

# **BOSTON METCO ADMISSIONS POLICY**

*Revised and Approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in August 2022*

## **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 (METCO, Inc.) 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.

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## APPLICATION PROCESS

Each participating METCO district will use the common application form developed and administered by METCO, Inc. The common application will only include documentation requirements related to proof of residency, parent/legal guardian ID, and the student's birth certificate. METCO school districts may not collect any additional documentary information from an applicant prior to making an admissions decision except as specified in the guidelines below.

METCO will accept applications during designated periods publicized on METCO's website. Within two weeks of the end of each application cycle, METCO, Inc. will run a lottery for all applications received and assign a randomized number to each applicant. Applications submitted outside of the application cycles will not be accepted.

All applicants will be provided with the opportunity to participate in one strongly recommended 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, platforms, dates, times, and languages, including ASL.

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.

## TRANSFERS

Once enrolled, METCO does not transfer students between districts. For enrolled students to be considered for admissions in any other town, the enrolled student must completely withdraw from the METCO program by disenrolling from the current METCO partner school district before applying during the next application cycle.

## REFERRAL PROCESS

METCO partner districts estimate the number of available seats in each grade in the upcoming school year, and contact METCO, Inc. individually to request a referral of applications from prospective students.

Districts may request applications for admissions consideration for a specified number of open seats in particular grades during the **referral window** from February 1<sup>st</sup> of the current school year through October 1<sup>st</sup> of the subsequent year. In accordance with the referral lottery rank order, METCO, Inc., will provide a **referral cohort** of up to an additional 25% 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 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 received a final admissions decision.*

METCO, Inc. will make every effort to provide a referral cohort of up to an additional 25% based on a review

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of the completed applications submitted to date and concurrent requests from participating METCO districts. A referral does not guarantee admission.

Upon receiving each district's request, METCO, Inc. refers applicants with complete and verified applications in the requested grades in the following prioritized order:

- **Siblings:** A sibling of a student currently enrolled in the requesting district at the time of application. If the parent/guardian requests, it and if space is available in the appropriate grade level for that student.
- **New Applicants:** Applicants from the first cycle, (which occurs August of the current school year through December of that same year) entering the requested grade, in order of lottery number followed by new applicants from each subsequent cycle entering the requested grade, in order of lottery number.

All applicants may receive one referral to one district per year.

**For the 2022-2023 application cycle:** METCO, Inc. may pilot a process allowing families to identify preferences for district referral, which will be incorporated into the random assignment process. The pilot process will be evaluated and DESE will determine whether the process will be continued after consultation with stakeholders.

After all applicants from any prior referral cohort for a given grade have been offered or declined admission, the district may request additional students until all available open seats are filled,

With the above exceptions, neither METCO, Inc., partner districts, nor parents/guardians determine which district will receive a specific application. This will be determined by random assignment. If a parent of an enrolled sibling does not choose to have a child referred to the district of a sibling through sibling preference, the second child will not be referred there. METCO, Inc. will make every effort to refer siblings applying in the same year, to the same district when possible. All enrollments, including siblings of current students, are subject to availability of space in the appropriate grade level.

In all cases, referral does not guarantee enrollment in that district.

### **SELECTION PROCESS**

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.

METCO districts will receive, and review information provided on the **common application** by prospective students referred to them by METCO, Inc. The common application will only include documentation requirements related to proof of residency, parent/legal guardian ID, and the student's birth certificate. Outside of the common application process, METCO school districts may also request some or all the following additional sources of information, provided that reasonable accommodations are made for alternative arrangements when necessary:

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- An interview
- An orientation

**For the 2023-2024 application cycle only, for secondary students (grades 6 through 12) only:** Districts may continue to elect to require the submission of report cards and attendance records for the last two completed school years, along with a teacher recommendation and/or discipline records. The collection of these additional records will be the responsibility of the districts after referral by METCO, Inc. When requested, METCO, Inc. may support districts with collecting the additional records. Should districts elect to request record collection support from METCO, Inc. then METCO school districts and METCO, Inc. will jointly agree on the timeframe for the records to be collected.

Districts should make reasonable attempts to communicate with applicants' families through multiple modes of communication prior to declining a student due to parent/guardian unresponsiveness. This includes emails, texts, and phone calls as parent/guardians' modes of communication may shift.

Before offering enrollment to applicants in the referral cohort, each METCO school district may holistically consider assessments of 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.

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<sup>th</sup> of the current academic year, though districts are strongly encouraged to do so sooner if possible. All other decisions must be made no later than October 1<sup>st</sup> of the subsequent academic year.

Districts must identify a staff member whom parents can contact for questions about the admissions process or admissions decisions, in the event DESE and/or METCO, Inc. need to direct inquiries to districts regarding admissions decisions.

If a referred applicant is not selected for admission by a participating district the application and assigned lottery number expires and the parent/guardian may not apply again until the following year.

If selected, applicants have the option to decline enrollment in that district. Declining enrollment in a district will remove the applicant from consideration for METCO enrollment for the applicable academic year and the parent/guardian may re-apply the following year.

### **Program Removal**

METCO districts should consult with METCO, Inc. in instances where a student may be involuntarily removed from the program.

Once enrolled in the METCO program through a district, a student can only be involuntarily removed from that district, for the following reasons:

- Moving out of Boston

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- Out of district placement through IEP process: [See guidance here.](#)
- Discipline process. For more information, visit: [Advisory on Student Discipline under Chapter 222 of the Acts of 2012 - Education Laws and Regulations.](#)