themselves as participants within the academic conversation. Field trips to the city and possible exchange programs with faculty and staff would further build on this idea and would greatly benefit the entire student population.

The creation and continuation of the Affinity groups is critical to the success of this endeavor. Allowing the groups to be as inclusive as the students will allow will further aid in the entire community embracing and celebrating diversity. Cultural differences will be seen as something to be appreciated and learned about rather than to be feared and misunderstood.

Do the Weston/ METCO initiatives, such as after school support and summer school, successfully address the academic and social achievement of METCO students?

The committee finds that the Weston/ METCO initiatives are a huge strength to the program and that further innovative thinking will continue to elevate Weston as a leader in thinking and model

for other METCO schools. The following are concerns, recommendations and areas of improvement that will aid the program in even further accomplishing the stated goals.

Numerous examples of attempts to create equal access were very apparent during our visit. The most notable, perhaps, were the emerging summer preparatory/ enrichment programs with specific emphasis on Physics, Math and History. These programs have achieved success in preparing METCO students for immersion into Honors and eventual AP courses. These programs attest to the strong financial commitment by Weston Public Schools administration. It is our hope that these programs remain in place for a long duration of time. We were pleased to hear of the initiative towards creating instruments to actually assess the success of these programs of a short period of time in order to verify their effectiveness.

Weston's METCO program substantially provides incredible intervention and great educational opportunities to students that aren't offered this in their own neighborhoods. From the early access offered by the pre-METCO RoxWes and CATCH programs to the immersion of Boston students into the Kindergarten classes, it is clear that the gains are mutually beneficial. The Boston and the Weston children learn, grow and experience a sense of community in ways not previously available. It is absolutely clear that the Weston and Boston children admire, enjoy and learn from one another. In fact both groups (at all levels) affectionately spoke of their counterparts in their presence.

The success of the Homework Club at the middle school level has attracted so much attention that some faculty and staff wonder if the clubs could be open to non-METCO students. In fact there appears that numerous faculty are interested in being invited into the Homework club space in order to experience the transformative nature of its success.

When presented with the excellent experience that the faculty, staff and students of the Middle School had surrounding the presentation of the "Shades of Grey" play, the committee unanimously wondered what will be the residual impact and teaching/ learning-moments that will exist as follow-up? It is clear that the ENTIRE school invested time and energy in the creation, development and creation of this magnus opus, the committee simply wonders how will the school maximize the impact that the play has on the students, all of whom were emotionally, intellectually and overwhelmingly moved by the piece.

Do the METCO parent group and METCO staff work effectively together to communicate with parents and to develop parent support and participation?

The committee finds that the METCO parent group and the METCO staff do have an effective working relationship, but there is much work to be done in this area. It is clear that not all of the responsibility in this area lays on the METCO staff. Further, it is clear that the METCO staff have made this a priority, however more innovative ideas must emerge to get parents even more involved in the academic and school life of their children. The following are concerns, recommendations and areas of improvement that will aid the program in even further accomplishing the stated goals.

It is clear that the success of METCO students can be directly proportional to parent involvement. According to anecdotal evidence and the committee's own observation, parental

involvement at the earlier grades seems to be good, particularly surrounded events such as school assemblies, back-to-school nights and class functions. However, as the students matriculate to higher grades, the parental involvement wanes. It is clear that there are substantial challenges for parents with students involved in the METCO program, however, a clear indicator of success is the ability for the child (and parent) to fully immerse themselves into the culture of the school and thus the community that the school resides in.

A priority of the METCO program must be to continue to engage, involve and retain parent partnership in the education of the students. A second priority must be to increase the participation and overall pool of Weston host families.

Do Boston parent leaders who are closely involved with METCO effectively reach out to new families? Are they a good resource? Could they be doing more?

Every METCO family should receive a copy of the METCO, INC. Parent Handbook after attending an orientation program which raises the need for continued active participation. Physical presence is always the goal, however technology can be better utilized to not only keep parents informed but to keep them engaged. There is much room for innovation in this area.

Incentives should be offered to faculty who go above and beyond the call of duty not only to work with students to support extra needs but also for engaging student families on a regular basis in order to show them that faculty and staff are not only accessible but that they care. This is critical to student academic, social and emotional success.

Families should be inundated with information (newsletters, facts and stats about the program, matriculation lists from previous graduating classes, etc.) in order to keep them involved, interested and to continually allow them to engage and enter the process at any point. Possible year-end self assessment surveys might be helpful to set annual, short-term and long-term goals. Parents will let you know what there needs are, and the METCO staff and the school faculty and staff should continue to share with parents “their needs.”

Weston METCO director and staff might charge the METCO Parents group to develop written materials to complement the METCO, Inc. Parent Handbook. This could include: contact list of parents, FAQs that might serve to be a resource and/ or reference throughout the year and anecdotal stories of reflection and of support of the initiatives involving parents (i.e., the Family/Friends Program).

It is imperative for the METCO staff to encourage school staff and faculty to also establish healthy relationships with the METCO family. Often there is differential treatment as the school staff and faculty refer all conversations through the METCO liaison as opposed to calling the students’ family. This creates conflict and leads the METCO parents to perceive a double standard in treatment which diffuses the possibilities and successes of the overall program.

The Family Friends host family program seems to be effective for approximately 50% of families involved. The committee recommends that the METCO staff ponder the following: 1) Review any collected data to see how many families stay connected over the progression from

elementary school through middle school to high school. Do those connections drop off over time? Why? 2) Is there a way to have the same families stay consistently connected over time? Are there better practices that you can develop or borrow to continue to build bridges between the Weston and Boston families?

Despite Boston students in early grades feeling comfortable, invested, important and cared for, older students can feel disenfranchised and racially separate. This is a growing trend across the country and parental involvement in aiding the student to process their own feelings and emotions can aid in working through this reality.

More resources need to be provided to parents in general. Parents should take the initiative to help think through these challenges. A true partnership between METCO staff, parents, school staff and faculty, student and parent will lead to even greater success.

The transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high are crucially sensitive moments in the life of the young person that can be better mediated with the assistance of direct programming for parents and students.

Do METCO students have adequate access to necessary resources, such as technology, to participate fully in our academic program?

Upon the committee's review it is clear that steps have been made in the right direction towards providing necessary resources such as technology to the METCO students. It has been noted that at both the Middle School and the High School faculty and staff open computer labs to METCO students in the morning prior to school to help alleviate the stress of students who may not have computers or have access to the internet at home. In some cases we heard anecdotal evidence of computers being provided for some students without at the high school level.

The technological advances in the classrooms of all Weston schools are an asset to the learning environment of all the students including the METCO students.

Additional questions to ponder in preparation for your next phase of strategic planning:

With the current economy what METCO programs appear to be most vulnerable? Is Weston willing to sustain its support of a full and vital METCO program?

Are there best practices for parental involvement and support programs that liaisons should be investigating across the board? Is there a way that parents in the earlier levels will learn a system of engagement that will work all the way up through high school, not just with the liaisons, but with the school faculty, staff and district administrators?

Although METCO-specific programs target challenges for Boston students, do they also encourage the racial separation that occurs in the older grades? Should funding be sought to include Weston students in these programs (i.e., Power Hour, SOAR)?

What type of relationship remains after graduation? Should Weston be doing more to encourage on-going support and connection (idea of service corps/ encouraging Boston students to be educators and to return to Weston)?

How could the METCO and the greater Weston Community better engage METCO graduates to come back and potentially teach in the Weston Public School System?

What programming might be put in place to reintroduce the Weston faculty and staff to spending time with METCO families in Boston?

How might METCO students be groomed to take advantage of the travel abroad or foreign language travel programs so that they too may be exposed to the international realm beyond Boston?