



# LINCOLN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MICHAEL F. BRANDMEYER  
SUPERINTENDENT

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April 6, 2011

To: School Committee  
From: Mickey Brandmeyer  
Re: Proposal for Staffing METCO for 2011-2012

## *Introduction*

The Lincoln School was a founding member of the METCO program and nearly half a century later continues to maintain the highest percentage of METCO students among any of the participating suburban school districts. Over the time that METCO has been part of the Lincoln School, the Town of Lincoln has had several broad-based conversations questioning and analyzing the value, cost and benefit of the program - both for the Lincoln resident students and the Boston students who attend the Lincoln School. Following each of these discussions the community has reaffirmed its commitment to the program. It is generally accepted that the school's participation in METCO program is one way in which the Town meets its stated value of "... fostering economic, racial/ethnic, and age diversity among its citizens through educational, housing and other public policies..."<sup>1</sup>. It is broadly believed that all Lincoln School students benefit from this integration program and develop deeper understandings of different cultures, beliefs, and customs. Students of the Lincoln School have built lasting friendships with the peers from both communities.

## *Grant Funding*

One factor that influenced the development of this plan is the continuing decline in the METCO grant funding received by the district to offset some of the cost to the operating budget. As you know from this year's budget discussions, we are anticipating an additional reduction to the FY12 METCO grant. While the Governor's initial budget proposal included level-funding for METCO, it has become commonly accepted that a reduction between 5% and 15% may be implemented. This projection is based on information presented by Jean McGuire, Executive Director of METCO Inc. and John Shandorff, Associate Executive Director of METCO Inc. at this winter's METCO Superintendents' meeting held in Wayland. The projected decline in funding was confirmed by Representative Tom Conroy when he attended the School Committee meeting last month. We do not expect to get final grant allocations until the State budget is passed.

## *Support for Students*

In keeping with our district goals, this year we have taken a closer look at the achievement gap between students of color and their white and Asian counterparts, and made efforts to identify and quantify the magnitude of such gaps (see report from the January 20, 2011 School Committee meeting). This is a critical first step in assessing

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<sup>1</sup> Town of Lincoln Vision Statement

whether our programs and interventions serve to help all students achieve at a high level and how best to narrow the achievement gap.

We learned that the achievement gap is relatively narrow in the early grades but that as students begin to move into the intermediate grades of 4, 5, and 6, the gap gets larger and is significant by the time students reach the middle school. It is important to note that when we talk about “students of color” we are including Lincoln and Boston resident students. As approximately two-thirds of our students of color are in the METCO program, the achievement gap study can serve as a proxy for an achievement gap for our METCO students. This is a significant finding and one which should cause the district to drive resources toward supports that will effectively assist students in improving their performance and narrowing performance gaps.

Recently an analysis of special education referrals, identifications, and the need for specialized instruction verified the prior trend of a significantly higher percentage of students from Boston being eligible for special education services. As of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 21 of the Lincoln School’s 84 special education students, or 25% were METCO students, compared to 12% of Lincoln resident students with disabilities. Overall, METCO students comprise 15% of the total school population. The district seeks to fulfill its commitment to this population of students – academic services and supports remain paramount to educational success for all students with disabilities.

### Community Outreach

The district’s staffing plan for the METCO program has remained relatively intact during the recent cuts to the grant. It has generally consisted of three full-time professional positions: a METCO Director, an academic advisor, and a social worker. Support positions have consisted of two bus monitors and a secretary (at various times either full or part time). The grant also partially pays for part of a special education teacher (about .6 FTE) and allocates \$20,000 toward instructional assistants. The grant does not pay for the benefits of these employees. The cost of basic transportation (2 runs each way) is also covered by the grant. In recent years the position of secretary has been eliminated, discretionary funds for program enhancements have been cut, and extra transportation for late buses has been eliminated.

Last spring, the Superintendents from Sudbury Public Schools and Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School joined me in proposing a multi-district reorganization of the METCO administration for our districts. Feedback about the process and the proposal was quite negative and ultimately I withdrew my proposal to the School Committee to approve participation in this collaboration. The School Committees from SPS and LSRHS ultimately approved the reorganization and the Superintendents of SPS and LSRHS implemented the plan.

This fall and winter, in order to solicit input and feedback about staffing and support for the METCO program, I met with parents and stakeholders of the program before developing a proposal. Several meetings were held this winter beginning with a representative group of Boston parents from the METCO Parents Association, Lincoln parents representing the METCO Coordinating Committee, Christina Horner, Lincoln’s METCO Director; and representatives from the School Committee, including the METCO representative to the Committee. The goal was to determine which supports

parents believed to be most important in supporting successful participation and achievement at the Lincoln School by our METCO students.

Many ideas were discussed. Parents and others expressed:

- ❑ the belief that the academic program is a highly valued opportunity for their children, and that the faculty and staff in Lincoln is of high quality;
- ❑ that it is important to support both academic and social/emotional growth for all of the students, therefore, both academic support and social supports are necessary;
- ❑ that it is important for our students to have faculty of color with whom they can form connections;
- ❑ the idea of “one school, one budget,” i.e. that the program is one of several funding sources in the budget that supports programs and that budget adjustments could come from both grant funded positions as well as the district’s operating budget;
- ❑ that there should be some consideration to eliminating the concept and designation of “METCO staff” and rather consider all of the staff “Lincoln staff” with the opportunity for any staff member to teach, counsel and support all children who attend the Lincoln School;
- ❑ that the district might consider hiring a “Diversity Coordinator” who has broader and different responsibilities than those of the current METCO Director.

### Staffing Proposal

Considering our commitment to supporting students in the context of the economic conditions pressuring the state budget and local appropriations, I am proposing for your discussion and consideration the following:

1. That Lincoln maintain its commitment to the students currently enrolled in the Lincoln School and seek to enroll students in lower grades up to the state’s allocation of 91 students for Lincoln. It is important to sustain the program with sufficient scope so as to provide sufficient critical mass, not to isolate individual students in small numbers or to have some classes with METCO students and others without. This will also allow the district to continue to receive the maximum grant funding that it is eligible for and will hopefully mitigate the impact of METCO students who leave the Lincoln School to attend exam schools after the 6<sup>th</sup> grade (a recently developing trend).
2. That we focus resources on the school’s core mission of teaching and learning and that we increase academic support for students from kindergarten to grade 8. The motivation for this adjustment is a commitment to narrowing achievement gaps and the belief that academic supports are needed to address individual student learning issues and the growing special education population associated with the METCO program at Lincoln School. Currently, the school does not have any specific academic support through METCO for students in lower grades. Given our belief that we have a greater chance for successful teaching and learning I am recommending that we allocate a half-time teacher as academic support for grades kindergarten to two. Additionally, I am recommending that we allocate the current 1.0 FTE for academic advisor to provide support for grades three to eight (this position typically supports middle school students).

3. That in order to free resources for more academic support while supporting coordination with Boston families and METCO Inc., we eliminate the position of a full-time METCO Director and establish a half-time position of METCO Coordinator. As part of advancing the one school, one budget, one program concept that has been discussed, the newly established METCO Coordinator will report to the Lincoln School Principals and the Administrator for Student Services. This will structurally place the METCO program in the Lincoln School, under the overarching leadership of the Principals who support learning and programming for all students who attend the Lincoln School. If this concept is approved we will develop more specific roles and responsibilities for Principals, the METCO Coordinator, and the Administrator for Student Services.
4. That we maintain the METCO Social Worker position but that we charge the Principals and Administrator for Student Services with organizing the social worker team (2.9 FTE that are part of the mental health team that is currently led by the Administrator for Student Services) in a format that eliminates the designation of the METCO social worker as primarily for METCO students and further establishes the one school, one program concept by addressing the needs of students through the allocation of all social worker services to any student requiring such supports.
5. That we maintain bus monitors and the transportation at its current level and that the district continue to use grant funds to support instructional assistants and a portion of a special education teacher.

At my February meeting with parents in Boston, I indicated that my highest priority was to provide sufficient academic support to assist all children in reaching their greatest academic potential. I am making the above proposals in order to direct more resources to academic support.

Approximately ten years ago, the district left the METCO Director's position vacant. It later evolved to part time and eventually full time. While not filling the leadership role and directing all resources to academic support could have been a potential option, I believe that it is clear that having a direct liaison between the Boston families and the school is highly valued by parents and helps support our administrative team. Given the needs of our students, feedback from Boston parents, the complex budget situation, and our school and district goal to narrow achievement gaps, I believe that this model is educationally sound, fiscally responsible, and allows the district to maintain its commitment to METCO and the number of students we enroll annually.

I am requesting that the School Committee review, discuss and consider this proposal. I will request a vote in an early May meeting. So that parents are aware that I am presenting this model, I will send it directly to all Boston parents via the district's automated email messaging system. I will also schedule a meeting with Boston parents, in Boston, prior to the School Committee's vote, in order to present changes from the existing school model.