

**Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST)
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – July 21, 2016**

Date: July 21, 2016
Time: 1 pm – 3 pm
Location: MSDE, 8th Floor, Conference Room #2

Board Members:

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

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

Attorney General's Staff Present: Alan Dunklow, Esquire

Proceedings and Public Comment:

- Meeting called to order at 1:05p.m. by Chair, Matt Gallagher

Mr. Gallagher asked for public comment. Mr. James Sellinger, Catholic Archdiocese, offered comment on the need for the BOOST scholarships. He stated that the Catholic schools, even with the assistance they provide, can meet about 15% of the need for scholarship assistance. The tuition rates are \$6,200 per year on average. High school tuition is \$12,000 on average. He explained that schools assess need by reviewing applications, W2 tax forms, and other income information. They also consider diversity factors, such as geography and race. As to parental contribution, some schools offer the opportunity for volunteer service.

In response to Ms. Green's question about a dollar amount that would make the scholarship significant, he responded that if the family received funding for 85% of the tuition then it would meet that goal. Some from the school, some from the State. He felt that less than 85% may put too big a burden on the family.

Mr. Sellinger explained that some students are waiting to hear whether they have been awarded a scholarship before deciding what school to attend.

Ms. Green and Mr. Sellinger engaged in a discussion about the differences in enrollment and funding decisions between Catholic schools and Jewish schools. In Jewish schools the student is enrolled, "has the seat," and the parents pay tuition, or owe it, or the school does with less. In Catholic schools, seats go unfilled if the family or school cannot afford to cover tuition costs.

Ms. Green emphasized that current and continuing students are not necessarily less deserving of the BOOST funds. Some of those families struggle to provide the family contribution. Dr. Grasmick asked for the attrition rate of students who can't continue because of financial reasons. Mr. Sellinger said the schools did not disaggregate data that finely.

Ms. Green asked about families with multiple students. Mr. Sellinger explained that the schools offer a sibling discount and they tend to do a family cap.

Underperforming Schools

Mary Gable from MSDE explained the various ways to identify underperforming schools and some of the complications in doing so. The Board asked for information on 5%, 10% and 20% of the lowest performing schools.

General Discussion of Award Criteria

Dr. Grasmick asked whether the Board was persuaded not to fund scholarships for high school? Some discussion ensued. Ms. Green said that not all high schools have development offices, and that many parents go into debt to send their children to non-public schools.

Mr. Gallagher asked staff to present the latest data. Mr. Clark discussed with the Board the ongoing data review process and gave an update on the count for multi-household applicants. There are 840 with majority coming from free meal eligible households. He noted that MSDE staff will continue with the income validation process and keep the Board abreast of all findings. He expects that 4,512 applications will be the final number. Ms. Kearns explained that data cleaning efforts for all applications with missing income verification and/or mismatched documentation will need to occur prior to completing the data validation. Mr. Clark added that applicants who submitted incomplete applications, but who have now submitted the documents via email, will have their applications appended with the missing documents this week. Ms. Kearns explained that an extended time frame for reaching out to households to request missing data poses a problem for completion of the data validation process.

Board members recommended reaching out to applicants who appear qualified based on income data reported. Ms. Eberhart agreed, emphasizing that some families faced a barrier to computer access and the application had to be submitted online.

The discussion turned to award amounts and whether all scholarships would be accepted. Dr. Grasmick recommended that in considering the award amounts, the amount given should be a significant enough amount to make a difference to the household. Dr. Sanders proposed having the funding award amount fall within a 75-85% of tuition level with families meeting the remainder of the financial need. Ms. Eberhart would like to award the public school applicants a higher amount to make it possible for them to attend the nonpublic schools. A recommendation was made to send a confirmation letter first then follow up with a check payment if the family accepts the award. Ms. Harbinson suggested having the households sign off on a verification/accountability form which will outline all details of the award conditions.

Mr. Gallagher stated that no matter how the Board acts, there will be funds awarded that are not used in the first round. It is difficult to predict what percentage of funds that would be. Board members surmised that anywhere from 10%-30% of the awards might not be accepted.

Ms. Harbinson agreed that some funds would not be accepted. She said in her organization, two of 26 families did not use the scholarship. With the late timeline here, there will likely be more in the BOOST Program. Ms. Eberhart said that public school students could be given preference to help them make the change to a non-public school. Ms. Harbinson said that participating schools need to provide information on student need.

Check Disbursements

Mr. Clark explained the plan to date to handle check payments. The checks will be sent to the school made payable to the families who will come to the school to sign the check over to the school to pay the tuition. Dr. Sanders suggested that school principals be informed and heavily involved in the check sign off process.

Incomplete Applications

Mr. Gallagher noted that the new target date for a completed data set was July 29. He and the Board directed staff to continue to follow up on incomplete applications. He did not want to exclude applicants without a continuing effort to reach out to them for the documents needed. There was discussion of a firm deadline for applicants to submit missing data, but no consensus was reached.

Recap and Board work plan proposed by Mr. Gallagher:

- Follow-up with applicants regarding missing application data.
- Complete data validation by working in two application batches.
- Have data validation done by July 29th.
- Work on final determination of the award criteria (ranking, categories, cap per family).
- Goal set to have complete data to the Board by Aug 1st or 2nd meeting.

Next meeting dates:

July 25, 2016 8:30 a.m. (this meeting will focus specifically on award criteria)

August 1, 2016 1 pm – 4 pm

August 2, 1 pm - 3:30 pm

The meeting adjourned at 3:24 p.m.