

**To: School Committee, Westwood Public Schools**  
**From: Emily Parks, Superintendent**  
**Lateefah Franck, METCO Director**  
**Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent**  
**Date: November 29, 2021**  
**Re: Proposed elementary METCO expansion**

*Introduction*

Over the last several years, Westwood has committed to honoring diversity, pursuing equity, and promoting integration through strategic priorities for the district. Most recently during the strategic planning process, the district's administrative leadership team has carefully thought about how objectives and priorities might directly align and impact the METCO program.

Westwood's participation as a METCO school district and its commitment to the goals of the program is long-standing, dating back to the 1960s. The history of METCO, Inc. is rooted in desegregation efforts. Westwood's membership as a METCO district reflects the community's belief that the way that students think about race and each other is positively changed when we learn with each other and that education is improved when we don't learn in isolation. For many years, therefore, there has been discussion during School Committee meetings about the possibility of restructuring Westwood's METCO program so that it begins in Kindergarten, allowing for an earlier and fuller integration of Boston students into our school community.

The barrier to restructuring and expanding has primarily been related to funding. The METCO program is funded each year by the state legislature as part of the state budget process. That state allocation is then distributed to by grants participating districts. The local allocation is determined using a per pupil funding formula. The calculation for a particular fiscal year is determined based on the highest of the 3 prior years' enrollment numbers. For this reason, it has been challenging to make changes in Westwood's program without a plan in the operating budget to provide "upfront" funding for the initial year of expansion.

Over the last several months, we have engaged in discussions with METCO HQ, the METCO Superintendents, and MA DESE (which administers the grant) to identify ways for districts to address this funding barrier without negatively impacting the funding in our colleagues' districts. As a result, when the state legislature voted an increase to the FY'22 METCO allocation, this fall, DESE and METCO HQ earmarked a portion of the increase in the state grant to support districts' expansion efforts.

Hearing of Westwood's interest, DESE reached out in the summer to ask for a preliminary proposal. At that time, we submitted a brief overview of what an expansion program might

entail, with the understanding that a more robust grant process would follow. The department then unexpectedly reached out a couple of weeks ago to let us know that the proposal was approved, pending school committee support, and that we can move ahead with planning for expansion. We have a unique opportunity right now to significantly increase our local METCO grant allocation that would fully fund our program expansion and do so on a timeline that would not require an upfront expenditure of local dollars. Our understanding is that this grant represents a one-time opportunity. If we do not act now, we do not know if or when the option will be available in the future.

### *Proposal*

We think that expansion, and the benefits that come with it, can be achieved through purposeful planning, ongoing student support, and family/community engagement. Elementary expansion will provide our students with a robust Elementary experience by enhancing diversity in the classroom and providing exposure to multi cultures and the ability to engage with classmates that may have varied perspectives.

Currently, Westwood has a METCO student enrollment with about 51 students in grades 6 -12. Our proposal is to expand Westwood's program to become a Kindergarten - 12th grade district, by adding an additional 32 - 36 elementary students. The resulting Westwood METCO student enrollment would total about 83-88 total students.

### *Enrollment Grades*

We will continue to enroll students in grades 6 - 12 and keep our enrollment steady in these grades at about 51 students. With elementary expansion, Westwood METCO would also enroll students in kindergarten through 5th grade. In the future, we would continue to accept new students annually in Kindergarten through 2nd grade to keep our elementary enrollment steady at about 36. Though this is the intention, we would be allowed to bring in students at any grade level if in a given year strategic placement were needed to keep class sizes within School Committee guidelines.

### *Funding*

The METCO grant, provided by the state and managed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, supports the operational costs of the program, student access to curriculum and instruction, and K-12 district support and resources. The local program is funded on a per pupil allocation based on highest enrollment from the prior 3 years. For example, if the enrollment range was as follows, the grant for 2021-2022 would be the per pupil base x 50.

2018-2019: 48 students

2019-2020: 50 students  
2020-2021: 47 students

Based on our current numbers, our FY'22 allocation was estimated at \$368,002. This grant funding is earmarked for transportation for students from Boston, staff salaries (METCO Director and 2 support staff advisors), professional development, and enrichment and support programming for students and families, including Westwood-resident families. Our METCO grant allocation fully covers these program costs.

If we expand the number of students in the program, our allocation will be adjusted to \$588,038, an increase of \$220,036. That increase will fully cover the costs associated with the expansion, most significantly an additional bus (approx. \$100K), an elementary METCO site coordinator, an instructional assistant, and expanded support programming. In addition, this funding would allow a restructuring of the METCO Director role to a broader set of responsibilities across the district and community (e.g. Director of Equity, Integration and Community Partnerships). This role will support the mission of METCO through support of the program, as well as additional efforts to promote greater equity and integration in our schools and community, and the development of collaborative partnerships that support, sustain and augment those efforts.

Some people have raised the concern that the METCO per pupil allotment is not equal to the per pupil spending in the WPS. Two factors are important when addressing this concern. First, when METCO students enroll in the WPS, our total enrollment for the purpose of Chapter 70 state aid to schools increases correspondingly. Second, and more significantly, though the local METCO grant allotment is calculated based on the number of students in the program, in fact, METCO is a marginal seat program. The cost of the program at the local level does not change when an additional student is added. The terms of the grant allow that student seats can be filled based on seat availability in a given classroom. We can make choices about student placement and add students at grade levels such that all classrooms will continue to be aligned with the School Committee policies around maximum student capacity and additional classroom sections are not added to the budget.

### *Planning for Expansion*

In order to support expansion, **DESE will increase Westwood's FY'22 grant allotment for this year,** as if we had already expanded to the target enrollment, so that funding can be used to prepare for the arrival of elementary students next fall. This increase effectively "raises the floor" of the total grant allotment moving forward, thereby

allowing us to continue as a K-12 district for the foreseeable future. It also represents a sizable infusion of resources (\$220K) for planning and preparation.

A number of critical steps are needed in order to prepare for the arrival of new elementary students next fall. First and foremost, we think that the completion of an equity audit this spring will provide the district with important information about our strengths and challenges in supporting the achievement of all students. If we accept this opportunity, we will also need to recruit and hire an Elementary Program Coordinator who will act as a liaison between Boston resident families and the school on a daily basis, provide robust professional development for staff, conduct outreach to elementary school families, create onboarding programs that welcome our new students and their families and help them form connections within the community, plan for enrichment and support opportunities (e.g., after school activities in the district, fun days with class peers, cross community family events, academic tutoring) and attend to the logistics of transportation, supplies, program space, etc.

This is an exciting opportunity for Westwood. Of the 33 METCO districts, Westwood is one of just three without an elementary cohort, and many educators and Westwood families have expressed an interest in expansion into the elementary grades over the years. Given the availability of state support, the strong level of local community interest and the district's strategic priorities, the time is right for growing Westwood's METCO program.