

To: Natick School Committee

From: Rasheedah Clayton, Natick METCO Director and Influence 100 Superintendent Intern

Date: 1/23/23

Re: METCO program expansion

I. **Our Enrollment Request** – How many students we currently have and where we want to be?

Natick Public School currently has 50 students enrolled grades 5-12. We are seeking to enroll an elementary cohort of 16-20 students to be phased in over time, K-4, pending school committee approval at the 1/23/23 meeting and grade availability at the time of request. For the coming year we are proposing approximately 6 students to be brought as a first phase into the elementary school. We have to apply now to METCO for expansion funding and need your vote of support to do it.

II. **Our Rationale** – Why as a district is it important to increase our enrollment?

Since 1968 Natick Public Schools has partnered as a middle and high school program. The district recognizes the importance of educating the whole child K-12. We have the opportunity to add diversity of thought and experiences in the classroom at the elementary level, a critical developmental stage of childhood. As a district, we engaged in a series of community meetings for feedback and questions about the current METCO experience from those impacted by it or in charge of supporting it. Based on these conversations and yearly reflections, coupled with the district's strategic plan goal to eliminate barriers to equitable access to experiences and resources in our district, we believe this is the right time to expand to the elementary level and align Natick Public Schools with our partner communities.

III. **Our Plan to Support Increased Enrollment** – What grade levels we intend to add students?

As of 1/13/23 we estimate space availability in grades 1 and 3 at the Bennett Hemenway elementary school, who is experiencing a decline in enrollment..

IV. **Improvement and Supports Currently Being Implemented** - Things we are currently doing to ensure that we are a good METCO district that supports our Boston resident students to ensure that all students in our district are learning and benefiting from METCO?

Expanding Staff- FY 2022, we added 1.0 METCO High School Coordinator through grant funding and repurposing/savings with the METCO budget once added funds were gained from the legislature. FY 23 we are proposing a 1.0 METCO Elementary/Middle School Advisor by reducing the monies spent on guidance counselors at NHS (adding those

positions instead to the operating budget as they serve all students in NHS and not just METCO students).

Diversifying Staff- Historically, the METCO program has attracted staff of color to the district. However, the district has made a strategic commitment to diversifying the staff. Natick Public Schools has begun active engagement with METCO alumni to recruit for positions within the district. We have successfully recruited and employed 7 alumni in various positions ranging from central office to building based. We look forward to continued success in recruiting pathways for our alumni and recruitment of staff of diverse backgrounds.

Programming/Curricula- Equity, Voice and Empowerment are important lenses we value and uphold in Natick Public Schools. We have forums and spaces in which parents, students and faculty are able to create, innovate and amplify programming or curricula to meet the needs of families, students and staff of color. At the district level, we engage in professional development, job-a-likes and information sharing with area schools to evaluate and progress in our professional practices, policies and systems to understand bias and barriers. Adding our elementary colleagues to this program allows us to unify in our mission, program and vision around equity, voice and empowerment. Finally, beginning METCO students at the critical elementary years allows us to give the full scope of Natick offerings to all of our students. So, too, in offering foundational elementary experiences to students, we also ensure that their families, like Natick families, begin to know each other and make friendships that can last the lifetime of schooling--whereas in the current program, families have to try to find connection in the Natick community starting at middle school at the earliest--a time that is already hard for students socially, and not a time when parents are most able to connect and bond with other parents.