



METCO: An Explainer

History & Purpose

The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) is a state-funded educational program designed to eliminate racial imbalance through the busing of children from Boston and Springfield to public school systems in surrounding suburban metropolitan communities.

METCO began over 50 years ago. Driven by the efforts of the Boston Chapter of the NAACP and a concern for quality education in the Black community, state legislation was passed that made racial imbalance illegal. School systems were penalized by having state appropriations withdrawn until suitable plans to alleviate racial isolation were approved by the state Department of Education. The Boston Public Schools were among the school districts penalized. During this time, suburban residents realized that their children were also inadequately educated because of racial isolation.

Many groups within the Newton community, including the citywide P.T.A. Council, Newton Fair Housing Committee, League of Women Voters, Roxbury-Newton Freedom School, the historically black Myrtle Baptist Church, and many individuals officially supported the unanimous vote of the Newton School Committee to participate in METCO in 1966. The Newton METCO Program began with 50 African American students in grades three through six, attending seven different schools in Newton.

The METCO Program Today

The METCO Program is open to all children of African American, Latino/a, Asian, and Native American descent who reside in the cities of Boston or Springfield and volunteer to participate. The Newton METCO Program draws from the neighborhoods of Boston and is comprised of a diverse group of students from broad ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious backgrounds. **Newton's METCO program is the largest**, maintaining a targeted enrollment of 431 students each year. Students are enrolled in all 21 schools, in kindergarten through grade 12.

Once a student enters the Newton METCO Program, they exercise all the rights, privileges, and services of Newton resident students. The cooperative work of Boston and Newton residents and the staff of the Newton Public Schools advances the purposes of the METCO Program: to provide a quality education and a more diverse cultural experience for all students attending school in Newton.

Note that no Newton resident is denied school placement for his or her children as a result of a METCO student placement.

Why Do We Need METCO Today? The Persistence of Segregated Communities

In greater Boston, the evidence of continued racial segregation and inequity in our communities is clear. The practice of redlining, or refusing to extend credit to prospective homeowners in certain neighborhoods, is now illegal, but the legacy continues and persists in more subtle ways. The recent *Boston Globe* Spotlight Series found current evidence of housing discrimination by landlords in Greater Boston and extreme and persistent segregation in our suburbs.

In Newton specifically, we had a large community of African American residents who moved here and owned homes beginning in the 1800s as they fled the south after the Civil War, many living in the Hicks Street neighborhood of West Newton. This neighborhood was almost entirely eliminated in the 1960s, with thirty-two homes demolished, when the community was identified for takeover by eminent domain during the construction of the Mass Pike. There was no other neighborhood in Newton hit as hard by the

construction process. Residents who were evicted had difficulty finding new homes in the city or other suburbs due to explicit and institutional racial discrimination at the time.

The METCO Program is also needed to support resident students in experiencing a diverse community in schools, in order for them to succeed in a global society. It can also help non-white resident students not feel isolated as the only non-white student in a classroom, in a grade, or at a school.

For further reading on segregation and racial inequity in our communities:

[Boston.Racism.Image.Reality](#), The Boston Globe Spotlight Series

[The Disturbing History of the Suburbs](#), Adam Ruins Everything

[Redlining, Still A Thing](#), Washington Post

[Interactive Redlining Map Zooms in on America's History of Discrimination](#), NPR

[A City Divided, The Building of the Mass Pike in Newton](#), Newton Patch

How is the METCO Program Funded?

The METCO Program is funded by the State of Massachusetts through the Department of Education under the Racial Imbalance Law. Funding includes the cost of student transportation, anti-racist materials and training, program initiatives to enhance academic achievement, cross-cultural presentations, and salaries for the Newton METCO Program staff. The City of Newton also receives funds calculated to cover the cost of teachers.

How Do Children Enter the Newton METCO Program?

The placement process begins with parents registering their child at METCO, Inc. in Boston. Since the METCO, Inc. waiting list is very long, many parents register their children before their first birthday and update their information on a yearly basis. When seats become available in a participating school system, METCO, Inc. refers students on a first-come, first-served basis, based on the date the child was registered.

The Newton METCO Program primarily places students in kindergarten through grade two based on space availability, class sizes, and the total amount of Boston students already enrolled in that grade. The Director of the Newton METCO Program works with the Newton elementary principals and school administration to determine the number of seats available for Boston students in each of the elementary schools. METCO Parents and students go through a placement process, including parent interviews and attendance at mandatory workshops, orientations, and programs.