



# **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

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## **Boston METCO Admissions Policy—February 2020**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the state-funded METCO Program is to expand educational opportunities, increase diversity, and reduce racial isolation by permitting students from Boston to attend public schools in other communities that have agreed to participate. Since its founding, the METCO program has enrolled tens of thousands of Boston students of color in participating school districts and has provided the opportunity for students in those districts to experience the advantages of learning and working in a racially and ethnically diverse setting.

The statute that authorizes the METCO program is M.G.L. Chapter 76, Section 12A, the Racial Imbalance Act.

### **MISSION**

The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. (METCO) provides students with a strong academic foundation rich in cultural, educational, ethnic, socioeconomic, and racial diversity, fostering the opportunity for children from Boston and from neighboring suburbs to develop a deeper understanding of each other in an integrated public-school setting.

### **ELIGIBILITY**

Only Boston residents are eligible. Any student whose primary residence is outside of Boston is not eligible for the METCO program. Before any student is referred to a METCO district, their parent or legal guardian must prove legal residency in the City of Boston. Once enrolled, families must continue to be residents of Boston for the duration of the school year and throughout enrollment in order to be enrolled in a METCO partner school.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provide broad protections to students who are experiencing homelessness or are in foster care. If, during application review, METCO Inc. learns of a student whose residency cannot be verified due to homelessness or placement in foster care, METCO Inc. will cease residency verification but continue to process the student's application.

For applications of such students who are enrolled in and attending the Boston Public Schools, METCO Inc. will verify the student's residency by consulting with the Boston Public Schools Homeless Liaison or Foster Care Point of Contact, depending on the student's situation.

For situations in which students apply to METCO, are experiencing homelessness or are in foster care, but are not enrolled in the Boston Public Schools, METCO Inc. will consult with staff at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Situations of this type may require fact-specific inquiries and case-by-case determinations regarding eligibility to apply for METCO in order to comply with both METCO authorizing statutes and the McKinney-Vento Homeless

Assistance Act or the foster care provisions of ESSA. In either case, METCO Inc. will continue to process the applications of these students until METCO Inc. receives written notice that students are not eligible for the METCO program, including but not limited to ESSA and McKinney-Vento dispute resolution letters.

- Each participating METCO district will use the common application form developed and administered by METCO, Inc. This form includes collection of images of the guardian's photo ID, the student's birth certificate, and the report cards and attendance records from the last two completed school year. Districts may not collect any additional documentary information from an applicant prior to making an admissions decision except as specified in the guidelines below. There will be three application cycles annually, in the Fall, Winter and Spring. Specific dates will be available on our website at [metcoinc.org](http://metcoinc.org) METCO, Inc. will verify the accuracy and completeness of all applications and assign a lottery number to each applicant within a week of the end of each application cycle. For the school year 2020-21, Priority Status will be given to applicants with completed and verified applications who meet the following criteria:
  - A sibling of a student currently enrolled in a participating district at the time of application (and who will continue to be enrolled in the district in the upcoming school year) will be referred to that district, IF the parent/guardian requests AND if space is available in the appropriate grade level for that student.
  - A student entering grades 1-10 who completed an application for the 2019-20 school year but was not enrolled in a METCO district, will be referred in the order of their original Wait List date.
  - A student entering Kindergarten in 2020 who was entered into the Wait List by April 29, 2019 will be referred in the order of their original Wait List date.
  - Applications submitted outside of the application cycles will not be accepted.
- Applicants, including those with Priority Status and those with lottery numbers, will be provided with the opportunity to participate in one 60-minute Information Session about the history, purpose, and experience of the METCO program, with emphasis on the admissions process outlined here. Information Sessions will be offered in a range of locations and online via webinar, on a range of dates and times, and in a range of languages including ASL.
- Only students with complete and verified applications for the 2020-21 school year will be referred. Applications from previous years are not considered. All enrollments, including siblings of current students, are subject to availability of space in the appropriate grade level.
- METCO, Inc. receives requests from districts between February 1<sup>st</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, as those districts estimate available seats in each grade in the following school year. The order of these requests varies every year and is not influenced by METCO, Inc. With the exception of eligible siblings, METCO, Inc. does not determine which district a given application is referred to. Family preferences for specific districts are not taken into account.
- METCO, Inc. refers eligible applicants in the following order:
  - Applicants entering the requested grade with Priority Status due to **sibling eligibility**, in order of lottery number from all application cycles
  - Applicants from the first cycle entering the requested grade with Priority Status due to **previous application or Wait List status** (2020-21 only), in order of original Wait List date
  - Applicants from the first cycle entering the requested grade in order of lottery

number

- Applicants assigned lottery numbers after the second and third cycle will be appended to the list of applicants from the first cycle, with the exception of siblings, who will be prioritized along with the siblings from the first cycle. Applicants will be referred to a maximum of one district. Referral does not guarantee enrollment in that district (see #4 and #5).
  - If selected, applicants have the option to decline enrollment in that district. Declining enrollment in a district will remove them from consideration for METCO enrollment in that school year; the application and assigned referral number expires and the parent/guardian may re-apply during the application cycles beginning October 2 for the following year.
2. Districts may request applications for admissions consideration for a specified number of open seats in particular grades during the **referral window** from February 1, 2020 – October 1, 2020. In accordance with the referral lottery rank order, METCO, Inc., will provide a **referral cohort** of 100% - 200% of the number of open seats (rounded to the nearest whole number) to each district for consideration, based on the district's request within the 100% - 200% range. The district may request additional referral cohorts during the referral window until all available open METCO seats are filled, *after all applicants from any prior referral cohort for that grade have been offered or declined admission. A referral does not guarantee admission.*
  3. Prior to making a selection decision, the district may conduct an interview, request a teacher recommendation and discipline records, and/or require an orientation of the parent and/or student (provided that reasonable accommodations are made for alternative scheduling arrangements when necessary).
  4. In making admissions decisions to select applicants from the referral cohort, the district may holistically consider information provided on the common application form and through the interview/recommendation/ orientation process, student/family commitment to participate in the program (including prior family experience with the METCO program through alumni and family members), and local district goals related to the purpose of METCO.
  5. For each applicant in a referral cohort provided prior to April 30, districts must make and communicate a final admissions decision to METCO, Inc. and families no later than June 30, 2020, though districts are strongly encouraged to do so sooner if possible. All other decisions must be made no later than October 1, 2020.
  6. Districts must identify a staff member parents can contact with questions about the admissions process or admissions decisions, so that DESE and METCO, Inc. can direct inquiries accordingly.
  7. Applicants with disabilities and applicants with limited English proficiency may voluntarily self-identify for the purpose of requesting reasonable accommodations during the entire application and admission process. Upon request, a qualified representative from METCO, Inc. and/or the district will provide these applicants with the full range of assistance to complete the necessary forms and provide interpretation services and/or reasonable accommodations. Information on limited English proficiency and disability submitted voluntarily by the applicant, for the purpose of receiving assistance and accommodations during the application and admission process, will not affect admissions decisions.
  8. **NON-DISCRIMINATION:** METCO, Inc. and participating METCO school districts do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, gender, gender identity, disability, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation.
  9. If a referred applicant is not selected for admission by a participating district by the end of the enrollment period on October 1, the application and assigned lottery number expires. The parent/guardian may re-apply during the application cycles that begins on October 2. If

eligible, the applicant will receive a new lottery number for potential referral the following year.