

Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – July 6, 2016

Date: July 6, 2016
Time: 3 p.m. – 5 p.m.
Location: MSDE, 8th Floor, Conference Room #2

Board Members:

Present: Matt Gallagher, Linda Eberhart, Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, Beth Sandbower Harbinson, Dr. A. Skipp Sanders, Elizabeth A. Green (via teleconference)

Absent: Michael McLeese

MSDE Staff Present: Monica Kearns, Jim Clark, Debbie Lichter, Amanda Conn, Donna Gunning, James Klarman, Kenya DeCosta

Attorney General's Staff Present: Alan Dunklow, Esquire

Proceedings:

- Meeting called to order at 3:13 pm by Chair, Matt Gallagher

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Speaker: Matt Gallagher

1st call for testimony – none

Review of award criteria, comments, questions, concerns from Board

The Board initiated a discussion of the eight issues they identified at the June 30, 2016 meeting that they wanted to consider in developing the award criteria. They are:

1. Awarding to multiple applicants in the same household.
2. Giving preference to currently enrolled non-public school students v. non-enrolled students.
3. Whether or not a parental contribution can/should be required.
4. Whether other financial aid can/should be considered.
5. Whether or not there should be tiers/differentiated levels of support based on income/need.
6. How/whether to address geographic distribution.
7. How/whether to address distribution based on religious affiliation of selected schools.
8. Continuity of the program (e.g., implications if the whole \$4.85M is awarded to students that will be re-applying next year).

A discussion ensued about the continuity of the program issue. MSDE staff advised Board members that early in the administrative stages of the BOOST Program, there was discussion among MSDE staff, Attorney General's Office counsel, and legislative staff about the need to address questions from the applicants about continuance of scholarships for students who

receive them in the 2016-2017 school year. The following is the conclusion that was reached at that point, and it is included in the “BOOST Question and Answer” document:

If the program is renewed, and to the extent that funding is appropriated, MSDE will administer the program so that students who receive scholarships will continue to receive the scholarships for the years they remain income eligible and enrolled in an eligible school.

Mr. Gallagher asked a series of questions about the rationale for the conclusion. Ms. Kearns responded that MSDE needed to be able to inform applicant households of the intent of the program to assist families in making a decision whether to apply. Mr. Gallagher asked for clarification from the Attorney General’s Office on continuity. He asked MSDE and the Board to think about how allocations might be structured in future years if the program is continued.

Criteria Discussion

Mr. Gallagher asked if there were other eligibility criteria to add to the list. He suggested that eligible students in low performing schools be added. The Board members made no further suggestions at that time.

The Board engaged in a free-ranging discussion of the various criteria. Mr. Gallagher discussed the need for prioritization of elements. Ms. Eberhart asked whether the legislation was clear about the requirements for eligibility, particularly eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. She recommended focusing on item #5 giving students receiving free lunch a higher percentage of scholarship funding. Dr. Grasmick was concerned with geographic distribution. In her view, it would be inappropriate not to consider children from all parts of the State. Ms. Harbinson agreed and asked how the Board would be equitable and fair and meet legislative intent?

The discussion continued on the topic of students currently attending non-public schools and receiving assistance. Mr. Gallagher asked about seeking an assurance from recipients or schools that award doesn’t exceed students’ need. Ms. Eberhart responded that if there is money coming to students from a variety of sources already, what are they going to do with BOOST money? Mr. Gallagher recommended that MSDE send letters to the award families that xxx amount is being given to meet unmet need and require unused funds be returned for other students. Ms. Green agreed with the affirmation request. She suggested that the BOOST Board could go back and ask legislature to add language making this mandatory. Ms. Harbinson noted that families to whom her organization gives scholarships usually contribute \$3,000. Mr. Gallagher commented that the average need of the Goldsecker Foundation scholarship families is \$5,500.

The discussion then turned to giving priority for public school students, especially those in low performing schools, - - which is a priority for Dr. Grasmick, Ms. Eberhart, and Mr. Gallagher. Dr. Grasmick commented also that the Board should not award only to students currently in non-public schools.

There was discussion about giving priority to high school students or students transitioning to middle and to high school.

The discussion returned to parental contribution. Ms. Harbinson stated that family contribution from low income parents is model for her program. It has been successful. Dr. Sanders commented that the contribution does not have to be monetary. It could be work hours. Mr. Gallagher noted that looking at other states, the average award is \$3,500. If the Board divided the program award amount by number of applicants, it could possibly offer most families a scholarship. Ms. Green stated if the award depends on the cost of tuition it makes it more complicated. Mr. Gallagher expressed a preference for a tiered award structure with free, reduced, and a maximum level for each. He asked staff to look at median income needs and what the impact will be on families.

This colloquy ensued:

Mr. Gallagher: Do we have the ability to manipulate the data further?

Staff: Yes, MSDE has the ability to look at and sort all self-reported data.

Ms. Eberhart: Is MSDE validating submitted information?

Staff: Yes, MSDE is checking the information submitted.

Staff: MSDE must, by law, provide a ranked list based on income levels to the Board.

Mr. Gallagher: Would that be accomplishing the same thing as using the free and reduced-price meal data? There needs to be a distinction between family income.

Staff: Rank is based on percentage of poverty levels.

Ms. Eberhart: How is a family of one determined?

Staff: A foster child would be considered a family of one. Including this household size on the application should be reevaluated.

Ms. Harbinson: Out of approximately 3,000 applicants how many will meet criteria.

Staff: 20 percent or so will not qualify.

The discussion moved on to geographic distribution, the need to include students in out-lying counties and religious affiliation of the schools. Ms. Green asked whether the Board could consider religious affiliation in determining the awards. Mr. Dunklow advised that that would not be appropriate.

The Board asked staff for additional data on multiple student families; household income; and number of applicants by county.

A preliminary discussion of award amounts began. Ms. Harbinson suggested \$1,800 per applicant. Ms. Eberhart prefers a tiered approach based on eligibility for free or reduced price meals. Ms. Eberhart reiterated that data on the financial need of the family is needed.

Information on other states' programs had been provided to Board members by MSDE staff. Mr. Gallagher asked Board members if they had any questions about the information that was provided. There were no questions.

Ms. Eberhart then asked about the assessment requirements for eligible schools. Mr. Dunklow advised that MSDE's Principal Counsel was drafting legal advice for the State Superintendent in response to a letter from MABE, ACLU, and MSEA about the assessment criteria.

Mr. Gallagher recapped the Board discussion and asked again for public comment. There was none.

Recap

The recap was:

- Criteria - add data and information about applicants in same household.
- Table on page 1, add percentages.
- On page 2, add column for free income levels.
- Itemize applications by household size, by free and reduced priced meal eligibility.
- Add horizontal lines to table.
- Spend time discussing award amounts and tiered approach tomorrow.
- Table showing all eligible applicants by income level broken out by free and reduced with a shaded in area so people can visualize what was done.
- Need to sensibly encapsulate all data.
- Need to keep a running issue log of things to keep under consideration to report back to General Assembly.
- Distribution of textbook money by schools and by jurisdiction.
- Ms. Eberhart wants free/reduced breakout table for tomorrow's meeting.

Next meeting date: July 7th, 2016.

The meeting adjourned at 4:48 p.m.