Crossing District Boundaries

The Benefits and Challenges of the METCO Program

Beatrice Antoine

Emmanuel College

Department of Sociology

Advised by Dr. Catherine Simpson Bueker

Bachelor of Arts

2013-05
Abstract

This study examines the benefits and challenges for minority youth participating in the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program. A Boston-based program designed to serve the dual functions of providing urban children greater access to quality education in the suburbs and white children in the suburbs a more racially diverse educational experience. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with five graduates of the program and two administrators, I identify a series of benefits and challenges experienced by participants of the program. On the positive side, METCO appears to provide a more academically rigorous program and improve educational outcomes. On the negative side, METCO results in social disconnections from their residential communities, same-race peer friendships, and displacement of racial and ethnic identity. Future research on METCO must be conducted to further examine the intended and unintended effects of the program by participants. I identify inconsistencies within the program and make recommendations for the future.
Crossing District Boundaries

The Benefits and Challenges of the METCO Program

Introduction

This project examines the METCO program, a private nonprofit organization founded in 1966 that busses low-income minority students from Boston’s underperforming schools to high-performing suburban schools in an effort to increase their educational opportunities. The goal of this study is to address the research question: “what are the benefits and drawbacks of minority youth participating in the METCO program?” Built on Susan Eaton’s (2001) earlier study on METCO, I hypothesize that METCO increases social disconnection within residential communities, same-race peer friendships, academic rigor and educational attainment, and creates a sense of displacement of racial and ethnic identity. By conducting in-depth video interviews with five alumni and two administrators of the program, I was able to examine the strengths and weaknesses of METCO.

In an increasingly competitive global economy, the costs of not receiving a quality education have increased. For three decades, racial segregation in United States public schools has been a controversial national issue (Taeuber & James, 1982). Segregation in public schools produces the rift between the types of education both black and white students receive. Consequently, black students attend racially imbalanced, under-funded public schools, while white students attend majority all-white public schools that are aesthetically appealing and well-equipped with an excess of resources. As a result of this imbalance, Boston parents of black students began advocating for better quality education within Boston Public Schools (BPS). Due to their persistence and public demonstrations, black activists and parents were able to establish METCO as a policy response to the achievement gap propagated by segregated BPS.
The program allows resident students and staff of participating school districts the chance to experience the benefits of learning and working in racially and ethnically diverse environments. Organized as a short-term program, METCO serves as a stop-gap measure to help Boston’s most under-performing schools, but due to the program’s success and the continuing decline of BPS, the program remains in existence (Chanoux, 2011). Boston’s minority students continue to lag in educational achievement due to a de facto segregated school system and METCO serves as the policy response towards alleviating racially imbalanced segregated schools in Boston.

In spite of the program’s outstanding feat over the past thirty-four years, there is a lack of public awareness of the program. Though that is in due part to the lack of expansion of the program, there is dearth of qualitative research that empirically assesses the benefits and drawbacks of the program. METCO as a desegregation program is significant because it is a proactive response to the achievement gap produced in urban, under-performing BPS. Influencing the long-term educational accomplishment of minority students, desegregation programs, such as METCO, are the tools necessary to equalize educational opportunities for urban youth. This topic is extremely important because it adds to the ongoing sociological debate of whether education is the “great equalizer” or “social reproducer” within American society. It is believed that education tries to lessen inequalities in skills between advantaged and disadvantages students (Downey, von Hippel, & Broh, 2004). However, reproductionist theorists lead an opposing argument suggesting that “education and schools are agents of power and control in society. Within education these theorists argue that school tracking and ability grouping are used as mechanisms to ensure not only the social order of the classroom, but also the social hierarchy of society” (Free, 2008).
Theoretical Framework

Responsible for dramaturgical approach, Erving Goffman (1959) indicates how fragile society is and how individuals mask their fear with civility (Johnson Williams, 1986). Simon Johnson Williams (1986) assesses the contributions of the late Erving Goffman to the field of sociology. Goffman (1959) outlines the intricate art of impression management, presenting a rational interpretation of the social world. Goffman states:

I assume that when an individual appears to be before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation. This report is concerned with some of the common techniques that persons employ to sustain such impression and with the common contingencies associated with the employment of these techniques... (Goffman, 1959, p. 26).

Goffman introduces the idea of the role playing model of human behavior, front stage and back stage. Put more simply, Goffman is saying that every individual is an actor on a stage performing for an audience. The front stage is where the performance takes place, using a number of impression management tools to articulate particular images to the audience, and the backstage, he argues, is where the protected self-resides. Goffman believes that individuals build a strong barrier between the front and backstage, partially because the individual is defenseless in the backstage but also in order to reserve the validity of the front stage performance (Goffman, 1959). Dramaturgical theory applies to METCO in two ways: (1) how the METCO student performs in their residential and host community and (2) how the METCO district acts towards the public and METCO students.

Particularly, minority youth struggle with their racial and ethnic identity while in METCO. Students are bused from areas in which they represent the majority in terms of race but in their participating suburban school they are now of the minority. Due to the lack of cultural and racial diversity in their METCO districts, METCO students struggle with showing their true
sense of self. In areas such as Roxbury, Dorchester, Hyde Park, and Mattapan, METCO students are able to behave in a way that aligns with the urban culture in Boston. Youth are exposed to an urban lifestyle such as engaging in vernacular dialect, listening to the same genre of music, and wearing a style of dress that embodies the “code of the street” (Anderson, 1999). METCO students spend their days navigating between two worlds: urban versus suburban life. In this case, the front stage of METCO students is more on edge, constantly acknowledging they are of the minority and need to suppress their natural behavior; whereas their back stage is more of a relaxed identity, behavior aligning with the cultural and racial norm of the residential community.

One METCO district represented in this study appears to be a lip service within its hot community; lip service implies a look of promise that is not reinforced by real conviction. From the outside looking in, METCO districts appear to be an ally for METCO staff and students. In some cases, these schools fail to provide the necessary resources and support for METCO. Their front stage shows support and overall joy for the program however their back stage shows their oblivion to the acceptance of cultural and racial diversity and institutional integration.

American urban sociologist Robert E. Park develops a race relations cycle that outlines the cycle beginning with contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. These four stages within the cycle are the generalized law of human relations (Park, 1950). After the first stage of contact, competition soon follows. After some time, a hierarchical system arises and gets the better of inferior groups. Put more simply, one race becomes dominant and others dominated. In the end assimilation occurs. The race relations cycle begins to repeat itself in society, enforcing natural prejudices (Park, 1950). Park (1950) believes, “that heightened group identity, solidarity and cultural activities would benefit the collective mobility and political mobilization
of Afro-Americans” (p. 125). However, I argue that for METCO students it would be harmful to engage in heightened group identity being that it would stimulate an “us” versus “them” mentality between METCO and resident students which defeats the purpose of an integration policy model.

George Herbert Meade (1934) expresses who we are as a person is primarily fashioned by our participation in the social world and by our social interactions with those around us, through which particular values, norms, and expectations are, guided (Mead, 1934). As we mirror these expectations that others have of us, our sense of self is constructed. The individual assumes an organized set of attitudes of others (Mead, 1934) and thus identities are negotiated by social interactions of daily life and take as the fundamental idea that social reality is created and negotiated by people through the names and meanings they attach to things when communicating. This frame on identity allows me to better understand how METCO students develop conceptions of themselves racially as they participate in their suburban schools since it is assumed that METCO plays a part in the displacement of racial and ethnic identity of nonwhite METCO students.

**Literature Review**

“Education is the great equalizer...opening doors of opportunity for all. As a nation, we must be committed to providing education equity and resources all students need to succeed” (National Education Association, 2010, pg. 1). It can be debated whether education truly is the great equalizer for all in today's American society. Though the United States education system has progressed tremendously since periods such as *Murray v. Maryland* (1936), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) and *Milliken...*
v. Bradley (1974), the education system has not reached its utmost potential in efforts to equalize educational opportunities and experiences for all students.

The main challenge to education as being the "great equalizer" is school segregation. Legal cases, such as Brown v. Board of Education (1954), focused on legal school segregation in both the northern and southern United States. Traditionally, race relations in the United States were subjugated to racial segregation (Birzer & Ellis, 2006). While racial separation denoted "separate but equal treatment of White and Black Americans, the reality is that it perpetuated inferior accommodation, services, and treatment for Black Americans" (Birzer & Ellis, 2006, p. 793). At the conclusion of the case, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in public schools by ruling that separate educational facilities are naturally unequal and in violation to the Fourteenth Amendment (Birzer & Ellis, 2006).

Notably, the Fourteenth Amendment has had the greatest influence on the development of civil rights in the United States. Since the commission of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution on July 9, 1868, it grants citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States," which included former slaves recently freed. In addition, it forbids states from denying any person "life, liberty, or property, without due process of law" or to "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" (The Library of Congress, 2002, pg. 1). In a study by Michael L. Birzer and Richard Ellis (2006) the authors find that:

The Brown decision is merely one of a host of events that not only brought to light discriminatory practices in the United States but also allegedly ended these practices. We use the word allegedly in the sense that much evidence suggests discrimination continues to haunt a great many minority groups in contemporary American society (p. 794).

Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) addressed an issue plaguing black and white children across the country. Although segregation was the product of Jim Crow laws in the south, such
Segregation was negatively affecting the legal and societal progressions in the north (Chanoux, 2011). One of the primary means used to separate black and white Americans was public education. The separation of black and white students in public schools leads to black students having poor self-esteem and success in school and white students concentrated within all-white schools in order to maintain racial homogeneity (Chanoux, 2011). A way for liberals to tackle racial segregation within public schools was through busing.

According to Thomas W. Mahan (1968), busing was a system developed to increase the likelihood of equal educational opportunity for black or other minority youth (Mahan, 1968). For the purpose of this paper “busing” implies an intervention designed to increase the academic and social performance of minority students by moving them out of their residential communities to opportunity-rich all-white suburban schools. Busing was thought of as an inventive way to not only improve challenges for black students but additionally expose white students to racial diversity (Chanoux, 2011). While busing received a great deal of negative public attention, it attempts to end segregated education and put African American and white children in the same classrooms. Mahan indicates, “clearly, there is no magic in sitting next to a white child that suddenly transforms the non-white child into a better student. Rather, the assumptions have to do with styles of learning, reinforcement, level of expectations and modeling” (Mahan, 1968, p.292). Nonwhite students who attend urban, poor racially imbalanced schools are introduced to a style of learning that does not foster educational success and in part is due to the lack of resources (ex: support from teachers and guidance counselors) within the school. Due to the racial homogeneity of the urban school, the learning style becomes a trend and is reinforced by the general population. In contrast, when the nonwhite child is placed in a suburban school, the
child’s learning style is academically and socially challenged and he or she is introduced to entirely new circumstances and receptivity (Mahan, 1968).

Evidence suggests that United States schools continue to be segregated, largely because of continued residential segregation of blacks and whites (Rivkin, 1994). As defined by Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton (1988), residential segregation “is the degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another, in different parts of the urban environment” (p. 282). Residential segregation is a means used to keep minority members (people of color) concentrated in particular areas and underrepresented in others. Generally, minority concentrations can be found tightly compacted to form a large abutting territory or be dispersed extensively around the urban area (Massey & Denton, 1988). As middle-class whites abandoned central cities (white flight) for suburban neighborhoods, black Americans came in large numbers to replace those who had left their homes. Because of rural-urban migration from the south to the north, “the percentage of blacks living in central cities rose from forty-two percent in 1950 to fifty-eight percent in 1970 (United States Census Bureau, 1970, p. 97). As central cities became sequentially blacker and suburbs grew whiter, this in turn formulated familiar patterns such as a “chocolate city with vanilla suburbs” (Farley, et al., 1978, p. 320).

Residential segregation applies to school segregation being that school district assignments are based on the residential addresses of students. In cities such as Boston, urban students attend majority nonwhite public schools, while suburbanite children attend majority all-white public schools. The distribution of nonwhite and white students by district exemplifies residential segregation at its worst. As a result of this, residential segregation leads to school segregation, and black children in most major U.S. cities rarely will see or interact with white classmates (Rivkin, 1994).
The achievement gap is the difference in educational outcomes among students of different races, genders, and classes (Kober, 2001). It is important to note that minority children living in urban areas are more likely to live in low-income households in comparison to rural or suburbanite children (Koball, Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2005). In reference to METCO, students are bused from low-income racially concentrated environments to affluent suburbs. In these prosperous communities, students attend opportunity-rich schools that academically challenge students and improve their trained style of learning (Chanoux, 2001). Nancy Kober (2001) explains how African American and Hispanic students are less likely to be rigorously challenged in comparison to white or Asian students:

They have less access to experienced and well-qualified teachers. Teachers tend to expect less of Black and Hispanic children than of White and Asian children. Black and Hispanic children also attend schools with fewer resources and higher rates of disruption and student mobility. They have less access to learning activities at home and in the neighborhood (p. 11).

Educators, students, policymakers, parents, and communities all play a role in narrowing the gap (Kober, 2001). In her report, Kober points out, “closing the gap should be a shared responsibility among the public and private sectors and the federal, state, and local levels” (Kober, 2001, p. 13). METCO may help to close the gap as it allows students in high-minority schools greater access to factors linked with high achievement, such as rigorous courses, exceptional teachers, motivated peers, and engaged parents (Kober, 2001).

Christy Lleras (2008) conducts a study using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study to suggest the difference in the quality of education in U.S. urban and suburban public schools. Lleras’ (2008) results indicate that there are strong effects between placement, engagement, and performance over a period and across both school types. Yet, her results also show that racial segregation is harmful to the overall course of learning for students
between the eighth and tenth grade (Lleras, 2008). Lleras (2008) states, “White and African American students in predominantly Black, particularly urban schools are significantly disadvantaged at each point of the learning process compared to students in other school types” (p. 886). Since the turn of the twenty-first century, our society has become far more racially and ethnically diverse, but color lines continue to separate racial and ethnic groups within schools (Orfield & Yun, 1999). Commonly, segregation is associated with the separation of racial and ethnic groups, but socioeconomic status/class is a strong component for spreading segregation (Orfield & Yun, 1999). Gary Orfield and John T. Yun (1999) find that in recent year’s class appears to be the reason for continued segregation:

When African-American and Latino students are segregated into schools where the majority of students are non-white, they are very likely to find themselves in schools where poverty is concentrated. This is of course not the case with segregated white students, whose majority-white schools almost always enroll high proportions of students from the middle class. This is of crucial difference, because concentrated poverty is linked to lower educational achievement (p. 3).

Lleras (2008) summarizes viewpoints from Jacobson, et al. (2001) with regard to the difference in knowledge attained by black and white students. Every academic year, African American students consistently learn less in comparison to white students. Black students attend schools in which their academic schools are not up to par with the skills of white students. These students are then placed in lower level tracked classes that do not promote academic rigor, while white students generally occupy advanced level courses (Jacobson, et al., 2001). Lleras (2008) argues that in order to understand the causes for racial disparities in educational performance and achievement, it is important to not only focus on how “African American and white students differ with respect to the overall learning process but also how these students interact with and are shaped by the larger organizational context and social environment of the school” (p. 887).
Lleras’ (2008) study is unique in comparison to prior research that examine the main influence of school characteristics on student learning because she examines whether the impact of a student’s race on the course of learning varies by the characteristics of the school the student attends—more specifically, racial structure and school location.

It is important to note that there are two forms of segregation: de facto and de jure. De facto segregation is a form of segregation that exists but not as a result of legal actions or policies whereas de jure segregation is that imposed by laws. A plethora of influences have led to racial segregation within BPS, but it has been mainly due to the residential composition of both the city and the suburbs (Chanoux, 2011). Residential segregation plays a critical role in school segregation because of how our public education system is structured. Policies were applied in order to create divided neighborhoods by both race and ethnicity in the city, as well as the suburbs (Chanoux, 2011). As more and more African Americans moved into Boston areas such as Dorchester, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, Hyde Park and Mattapan, white Americans began to move out. In a report from the Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights (December, 1963), it was stated that:

Slightly less than 13 percent of the Commonwealth’s white population lived in the City of Boston and slightly more than 35 percent lived in the suburbs of Boston, whereas approximately 56 percent of the Commonwealth’s Negro population lived in the city but only 12 percent lived in the suburbs. These disproportionate distributions are aggravated by a neighborhood segregation of Negroes within Boston and its suburbs (p. 3).

The movement of white residents from the city to the suburbs indicates a white flight movement that occurred at great rates during the 1950s and early 60s.

Opposite from this, was the black boomerang, which entailed more or less the entire black population of Boston living in a “contiguous, geographically compact area, which has been
very aptly described by the Urban League of Boston as a curved area resembling a black boomerang” (Massachusetts Advisory Committee, 1963, p. 3).

In Boston, real estate brokers, developers, landlords and homeowners utilized tactics to keep blacks from entering into certain areas (Chanoux, 2011). With school districts determined by neighborhood and thus segregated both within the city and the suburbs, black students in Boston increasingly found themselves in segregated and underfunded schools. Nonwhite Boston children attended schools with poor funding, scarce supplies, and a lack of devoted teachers willing to work with struggling students. In addition, the lack of resources black students obtained prevented students from achieving post-secondary education (Chanoux, 2011).

In Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life, Annette Lareau (2003) reports on the in-depth observations and interviews she conducted with poor, working-class, and middle-class families. Her goal in doing this observational research was to understand how social class impacts children’s lives. Throughout the course of the book, Lareau (2003) highlights the children’s experiences both at home and in school, focusing on the influence of parenting on the child’s life and style of learning in school. Lareau (2003) develops a link concerning parents and the level of education their child will receive by stating:

One of the best predictors of whether a child will one day graduate from college is whether his or her parents are college graduates. Of course, relations of this sort are not absolute: perhaps two-thirds of the members of society ultimately reproduce their parent’s level of educational attainment, while about one-third take a different path. Still, there is no question that we live in a society characterized by considerable gaps in resources or, put differently, by substantial inequality (p. 8).

Middle-class parents across racial differences enthusiastically participate in a “concerted cultivation” of their children, which produces a vigorous sense of entitlement and cultural advantages in institutional settings such as the school (Lareau, 2003). On the other hand,
working-class parents engage in “natural growth,” which results in children who, while having a great deal of autonomy in their leisure time, feel unentitled and insecure in institutional surroundings. These children then develop a sense of limitation in relation to school and the social world (Lareau, 2003). Ultimately, the difference in class approach and beliefs result in “the transmission of differential advantages to children” (Lareau, 2003, p. 5), middle-class practices create dominant cultural capital capable of being exploited into social profits, while working class families do not.

*Unequal Childhoods* is able to partly explain class inequalities in the United States and further analyzes the processes through which inequality is reproduced. Lareau’s findings are relevant to this study in that many METCO students are from working-class and poor families who have less access to the upbringing and resources needed to produce “concerted cultivation” (Lareau, 2003). METCO is one means of aid for students who not only come from disadvantaged schools and homogenous communities but disadvantaged households.

Similar to the fundamental makeup of the METCO program, magnet schools are components of school desegregation efforts in the United States. Magnet schools are free public elementary and secondary public schools of choice that are directed by school districts or a monopoly of districts. Magnet schools have a focused theme and aligned curriculum. The benefits of magnet schools are that they, “generally attract a wide-range of students based on their interest within the school theme. As a result, magnet schools are typically diverse with students from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds” (Magnet Schools of America, 2012). Robert Bifulco, Casey D. Cobb and Courtney Bell (2009), indicate from their research that interdistrict magnet schools provide students from Connecticut’s central urban cities access
to less racially and economically isolated educational settings and measure the impact of attending a magnet school on student achievement.

After a 1996 ruling by the Connecticut Supreme Court that stated that due to, “racial, ethnic, and economic isolation, Hartford Public School students had been denied equal educational opportunity under the state constitution” (Bifulco, et al., 2009, p. 326). The state reacted by utilizing various programs meant to give urban students the opportunity to attend schools with students from suburban districts. From their research of Connecticut’s interdistrict magnet school program, the authors were able to conclude that this program is an appealing model for decreasing racial and economic segregation and bettering educational outcomes for low-income minority students in urban schools (Bifulco, Cobb, & Bell, 2009). The only fault to institutions, such as magnet schools, is that they provide only options for a limited population of urban minority students. Magnet schools provide less racially imbalanced and higher-achieving environments than what most urban students would experience, but they cannot accommodate everyone (Bifulco, Cobb, & Bell, 2009).

Public schools in Boston are and have historically been racially imbalanced, indicating that school districts have a population of at least fifty percent nonwhite students (Chanoux, 2011). Because of this, Massachusetts legislature passed The Racial Imbalance Act of 1965, which ordered school districts to desegregate or risk losing state education funding. In Boston, METCO was a busing program that “worked to give both black urban students and white suburban students’ integrated educational experiences” (Chanoux, 2011, p. 1). METCO is the only program of its kind constructed to resolve the long-established racial and economic isolation of the Commonwealth’s public school system (Eaton & Chirichigno, 2011). Due to the inadequacies of BPS, METCO served as the “get out of jail pass” from a faulty education
system, becoming an escape from Boston and a means to attaining a better education and better socioeconomic future (Chanoux, 2011).

The choice-based program was founded in the spring of 1966 by concerned parents and black activists with the intent to send their children from Roxbury and Dorchester to opportunity-rich suburban schools, while simultaneously enhancing racial diversity within suburban school systems outside the city of Boston. In the program’s first year, METCO bused two hundred and twenty students to open seated public schools in seven suburban locations (Chanoux, 2011).

For thirty-four years METCO has bused African American students from the inner-cities of Boston to established, affluent suburban schools. METCO is meant to provide students who live in areas such as Boston access to enjoy “reputations for academic excellence and rigor” (Eaton & Chirichigno, 2011), all the while fostering a caliber of racial and ethnic heterogeneity in racially homogenized suburbs. Students participating in this program are doing so by choice. Parents are the ones responsible for enrolling their children into the program, mainly because they are aware that public schools in their residential communities fail to educate their children in comparison to white upper-class students in areas such as Newton, Lexington, Wellesley and Lincoln.

Throughout the 1970s the program began to pick up momentum and expanded to busing more than one thousand students, and annually has thousands of students on the waiting list (Chanoux, 2011). In the program’s early development, the purpose of METCO was questioned. The absolute aim of the program was to create integrated school environments but in the program’s first few years, few of the participants and their parents considered that to be an important factor as to why they chose to participate. The insufficient amount of METCO students added to the “question of whether the program truly intended to correct the societal
problem of suburban school segregation or whether it was more focused on improving the educational experiences of a small number of urban students” (Chanoux, 2011, p. 2). METCO was able to provide improved educational experiences to a limited population of Boston students, but METCO did not commit to alleviating the issues in the city’s schools (Chanoux, 2011). Increasing integration in Boston is different from expanding METCO, up until now it is unclear what the true goal of METCO is, whether it is to (1) increase integration within BPS or (2) increase integration outside of the city in suburban schools.

In the early days of METCO, David Armor (1972) conducted research on the development of school integration programs throughout the United States. Armor (1972) hypothesized “that school integration enhances black achievement, aspirations, self-esteem, race relations, and opportunities for higher education” (p. 90). Armor reviewed five reports on integration programs in Northern U.S. cities: (1) Project MECTO, Boston, Massachusetts; (2) White Plains, New York; (3) Ann Arbor, Michigan; (4) Riverside, California; and (5) Project Concern Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut (Armor, 1972). Armor’s findings were grouped under five main themes—“the effects of busing and integration on (1) academic achievement; (2) aspirations; (3) self-concept; (4) race relations; and (5) educational opportunities” (Armor, 1972, p. 90). In terms of achievement, Armor’s research was not able to convincingly conclude that integration has had an effect on academic achievement as measured by standardized tests. Although this finding is surprising, at the time this study was conducted there had not been any published work on any form of education which proved to be an influence on academic achievement; school integrations was of no exception (Armor, 1972). Significantly, Armor’s data indicates the justification as to why black students’ participate in METCO, Armor states that “the justification of the program in the black community has little to do with the contact-prejudice
components of the policy model; instead, busing is seen in the context of enlarging educational opportunities for the black students” (Armor, 1972, p. 107). Armor (1972) speaks to the idea that a community must decide what their intended goal is, versus implement integration programs that are not really of an importance to the black community:

"Many liberal educators have not been so intent on selling integration to reluctant white communities that they risk the danger of ignoring the opinion of the black community. While many black leaders favor school integration, there are also black persons who would much prefer an upgrading of schools in their own community (p. 115)."

Armor’s findings suggest that the real need for black students in terms of educational attainment are better performing BPS versus school integration models/programs that bus students out of their residential communities.

Susan Eaton’s book, *The Other Boston Busing Story: What’s Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line* (2001), focuses less on the academic outcomes of METCO, yet explores issues such as METCO graduates recollections of their experiences in the program and the meanings they associated with them. Graduates reflect on the longer term effect of their experiences and their present evaluation of the benefits and hardships of their participation in METCO (Eaton, 2001). Using in-depth interviews with a sample of sixty-five African American METCO graduates, Eaton makes use of these accounts as a way to inform outsiders of the program to understand how graduates “think various aspects of their METCO experience, including the tracking policies of the schools they attended and the nature of the relationships they developed with suburban families who provided a home away from home for METCO students, influenced them” (Ward Schofield, 2001, p. 384). From Eaton’s (2001) research, various findings were uncovered but the finding that sets itself apart from the rest was that students began to value the program once they were able to:
Perceive that their actions at least were heightened by their stark, daily crossings over to the white world and back to the black world. The adults speculate that this straddling forced them to deal with issues and conflicts that they would not have had to confront had they stayed in Boston for their schooling. And past participants often express ambivalence, wondering whether they missed out on something important by not attending predominantly black schools (p. 20).

After their completion of METCO, past participants reconnected with their neighborhoods and to black history and culture since they felt displaced from it while in METCO. Graduates purposefully sought out predominantly black social groups and organizations with the hope that these groups and organizations would reestablish an identity and connection that METCO had dismantled (Eaton, 2001).

Joshua D. Angrist and Kevin Lang (2004) attempt to study whether school integration generates peer effects using evidence from the METCO program, instead of solely focusing on the social consequences of the program between METCO and resident students. Peer effects imply the level of influence METCO students have on the academic outcome of their peers (resident students). Because METCO students account for nearly all black and Hispanic students within host communities; this suggests that METCO provides a useful test for the study of the impact of desegregation on students in host communities. Using combined school-level data from the statewide Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) testing program, data indicates that METCO receiving-districts “tend to be higher scoring while METCO participation pulls down the overall average score in schools within districts” (Angrist & Lang, 2004, p. 1614). However, there is no impact of METCO participation on the scores of white students in receiving districts. The visibility of lower-performing students in suburban public schools may, however affect resident students if peer performance and/or racial structure matter to overall student learning (Angrist & Lang, 2004).
Methods and Data Collection

This project was reviewed and approved by Emmanuel College’s Committee for the Protection of Human Participants in Research (CPHPR) in order to ensure the protection of participants. Individuals were informed of the goals of the study and were provided with a statement of informed consent, making research participants aware of all the potential risks and costs involved in the research study.

Once the CPHPR approved the research design, participants were recruited through a variety of channels such as emails, phone calls, and informal conversations. Seven participants in the Boston area were offered to participate in this study. Of the seven that chose to participate in this study, five were METCO graduates and the remaining two were METCO administrators. The reader should note that administrators interviewed for this research were former METCO students as well. However, they are purposefully interviewed for the reason that they are current administrators. Over the course of three months, a total of forty-four participants were invited to participate and only the seven responded. Using a convenience sample of three METCO graduates, I contacted three students who I knew through Emmanuel College. Leading into a snowball sample, at the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked to share names of potential research participants; referrals would be contacted via email and direct phone calls. With regard to administrators, I retrieved their contact information from METCO’s direct website which is made accessible to the public. Those who have participated were screened to meet the following criteria: (1) eighteen years or older; (2) graduate/alumni of the METCO program or (3) administrator of the METCO program. Sample included 29.0% males and 71.0% females, 57.0% self-identified African Americans, and 43.0% self-identified Hispanic/Latino.
I collected data via semi-structured, in-depth interviews which were video recorded. Two sets of open-ended interview questions were developed because questions needed to be tailored specifically for METCO graduates versus administrators. Particular open-ended questions for graduates included: “How did you get involved with the METCO program?” “What was your experience while in METCO?” “What were the positives and negatives of your experience?” “Did your race ever play a role throughout your school experience?” Administrators were asked the following: “How long have you been working for the program?” “How do the parents of METCO students play a role in their child’s education experience?” “What would you say is the most challenging aspect of the METCO program for both METCO and non-METCO students?”

For an outline of the interview guides used for this study, refer to Appendices A and B.

Interviews were conducted in various locations; all graduate interviews took place at Emmanuel College and administrator interviews took place at off-site locations in their METCO school receiving-district. At the beginning of each interview, the participant and I would review the informed consent form to ensure all questions answered and study objectives clarified. Interviews were scheduled for an hour but did not stop if the interview went beyond the hour. Some interviews were completed within the hour, but the majority of interviews exceeded that time frame. After the completion of interviews, recordings were transformed into interview summaries. As there was a great amount of data collected, it was unrealistic to transcribe each interview. After identifying reoccurring themes, I re-categorized the existing data to determine whether themes and patterns and relationships existed in the data already collected. Thematic coding and analysis is a descriptive strategy that simplifies the search for patterns within the data set (Alhojailan, 2012).
Findings

Educational Opportunities

The duration of each interview with graduates revealed the pronounced effect that METCO had in terms of educational opportunities. All graduates express how METCO has given them the opportunity to improve their education, yet, it is the school they attend that provides them that privilege. Due to the structure of specific METCO district schools, some graduates received significant academic support (tutoring services, academic clubs, etc.) while other METCO students were not offered the same experience due to a lack of individual program services.

In my interview with John, I asked him: “if you attended a public school within your community, how would the experience differ from your experience within METCO?” John provides a summary of the benefits his particular school provided in comparison to the education he would have received had he attended a school in Roxbury:

Ummmm. I don’t know, I’m only going to speak because like I was going to say ummm going to the Carea School like even looking at that now if I went there, I don’t think I would be academically challenged cause I feel that’s why they asked me to do it (participate in METCO). Cause in kindergarten I could like read like pretty well I guess for my age and then I remember they’ll like read for blah blah and they were like “alright.” Next thing you know I was at Langston. But I feel like there I probably wouldn’t be academically challenged and like I don’t know, I’ve never been in a public school (meaning a public school in Roxbury). So you always hear stories but like you don’t know if that’s really reality, you know?

As he answered, it looked as if John realized for the first time how lucky he was to be in METCO, because it brought him to an institution that provided him a better education. He discussed how his teachers and mentors in Carea would motivate him and encourage him to do

1 Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect participant confidentiality (Pseudonyms include names, school districts, and any potential identifier)
well academically. This level and amount of support steers John from becoming academically complacent choosing to take remedial tracked courses. Similar to John’s academic experience, Jesus was pleased with the education he received from Addison Public Schools:

Academically, I have no complaints, a few complaints. I went to school at Trumble University so when I went to my first writing seminar ‘I was like, is this it?’ Not saying Addison is a very elitist school but I thought they prepared me very well. There were kids from other parts of the country ummm were like ‘uhh this is so...’and I was ‘WHAT, I did this in Mr. James’ class, like I did this junior year. Of course it was still challenging, but it wasn't overwhelming like I thought college would be.

For Jesus, he is stunned that his college classmates find the coursework difficult, as he has already been exposed to this type of academically challenging material. During his interview he would find it amusing that students in many of his classes would not be able to comprehend lectures or have the ability to handle coursework. Addison Public Schools were able to academically prepare Jesus for educational success; while enrolled at Addison High he only took honors and accelerated courses. By Jesus’ freshman year at Trumble University, a large university in Boston he was already prepared for the level of academic rigor expected of him in comparison to his classmates. Improved education is the most valued aspect of METCO for graduates. Additionally, data shows that Parental Involvement and the No Excuses Model are subthemes under the larger theme of Educational Opportunities.

Parental involvement is a subtheme under the larger category of Educational Opportunities. Data shows that parental involvement is the primary vehicle for raising academic achievement. All of the graduates were enrolled in METCO at an early age, majority of them in the kindergarten level. I asked Tatiana how she got involved in the METCO program. She replied:

My mom actually signed all of us (siblings) up in the METCO program when like a couple of weeks after we were born. So, because the METCO waiting list is so long uhh my mom decided that she would sign
up all of her kids after they had been born so that kind of after five years or six years whenever age we get accepted into the program umm hopefully they would have a spot.

For many of the graduates interviewed, if it were not for their parents, they would have never been aware of or enrolled in the program. This evidently speaks to the level of knowledge their parents have and how proactive parents are in terms of their children’s education. More so parents place their children in METCO due to its inherent academic benefit which leads me to believe that parents see the educational decline in BPS.

In this paper, I define the “no excuses model” as a strategic tool used by METCO administrators and affiliated personnel to actively engage METCO students in higher learning. Students follow a highly structured, rigorous instructional environment and a clear and regular discipline and behavior code. The “no excuses model,” though helpful to METCO students in terms of academic and personal development, exemplifies the connection created between METCO staff and students. From my observation of the suburban schools I visited, it was apparent that METCO students felt comfortable with their directors; there was a sense of comfort in a parent-child relationship. Students look to these adults as parental figures, admiring them for their compassion, yet respecting them for their discipline and high expectations. Once students build this relationship with METCO staff, they are more inclined to behave and push for academic success because not only do they not want to disappoint their parents at home, they do not want to fail their METCO “parents.”

Parallel to Susan’s Eaton’s findings in *The Other Boston Busing Story: What’s Won and Lost across the Boundary Line* (2001), graduates are able to understand the value METCO with regard to the academic benefits the program provides. Previously mentioned in the introduction section of this paper, a portion of my hypothesis states that METCO increases academic rigor
and educational attainment (Eaton & Chirichigno, 2011). The data indicates that METCO places students in opportunity-rich schools that value a variety of opportunities for students to excel academically and shape balanced students who are able to actively engage inside and outside of the classroom.

**Racial Sensibility**

The racial sensibility concept describes when a METCO student becomes cognizant of their race within a dominant racial setting. The METCO student realizes that they are outsiders within the homogenous community. This concept relates to a fraction of my hypothesis that METCO strips minority students of their racial and ethnic identity, displacing students from their culture. This displacement then enforces students to seek out same-race friendships in order to reestablish their identity (Eaton, 2001). Findings do not definitively confirm whether METCO does this, but it was in their host communities students became aware of the racial group they belonged to. Jesus elaborates on his racial understanding that developed while in METCO:

> I am very proud of the fact that I was not only a minority in Addison but I was a minority on the METCO bus as well, a minority within a minority. Umm and I’m also not naive or maybe I’m naive or maybe cynical in thinking that my skin color has a lot to do with the fact that I had a better time than most METCO students you know? Ummm thinking about it most of the kids, most of the METCO students, that had a better time in Addison, most not all most, were lighter skin or were a lighter skinned African American METCO students, umm and that’s something that I think gets overlooked. You know leading into the negatives about it within the METCO community there’s always the sense of ‘you talk white or you’re whitewashed’ or ummm ... So you get that from the METCO side but when you’re talking to the Addison kids ‘you’re so ghetto, you’re so black, you’re so hood.’

It appeared irrelevant whether students personally identified with a racial group; they were categorized as such due to their physical characteristics. METCO students were perceived as the “other” and were left with finding their footing in their suburban school. The scramble for racial identity across the board began in high school. Graduates expressed how it was not until high
school when racial lines were drawn and students began building networks based on these color lines. Skin-Color Prejudice, Token Minority, and Racial Objectification are three subthemes that fall under the larger theme of racial sensibility. These subthemes highlight the constant racial awareness METCO students wrestle with daily in the program.

Skin color is a tremendous factor for all the students in the program, especially for black and Hispanic or Latino students. In terms of racial identification, African American students have it easy in comparison to Hispanic or Latino students. Two of the three Latino students (67.0%) did not see themselves fitting into the standard racial black/African American category mainly because (1) they were not raised that way in terms of cultural upbringing and (2) they did not view themselves as individuals that would be categorized as black. The data suggest that METCO students that identified as Hispanic or Latino straddled not only between two worlds but two identities. Resident white students viewed them as dark enough to be a part of the black kids, but for African American students they saw them as being too light skinned for someone to be considered black. Again, these color lines are clearly marked while in high school for many of these students versus earlier grades. Even beyond physical characteristics, space was also categorized by color. Christina during her interview talks about the racial segregation in high school perpetuated by METCO and resident students:

There's a lot of segregation in the METCO program especially when you get into the high school. Cause in middle school it was all about everybody all together. You go into high school it became the: us versus them idea of... that's where you started getting the idea of the METCO and resident students. You didn't hear METCO and resident students in middle schools, you would hear we're all from Hutton Public, you know what I mean? Everybody was friends with everybody. The mentality of having umm you know the resident and METCO students didn't start till high school. And that was a little ummm it didn't surprise me but it in my opinion it came from the residents students because I remember wanting to still be friends freshman year with those certain white students because there were white students you know that I mean? And I didn't feel the
same connection, feeling like almost like ‘what are you doing, we’re not supposed to be friends anymore’ idea.

When Christina spoke of the segregated lines she encountered while in Hutton High, it was evident that lines were drawn not only by how you looked but by territory. Christina was able to tell me about a rug that was mainly dominated by METCO upperclassmen students she said, “the color rug was for METCO students, residents students never hung out by the rug because they knew they didn’t belong.” Even when those particular students who had enforced the secret racial code of the rug graduated, resident white students still did not make the effort to socialize with students of color. The social disconnect between METCO students and white resident students could be due to a variety of factors beyond race but within this context, there is a gap found between these groups of students. Both groups appeared to struggle with stepping out of their comfort zones and build cross-race networks.

White teachers of American history courses who lack in cultural competency and sensitivity sometimes generalize all black students for having a responsibility of explaining African American history to their peers. In doing this, teachers are reinforcing the idea of a monolithic black identity, ignoring black sub-cultures, such as African and Caribbean descents. One major component of a school culture is its teachers. Relations with teachers are the primary interaction for students in the school environment. If schools are representative of the culture of power, then teachers also reflect the culture of power, unless they actively try not to. If minority students see white teachers as their primary contact in a prejudiced institution, they are more likely to avoid interacting with them. Asking a student of color to speak on historical context pertaining to the history of their racial group then objectifies the student and makes them what is referred to as the “token minority.” The token minority refers to a student, generally a minority student that is included within a larger, more dominant racial group. Tatiana gives an overview
of a moment in history class when her history teacher made a spectacle of her race and further
drove Tatiana to feeling singled out within the classroom:

She (history teacher) would always go on tangents and then like ask
about the black perspective but she would always ask me because I was
the one of the only black kids. Cause there was me and another girl and
she was really quiet, so it was just me.

This represents an extreme hardship for minority students in the program because in all aspects
of the classroom, that particular student is alone. In many cases, he or she will be one or one of
two students of color in the classroom. She is asked to be a teacher of black history, as well as a
student, adding to her stress. The infamous black perspective is an experience many students of
color experience while being taught by unskilled white teachers but for METCO students this
experience only negatively distorts the perception minority students have of whites.

Graduates expressed their encounters of racism and discrimination while in METCO. I
was able to conclude that many of the resident white students and teachers are not inherently
racist due the high level of racial isolation in suburbanite communities; residents are likely to
have developed racial prejudices due to their lack of encounters with minority groups (Chanoux,
2011). An example of the blatant obliviousness of Tatiana’s teacher exemplifies the minimal
interaction with students of color and lack of cultural competency training:

One time I remember in my ummm history class and we were talking
about the uhhh differences between CVS in urban communities versus in
like suburban communities and the products that they sell based on
where they are so they can make profit. And my teacher was like ‘uhh
yeah when I go to buy band aids umm I can buy whatever band aid I
want because they match my skin tone but if Tatiana wants to buy band
aids, what is she going to do because they don’t match her skin tone.’

Repeatedly mentioned, graduates express their feeling of being racially objectified while in
METCO. Because of this objectification, they felt alienated from their host community, proving
to be an obstacle to overcome. It is clear that METCO does not properly prepare school-
receiving districts on cultural competency building the skill set needed to interact and participation in conversation with individuals of diverse backgrounds.

The Cycle of Segregation

As I interviewed Mrs. Sonya Washington the METCO director of Columbia Public Schools, she mentioned how METCO is a desegregation program no longer a busing program. But ironically, it reconstructs segregation. The fact that METCO students are bused far distances places them at various disadvantages in comparison to their resident peers but even more so it restraints students socially, which perpetuates social alienation among METCO students. Social alienation in this paper refers to the estrangement of a METCO student from residents’ students with regard to social capacities (i.e. parties, trips, culture and etc.). I asked Jesus “What was your experience while in METCO? What were the positives and negatives of your experience?” When speaking of the negatives or in his words what “sucked” was that he could not attend social gatherings that some of his peers would over the weekend:

Like ummm what really really did suck was umm hanging out like, coming from back the weekend on a Monday morning, and sitting in homeroom and people being like ‘oh were like you at Josh’s party last night? Oh on Friday!’ And I was like ‘no I wasn’t, I wasn’t.’ ‘Ah you know whatever happened,’ ‘Why didn’t you guys tell me?’ And they were like ‘oh it happened last minute!’ And of course being a METCO student... and I tell my brother still till this day, you know cause my younger siblings were very lucky. Myself, Susanna and Alexa all drove, so my younger siblings were very lucky and fortunate because we drove and could pick them whenever because we were out with other people in Addison or cause we’d been there. But when the three of us wanted to go somewhere, last minute didn’t happen. I had to figure out a ride, I had to let my parents know I was going to stay like two days in advance. I had to find a ride to wherever I was going and to find a ride back so last minute didn’t really exist for me, you know. I had to plan this stuff, and it was really really bad.
Jesus was not alone in terms of feeling socially displaced from fellow peers; other students mentioned how it would be a disadvantage to be home for an entire weekend, while your friends from school would hang out together and get to interact in a more relaxed environment outside of school. Though METCO is not fully responsible for this, this does show one of the ways in which busing is a major setback from students in terms of developing adolescence.

Biculturalism signifies the daily transfer between urban and suburban communities and their cultures. METCO is of a unique experience for urban students in the sense that students are “waking up early each morning to be bused into a suburb where students were the racial minority created an unusual educational experience for METCO students. They lived in two communities, one primarily white where they attended school and one primarily black where they returned each evening” (Chanoux, 2011, p. 37). I believe the most striking and overwhelming is the culture students are exposed to, “one in the suburbs around white people and one back in Boston, divided culturally as well as racially” (Chanoux, 2011, p. 41). I asked John “Did you ever feel disconnected from your community? Explain.” He was able to introduce me into the dual life he survived as a teenager, living in Roxbury he chose to fit in by dressing “bummy,” never wanting to stand out because a group of boys jumped him, physically attacking him for his iPod. While going to school in Carea he was more diligent in how he dressed and groomed. John was more reassured that he would not be physically assaulted while in Carea:

I really never dressed nice over there (Roxbury). You know I’d be like this (points to his sweatpants and fleece) and occasionally I would dress nice as I got older. But I was like damm I’m not tryna to rock nothing nice, I’m tryna look bummy when I have to walk (laughing) so no one tries to think I have anything, you know I didn’t really have much but I really liked music so I got an iPod. Ummm I mean I was never like real real flashy but yeah definitely nicer. Uhh if I was going to be in Carea the whole day. Like if I really wanted to wear a nice outfit, I know I can wear it there. If I really wanted to wear a nice outfit around like just chillin in Roxbury) I’d have to be around certain people probably but
even sometimes that doesn’t matter. I mean it’s just like way more uncomfortable there.

The constant shift between an urban a suburban community can weigh a great deal on the personal development of a METCO student. While not all Boston urban areas are characterized by crime and violence, the community John grew up had high levels of it. The stress of balancing two cultures is a challenge experienced by METCO students, challenges that those in their host community did not understand.

Aside from race graduates rarely spoke of the influence of culture while in the program. I noticed that many of the experiences the graduates endured stemmed from race yet never once did I hear about cultural influence and its importance. It was not until my interview with Alexa, (Jesus younger sister) when I learned that METCO did not do a good job at promoting cultural diversity at her receiving school:

I don’t think so, that’s the point of the program is to not only umm help people from Boston to get an education but to also integrate suburban towns but I don’t think they did a good job because even in general I didn’t know where certain people were from in the program. Like I could see someone and say ‘oh they’re black!’ But I didn’t know that person was Haitian or from I don’t the Congo or just a different area. I never knew that and I feel like they never showed that to other people. And I don’t think they did it well because we had our own table, the black table that’s what people called it.

Alexa was the second graduate that mentioned having a METCO lunch table in the cafeteria. The METCO lunch table is assumed to be a place where METCO students come together and unwind because expectedly they are going through a lot of adversity throughout the school day so the table serves as their outlet. In reality, the table is causing harm to students rather it being a benefit. The lunch table promotes a concentration of nonwhite METCO students similar to the makeups of Boston cities and schools and it hinders students from interacting with their peers.
Instead of METCO encouraging students to disband and expand their networks, the program in fact is keeping METCO segregated from the host community.

The Time Crunch

The most important finding in this study is the burden of busing. Busing is a severe drawback for METCO students, placing great restraints on their time and placing them at great disadvantages in comparison to resident students. Students are waking up as early as 5 AM and are waiting for the bus in the dark to drive them to schools as far as forty-five minutes to an hour away. Depending on the time school starts, METCO students are awake at least an hour earlier than resident students. At the end of school, METCO students return to their residential communities on the same long commute, if not longer due to afternoon traffic and commit to after-school jobs, babysitting of younger siblings, homework and etc. By the time they go bed, the routine begins all over again. I ask Christina to give me an overview of a typical day in high school and she says:

In high school, I would get up at 5 (morning) be ready by 5:30; get on the bus around 6. Get to schools around 7 if I was lucky, ummm the latest 7:20ish. Go to breakfast because we did have a breakfast block. Then go start class at 7:50, 8:00. Ummm after that have classes all day, classes ended at the most random time: 2:36. I don’t know, I didn’t understand it but I remember it cause it was such an odd and weird time. Get on the busses at 3:10 (afternoon), make my way back home. Get home round...cause I was one of the last bus stops so around 4:30ish. Go immediately to work cause work started at 4 so I always had an excuse cause I was all the way in Hutton, Massachusetts at this time. And then go to work and get out of work around 8 (evening), go home and do homework. Finished it around 10, 10:30, then go to sleep and wake up at 5 (morning). And this was a Monday through Friday process but I did it. Mind you, I can’t get up at 8 now.

Christina mentions this daily routine as being “robotic” and as alarming this experience was for her, this is the reality of thousands of METCO students daily Monday through Friday. Each
moment is critically calculated while in METCO. Jesus said it best when he mentions that “last minute didn’t really exist for me, you know. I had to plan this stuff.”

A Different METCO

Through this study, I have found that there is reoccurring METCO vs. METCO feel, according to some of the graduates. The rift between the students and administrators of the program corresponds with the segregation that METCO unintentionally perpetuates. Graduates explained this rift as two-fold: (1) increased racial tensions within the program led many students to physically attack one another and form racial cliques and (2) some graduates voiced that there were times that they felt as if METCO staff were against them as opposed to being an ally or resource. Jesus elaborates on the sometimes community aspect of METCO but yet shares on the growing disconnect between METCO students, he states:

But the good thing is the METCO community (pauses and changes thought) it’s weird it’s tight when it has to be tight but it’s also very divided, like let me know if I’m talking too much. Back tracking sixth grade, we were leaving and uhh one of the METCO kids got beat up by three white guys. It was for like something very stupid, it was sixth grade, you know? So he comes back on the bus and he’s like bleeding and like all beat up, we’re like ‘oh hell no’ so we get off the bus and started fighting them you know what I mean? Umm and that to mean it sucks we were violent but we were together. A week later people within the METCO program were beating each other up, fighting. There were a lot of fights between METCO students.

This finding is not only unexpected but is of tremendous concern, given the challenges that all METCO students already face. Students who share similar burdens while in the program physically harm one another due to racial tensions in the program itself. On the flip side, a sense of METCO togetherness or collective consciousness develops when an outsider (resident white students) are threats to a METCO student. When the METCO student is beaten up by the three white students, METCO bands together as a militant task force retaliating in support of one
another, however, METCO students themselves attack one another displaying their disapproval for each other due to the color lines imposed. Primarily, METCO conflict would arise on the METCO bus according to some graduates; it is when students are on the bus tensions rise. Somehow METCO students had to learn how to defend themselves when becoming the targets of racial jokes or public humiliation, the METCO bus provides a cultural alternative to students because it endorses an urban culture that students are raised in, but displaced from due to METCO’s busing to the suburbs.

I find it compelling that all self-identified Hispanic/Latinos speak of the constant fighting in METCO. In saying this, this goes back to the racial issues and boundaries that many Hispanic/Latino students go up against while in METCO. This is not to say that black METCO students do not fight one another but the evidence highlights Jesus’ earlier statement that he was a “minority within a minority.” Evidently, skin-color prejudices increased racial tensions between African American and Hispanic/Latino students; it would be worthy to continue future research to understand the difference in experience between METCO African American and Hispanic/Latino students, if any.

Additionally, some METCO students while in the program argued that their directors were incompetent and failed at being a support system for them. While some graduates experienced exceptional directors who acted as parental figures, other graduates did not experience such support. In particular, some graduates felt as if their directors and/or coordinators were more so placed in the school for show by METCO. METCO students incur daily hardships while in school and when they feel violated by anyone or anything in their host communities they look to METCO professionals to be their protectors. After interviewing administrators, I learned how strenuous of a job it is to be responsible for nearly one hundred and
twenty to two hundred students ranging from kindergarten through the twelfth grade and then be expected build rapport with students. METCO directors are working within two systems, they adhere to both METCO Inc. and their school-receiving district following and cooperating to two distinct institutions. Especially, with the lack of METCO staff in these suburbs due to budget cuts, administrators are unable to establish relationships with students being that they are in constant motion, moving school to school.

Discussion

Repeatedly, I have heard from graduates that different METCO experiences are based on the autonomy of the student. While that can be true, METCO plays a pivotal role in the academic and professional development of its students. Noticeably, academics is a strong component of this program, the program strives to provide participants with exceptional and improved educational experiences. All the graduates interviewed for this research are living proof of the educational success METCO provides, with the reason being that John, Christina, Alexa, and Tatiana are enrolled in well-known private four-year colleges in the Boston area and Jesus a recent graduate of Trumble University. Apparently, METCO academically challenges students and promotes a route to higher education (Eaton & Chirichigno, 2011). The program’s academic focus is a tremendous benefit to participants. Altogether, graduates agree that their METCO districts were able to foster a style of learning. From their responses I understand that host districts are responsible for the academic success and growth of interviewed graduates. Indeed, METCO is responsible for bringing students to these schools but METCO is not in the classroom teaching students.

The present study predicted that METCO increases social disconnection within residential communities. Data is unable to convincingly conclude whether graduates experience a
social disconnection with friends and family members in their residential community (Eaton, 2001). Conversations with graduates lead me to understand that each student comes from a tight-knit family and community that are built on kinship which then reinforces community and family ties. It would be a setback to have friends in their residential communities and not be able to socialize as much as they had liked, but these friendships, mainly same-race friendships are very close knit. Many times, these friends are seen as family members establishing extended kin-networks so it was rare for graduates to experience a social disconnection and/or alienation from their residential community. Graduates frequently express their social disconnection from host communities which is a challenge for students throughout their METCO experience. Graduates spent most of their time in their suburban communities, so to be away from that environment for an entire weekend while they were home in Boston would be discouraging for graduates because they would then feel displaced from the community and the outside culture.

With the exception of males, graduates explain how it was difficult in making friends with white resident students. They indicate that racial and skin-color prejudices are a driving cause for the prevention of these friendships. Graduates share that as children growing up in kindergarten through the eighth grade they were able to easily adjust into their host communities mainly because of the host families program. Implementing host families was one of the ways in which METCO administrators expected to bring about a receiving environment in the suburbs (Chanoux, 2011). METCO staff would pair a METCO student with a suburban family who had a child of the same age and preferably in the same class at school. Host families provided support for METCO students and were available at all times during the day (Chanoux, 2011). The host family program demonstrates METCO’s determination to establishing relationships amid METCO students and families in the suburbs. In addition, METCO staff encouraged host parents
to fully embrace and learn about the culture of their METCO student by allowing the child to stay overnight and attend family functions. Host parents were encouraged to visit the homes of their METCO student and experience the culture and community in the urban cities of Boston. Mrs. Washington when she encouraged suburban parents of Columbia to commute on buses to the communities in which METCO students resided. The purpose of the commute was to allow suburbanite parents not only to simply understand that a commute to and from an urban and suburban community can be time-consuming and challenging but can be psychologically exhausting.

It is clear from the study that host families are an added success to the program, clearly being a benefit for Jesus. He mentioned that he is still in contact with his host family and regularly visits them. What is interesting about the host family program is that it is not a service provided in all METCO districts, it is dependent on the school district and allotted funds by METCO Parent Associations. Jesus mentioned that when he last visited his alma mater at Addison High, he learned that the host family program was no longer running due to the severity of budget cuts. Above all, host families provide security for METCO students allowing them to belong to a community where they spend the majority of their day. Removal of host families from METCO districts further impedes a METCO student from acclimating on a social level to their host community.

Alumni expressed the importance of friendship while in METCO; friendships evidently create deep connections between peers that allow students to feel comfortable and secure with themselves. Jesus is the only graduate to have participated in the host families program which explains why it was easier for him to adjust into the culture and environment of Addison. Though close to many METCO nonwhite students, most of his friends were white which I
believe is due to his early contact and interaction with white residents from the host families program. The remaining four graduates primarily associated with friends of the same race because according to Alexa it was “easier to be around people that were just like you.” METCO nonwhite students look to same-race friendships as tools asserting their self-identity because when METCO students are bused to the suburbs they are drawn away from their racial and cultural norms so in order to cope within the new environment, same-race friends fill that void.

Though data was not collected on students in BPS, findings suggest that graduates are aware of the differences in education, specifically between urban and suburban schools. For many of their peers who attend BPS, graduates realize the style of learning achieved in some BPS is unacceptable and urban public schools are hindering the academic and social growth of its students. Graduates are able to make this assumption closely following family members who chose to attend BPS rather participate in METCO. Also, in comparison to the intellect graduates would attain at certain grade levels would exceed that of their peers which implied that their friends in their residential communities were not exposed to a high standard of academic rigor. Although there are certainly high quality public schools within Boston, the schools which my interviewees would have attended are to be of lower quality.

The racial sensibility concept predicted that METCO strips minority students of their racial and ethnic identity, displacing students from their culture. Racial and ethnic displacement enforces students to seek out same-race friendships in order to reestablish their identity (Eaton, 2001). Again, the racial sensibility concept, also denoted as the reinvented color line implies the moment in which a METCO student becomes cognizant of their race within a dominant racial setting. Findings were not able to confirm whether METCO plays a role in this suggested displacement. METCO does not deliberately avoid the embrace and acceptance of the culture of
its students, but the program fails to acknowledge it and share it with the host community. Alexa corroborates this finding being that the METCO program in Addison continued to segregate METCO students from the resident population. The cafeteria symbolized segregation within METCO because METCO students had a separate lunch table that was perceived as the “black table” which characterizes this cycle of resegregation.

The most important finding is the time crunch. Busing is a tremendous drawback for youth in the program because it constantly shifts students between two worlds with the expectation that the student is going to academically and socially thrive. As stated earlier, busing places great disadvantages on METCO students in comparison to resident students. Time is calculated and the pressure of times strips a sense of control from students. Busing affects arriving to school on time, after-school jobs, tending to younger siblings, socializing, homework, and sleep. Busing harmfully controls the METCO experience, holding students hostage from residential neighborhoods, schools, friends, and culture.

Program Recommendations

Based on my findings, I recommend that METCO (1) increase professional development and training; (2) hire more teachers and staff of color; (3) actively seek federal funding; (4) increase public awareness; and (5) promote the racial and cultural diversity of METCO students. These recommendations are based on the impression that they will allow METCO as a program to rebuild and maintain longevity.

Increase Professional Development and Training: Graduates and administrators report instances of stereotyping and cultural insensitivities in the host school and that is mainly due to the lack of development and training with regard to cultural competency for professional faculty and staff. METCO school districts would benefit if faculty and staff increased their access to professional development and training. Promoting development training within the school
community will permit faculty and staff to play an active role in affirming that METCO students are supported because skilled educators can lighten the challenges students wrestle with daily. I believe in order to be an effective integration policy model, there needs to be open dialogue in the community that focuses on racial, socioeconomic, and cultural issues.

**Hire More Teachers and Staff of Color**: METCO districts need to hire more staff of color. The importance of hiring staff of color allows students to see teachers who look like them, who can empathize with their life stories. A diverse teaching staff can provide students a level of security and comfort but more so their presence within an educational institution accurately reflects societal demographics. The diversity of not only the student body but professional staff adds richness to teaching and learning within the school environment.

**Actively Seek Federal Funding**: I suggest that METCO Board of Directors and supporters plead federal officials to provide more active support for voluntary desegregation programs. The sought funding for METCO will allow the program to maintain many of its individual services that are provided in METCO districts such as tutoring services, field trips, host families program, and academic and social events. The depletion of these services prevents a student from fully undertaking taking the intended experience; increased funds will only allow METCO to remain consistent in all participating suburban towns.

**Increase Public Awareness**: Both administrators interviewed strongly believe that there is a lack of awareness of the METCO program. For those who are aware of the choice-based program, METCO is assumed to be a busing program, but administrators want to refrain from that association. METCO as a desegregation program shows to be a viable solution for closing the achievement gap. Though the achievement gap has narrowed considerably between black and white students, there is still evidence that shows that the academic achievement of minority
students is harmfully affected by higher concentrations of minority students in their schools. Desegregation programs of METCO’s caliber need to be further publicized in order to gain public awareness and boost program longevity.

**Promote Racial and Cultural Diversity:** Graduates criticized METCO for not promoting the racial and cultural diversity of its students within the host school. Integration does not stop at the transfer of students from urban communities to the suburbs. Integration continues with efforts such as open dialogue and public displays of the culture METCO students bring to the community. Segregating METCO students in METCO offices, lunch tables, and classrooms prevents students from acclimating into the community and continues a cycle of resegregation. I suggest that METCO administration form METCO advisory committees as the direct liaisons between METCO and the participating suburb. Preferably this committee would be made of third-party educators and policymakers that attend to the needs of METCO staff and students.

On a more focused level within the school, primarily starting at the middle school level, multicultural clubs/organizations should be established. Multicultural clubs/organizations are significant to the host community because they foster a cultural exchange between students and promote an increased understanding of cultural groups, representing the voice of minority students in majority all-white institutions.

**Limitations**

The reader is cautioned that the findings reported in this paper are qualitative, not quantitative in nature. This study is designed to explore how participants feel in regards to their experience while in METCO whether as a graduate or administrator of the program. Therefore, the findings cannot serve as a basis for statistical generalizations, but should instead be viewed as a working hypothesis, subject to quantitative validation in future research.
Graduates constitute a small convenience and snowball sample of relevant METCO graduates and therefore are not statistically representative of the thousands of students that have participated in METCO. Also, there is a lack of representation of METCO districts in this study; two siblings attended Addison Public Schools and two friends attended Carea Public Schools, with one student attending Hutton Public Schools. It is obvious that my research cannot speak to the experiences of METCO students in all thirty-eight METCO districts. Moreover, the racial composition of interviewees is not representative in a study of this nature; leaving me to suggest that future qualitative research needs to be conducted using not only a large sample of graduates but a diverse group with regard to race and ethnicity.

Lastly, this project intended to interview five METCO administrators in hopes to assess the program from an administrative standpoint. Numerous administrators failed to respond to phone calls and emails and others strongly voiced their objection to my research. Over time, I began to realize that administrators began to blackball my research, shutting out the project from potential participation. The opposition from administrators leads me to believe that administrators acknowledge the challenges of METCO but would rather keep them hidden.

**Conclusion**

Ironically, METCO resegregates the schools in which it intends to desegregate. The occurrence of resegregation in METCO districts can be reversed; however, it will take organizational will and consistent effort from METCO administration, receiving-school districts, parents, and students. METCO is an instrumental condition with the potential to produce higher-quality schooling, and improved race relations in outside suburban communities. Interviews with graduates and administrators lead me to believe that the purpose of METCO solely focuses on quality education and that racial integration is not of high importance to participants and the families that enroll them. This further explains why METCO cannot be considered to be a fully
integrated policy model. Findings add to the question of whether improved educational opportunities are worth the racial and cultural burden experienced by participants in METCO. Subconsciously, METCO represents a system that hints at the idea that quality education is provided in a white classroom with the presence of white students. This way of thinking sustains the idea that underperforming BPS will never be capable to adequately educate. Even so, graduates’ overall attitude of the program leads me to believe that the real issues at hand are the inadequacies of underperforming BPS and the tools needed to improve them.
References


Appendix A

Interview Research Questions: METCO Graduates

1. How did you get involved with the METCO program?
2. At what grade level did you enter into the METCO program?
3. How long was the commute from your hometown to your METCO School?
4. At your particular school, how many students were in the METCO program?
5. What was your experience while in METCO? What were the positives and negatives of your experience?
6. Did your race ever play a role throughout your school experience?
7. In terms of the curriculum, were you challenged academically? Explain.

For questions 8-10, students will be asked questions pertaining to history of either race or ethnic backgrounds. If the participant answers yes to question 8, they will be asked to answer question 9 as a follow-up. If the participant answers no to question 8, they will be asked to answer question 10.

8. In your classes, were you ever taught about history pertaining to either your race or ethnic background?
9. Did learning about either the history of your race or ethnic background help improve your self-esteem while participating in METCO?
10. If you were given the opportunity to learn about the history of your race or ethnic background, would that have helped you improve your self-esteem while participating in METCO?
11. If you attended a public school within your community, how would the experience differ from your experience within METCO?
12. Did you ever feel disconnected from your fellow classmates? Explain.
13. Did you ever feel disconnected from your community? Explain.
14. From your participation, do you think you were better prepared for educational success than your friends from home? Explain.
15. Did you receive more information in regards to higher education?
16. If you were to improve one aspect of METCO, what would it be? Explain.
Appendix B

Interview Research Questions: METCO Administration

1. How did you get involved with the METCO program?

2. How long have you been working for the program?

3. How do the parents of METCO students play a role in their child’s education experience?

4. Why would a parent choose to have their child attend a charter school rather than participate in METCO? What are the advantages and disadvantages of both?

5. In your opinion, why would a parent not want their child to participate in the METCO program?

6. How receptive has your school district’s community been to the METCO program and its students?

7. How have you seen METCO students adjust into the program and their host community?

8. How does METCO and its affiliated school help students adjust into the program and their host community?

9. From your experience, how have non-METCO students interacted with METCO students?

10. What would you say is the most challenging aspect of the METCO program for both METCO and non-METCO students?

11. What would you say is the most challenging aspect for you as an administrator of METCO?

12. In your opinion, does METCO effectively provide students with more opportunities post-secondary education (academics and social capacities)? Explain.

13. Would you define METCO as a “two-way street” benefitting all children (white and nonwhite students)? Explain.

14. From your experience, generally what are the first impressions of METCO children into their new environments?

15. In today’s society, why would a town choose not to participate in the program?

16. Is their training provided for teachers and staff in terms of cultural competency?

17. If you were to improve one aspect of METCO, what would it be and why?