

Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – July 7, 2016

Date: July 7, 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: Elizabeth Kameen, Esquire, Alan Dunklow, Esquire

Proceedings:

- Meeting called to order at 3:14 pm by Chair, Matt Gallagher

Agenda Discussion Items:

Board discussion of potential award criteria and an update on MSDE data compilation.

1st call for testimony – none

The meeting began with a discussion of some of the e-mails MSDE has received from potential applicants seeking assistance with application fees and making personal pleas. They were shared with the Board. Mr. Gallagher urged staff to be as helpful as possible to all applicants in completing the application process.

Ms. Eberhart turned the discussion to the assessment issue, providing the Board copies of SB740 and information about what other states require in terms of assessments. Ms. Eberhart advocated for application of public school assessment requirements to non-public schools accepting BOOST scholars, urging the importance of accountability. Ms. Green disagreed that the assessments should be those that public schools give. Mr. Gallagher noted that the issue is flagged for a future meeting pending legal advice.

The Board then reviewed the new data table asking a series of questions and requesting additional data. Mr. Gallagher commented that the data is representative of what the final pool will look like. He would like to create a framework while data is coming together and being scrubbed. Once the data set is established, the Board could take the framework and apply it, making adjustments as the Board considers the free and reduced categories and other criteria.

The Board then discussed the how to assess “neediness”- could a reduced meal family be more “needy” than a free price meal family? Ms. Eberhart suggested that, if the student came from an underperforming public school, he/she might be more “needy.” Ms. Green questioned whether there was legislative intent to prefer awards to public school students.

Ms. Eberhart discussed the lack of opportunities for students to get a decent education. She stated that Delegate Macintosh wanted opportunities for public school students to attend private school. Ms. Green asked how could the Board decide whether someone is more deserving than the other? In regard to non-public schools, the attendance is growing because the schools are now more accessible and low income families in non-public schools struggle also.

Dr. Grasmick asked what if all applicants are attending Catholic schools and no other types of religious schools? Mr. Gallagher responded that that was unlikely, but we would have to pick up representation from everyone in the applicant pool. Ms. Kameen cautioned the Board about using religion as a determinative factor.

Mr. Gallagher stated that determinations need to be based on free and reduced categories. At some point, the math reality will set in. We will have about 1800 students in the free category and will need to cascade down the other criteria.

The discussion turned to the number of members in a household. Ms. Harbinson stated that her organization provides scholarships to all student members of a household. One reason is to keep the students together in one school because low income parents often have transportation difficulties. Mr. Gallagher discussed the need for data to assist the Board with guidance because he foresees an argument with offering full funding to multi-children households. Dr. Grasmick believes a priority grade determination could offer a solution. Ms. Eberhart suggested that the Board consider having a variety of options for different criteria.

Preliminary discussion about award amounts

Mr. Gallagher asked: What is the tuition threshold? Staff responded based on 2013-14 data, the threshold is \$14,744. Mr. Gallagher asked the Board, if there was a general agreement for a tiered structure, what would be a meaningful number to provide assistance to the eligible pool given that \$3,500 is the average award from other states?

The discussion moved to the Board's thoughts on the parental contribution issue. Mr. Gallagher asked whether the Board should require an affirmation for acceptance of scholarship checks which states that scholarship is for unmet need. He asked: Do we have any mechanism to ensure/guarantee family contribution? Ms. Kameen responded that MSDE cannot police that. The school can make an assurance that family has contributed a certain amount and that the scholarship addresses unmet need.

Dr. Grasmick asked whether the requirement of a parental contribution has been an inhibitor in other scholarship programs. Ms. Harbinson responded no, but it puts a hardship on the family to fill the gap. She suggested lowering amount if focusing on the free category and because it is so late in the game. Mr. Gallagher noted that most of the applicant families are already enrolled in private schools so they are probably already making monthly payments to meet family contributions, but what happens if the family doesn't make payment...do we rescind the scholarship? Dr. Sanders agreed that parental contribution is beneficial to ensure that the money is effective. He also agreed that there should be some type of guarantee.

Dr. Grasmick and Dr. Sanders suggested leaving it to the school to determine/validate how parents can contribute and consider making nonrefundable application fee part of the contribution. Mr. Gallagher agreed that “skin in the game” was important. He asked that the eligible schools be required to affirm that the BOOST award did not exceed family need.

In considering awards, Mr. Gallagher asked the Board whether high school v. K-8 should be a tier? Whether the free category should be a tier? Whether there is value in targeting certain grades?

For the next meeting, the Board will review household data; discuss assessment legal advice, and hone in on the application count.

Next meeting dates:

Monday, July 11, 2016

Wednesday, July 13, 2016

The meeting adjourned at 4:47 pm.