**Racial Imbalance Advisory Council Meeting**

**Monday, February 5, 2024**

9:30-11:00am

Online Remote Participation (Zoom)

**Council Members in Attendance:** Matt Brunell, J.D.; Raul Fernandez, Ed.D.; Lateefah Franck, M.Ed.; Renée Heywood, Ph.D.; Laurie Hunter, M.Ed., Ed.D.; Julia Jarquin; Cleonie Mainvielle, MSW; Marieme Ngom; Monica Roberts; Jessica S. Samuel, Ph.D.; Darlene Spencer

**Council Members not in Attendance:** Lamikco T. Magee, M.Ed., J.D., Ph.D.

**Welcome & Agenda Overview**

* December meeting minutes were approved with no abstentions.
* New DESE staff, Ilana Bebchick, M.Ed., Contracted Specialist, & Karen Johnson, J.D., Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, were introduced and shared their insights on the DEI work taking place at DESE.

**Overview & Discussion: Recently Released Reports: Findings on the Impacts of the METCO Program from Dr. Elizabeth Setren & Massachusetts Education-to-Career Research and Data Hub (E2C) data story**

* An overview of positive outcomes and ongoing issues from the report were identified. As a related update, METCO, Inc. continues to lobby for DESE funding so that districts can ensure their needs are being met. They are currently running a $500k grant for districts to focus on their identified areas of need. DESE continues to work in partnership with METCO, Inc. as well as the directors and district leaders on programming.
* The Calculus Project, which includes summer coursework, has been successful with addressing the lack of students in higher level courses. That said, the size and resources of METCO districts vary, meaning that not all students can engage with The Calculus Project.
* There is a concerted effort to align programming for all METCO districts with the METCO Directors’ Association and METCO, Inc. so there is a more holistic student experience. METCO directors, board members, and the CEO have discussed the report findings and how to move forward with identified areas. The size of districts, METCO cohorts, and funding all influence these action steps.
* Currently, communication with families about tracking and advanced courses vary by district. Communication regarding advanced courses is typically done by each district, not from METCO HQ. It will be important to know what role METCO HQ has in gathering families together to inform them of the tracking process prior to student enrolling in high school.
* DESE to follow up with METCO if there is information on how placement decisions are made, since METCO students continue to track in lower performing groups. It may be that prerequisite courses for APs may not be available in Boston, so students have to retake prerequisites when they enroll into a METCO district and systemic biases may be at play. DESE is working on holding districts accountable and will be visiting METCO districts this spring to hear from METCO students and staff. There is no DESE data available for the difference in the trajectory of students enrolled in various courses depending on when they enroll in the METCO program. DESE has spoken with METCO, Inc. about whether students are getting higher level tutoring within their schools. More can be done to ensure success for METCO students in their districts.
* What are the limits of responsibility of the METCO program vs. higher education? How are METCO students doing in AP courses? On exams? Especially if AP teachers have limited capacity to provide support.
* It is also unclear why METCO is being level funded, which is essentially a budget cut when inflation is accounted for. METCO was consistently funded fairly well prior to FY24 and received annual increases starting in 2018. DESE is looking at districts who are not filling seats and transferring those spaces to other districts since funding is based on student enrollment and we several districts have been asking to increase their enrollment.

**DESE Data Request Update**

* By the upcoming meeting, the council will have a complete overview of items that have been requested of DESE’s data team which will be a part of the council’s annual recommendations that is presented to the Board in June. The following items were noted:
	+ In 2023, 18% of staff hired were staff of color which reflects an increase.
	+ The gap between students and staff of color is getting larger due to an increase in students of color.
	+ Teacher diversity benefits students of color and white students.
	+ Targeted programs are helping to promote teacher diversity.
	+ Demographic information from the report and recommendations were discussed.
	+ Staff of color do not tend to stay in a district if the environment is not welcoming.
* The following questions were raised:
	+ Are teacher certification programs including cultural responsiveness with their curriculum?
	+ Veteran teachers need training around cultural proficiency and recognizing bias. Can coursework be required as part of the teacher contract?
* Discussions took place around the “New Mainstream” and how districts and unions can join together on culturally and linguistically responsive work.
* DESE is looking to expand emergency licensure and alternative tests to MTEL as MTEL centers are being expanded across the state to support aspiring teachers. DESE is also looking at how to create affinity spaces for BIPOC staff across the Commonwealth and what else can be done to create more allies in school communities. Additionally, the Department is currently working in partnership with Harvard University, Boston College, and SEED around building a teacher apprenticeship program.

**Closing & Next Steps**

* Next meeting: Monday, March 4th from 9:30-11:00am via Zoom.
	+ DESE data will be discussed.
	+ Some teachers from New Bedford will be attending for public comment.
* Announcements/Updates
	+ The council liaison will extend the council’s invite for the Commissioner to attend a future RIAC meeting.
	+ DESE shared updates on hiring for the Teacher Apprenticeship and Accelerated and Advanced Learning manager positions. RIAC members may potentially be a part of the interview teams.
	+ RIAC members are invited to attend the first annual BIPOC and Ally Leadership Conference on May 17th in Marlborough. This will be an opportunity to coalesce BIPOC leaders and allies from around the state. The event is free of cost.
* No members of the public were present, so no public comment was provided.