

**Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST)
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – September 19, 2016**

Date: September 19, 2016
Time: 10 am – 12 pm
Location: MSDE, 8th Floor Conference Room #2

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

Staff present: Monica Kearns, Jim Clark, Donna Gunning, Kenya DeCosta, and Jamie Klarman.

Attorney General’s Office staff present: Liz Kameen Esquire, and Alan Dunklow Esquire.

The meeting was called to order at 10:18 by Chair Matt Gallagher.

Review of the most recent summary data on scholarship awards:

Mr. Gallagher asked MSDE staff to elaborate on outreach efforts to the award recipients who have not replied whether they accept or decline their awards. MSDE staff said that awardees who have not replied have received 5 emails and a telephone call. Also, a list of awardees was sent to each school for the schools to reach out to the parents.

Ms. Eberhart asked why awardees would decline. Donna Gunning and Jim Clark said that in some cases parents indicated that the amount was not enough to cover all the costs, and in other cases the selected school is not participating, for example.

Mr. Gallagher said that the acceptance rate is above 90 percent, which is better than he expected. Ms. Harbinson said that, given the time of year that the awards went out, it is a good response rate.

Ms. Green said that she heard that sometimes parent applicants were using each other’s email addresses, and this may have caused problems. She said that we need to consider acceptance of a paper application by mail.

Ms. Eberhart asked if a mailing can be done to awardees who have not responded. Mr. Clark said that it is very late in the process to try to continue to get responses from those who have not responded, and we need to move forward to confirm enrollment and other information with schools.

Mr. Gallagher asked about the size of the Waiting List. Donna Gunning said that there are **767 eligible applicants on the Waiting List.**

Update on communications with schools:

Ms. Eberhart asked if there are cases where the BOOST award exceeds the amount the parents owe, resulting in funds to be returned. Monica Kearns said that MSDE has asked schools for data on each awardee's non-BOOST aid and financial need. If BOOST aid plus non-BOOST financial aid exceed student need, then the BOOST award will be reduced accordingly.

Ms. Green said that she looked at the Excel file that MSDE sent to schools for them to report the financial aid data, and it is difficult to understand what MSDE is asking for. Ms. Kameen said that, for example, if the school only charges a student \$1,000 and the BOOST scholarship is \$1,400, then \$400 needs to be returned to MSDE. Mr. Gallagher said that at the Christo Rey school, there is a family contribution and there also is a student work contribution. Mr. Gallagher said that the Board's next phase of work will need to involve clarifying these types of issues.

Ms. Kearns gave an update on the Assurances to which schools had to agree in order to participate in the program. Of the 259 initial schools (the Nonpublic Textbook schools offering programs beyond kindergarten), 204 agreed with the Assurances. At this point, six have not agreed and 49 have not responded. Of the schools that have not responded, 12 have been selected by awardees, representing 38 awards. Ms. Kearns gave a list to Board members of the six schools that did not agree to the Assurances.

Dr. Grasmick asked why the Highlands School is on the list of participating schools because their tuition is very high. Mr. Clark said that in the past the Highlands School received a waiver to participate in the Nonpublic Textbook program, which enabled them to participate in the BOOST program. Dr. Grasmick asked MSDE to reconsider whether the Highlands School should receive a waiver to participate in the Textbook program because they already receive State aid through the special education aid programs.

Ms. Green said that another point to consider for next year is that some schools define kindergarten differently than the State defines it. She said that we may want to define kindergarten as being 5 years old by a certain date such as August 31. Also, some nonpublic schools have a "pre-first" grade after kindergarten. Ms. Green said that the Board may need to further define attendance at a public versus private school in the prior school year.

Decisions on awards:

The Board further discussed the information presented on funds available to award:

Award Response	Category	Students	Award Total
Decline	F-Private	60	84,000
	F-Public	39	171,600
	R-Public	21	71,400
No Total		120	327,000
Accepy	F-Private	1,494	2,094,600
	F-Public	377	1,658,800
	R-Private	12	12,000
	R-Public	166	564,400
Yes Total		2,049	4,329,800
Not Responded	F-Private	31	43,400
	F-Public	36	158,400
	R-Public	10	34,000
Not Responded Total		77	235,800
Grand Total		2,246	4,892,600

Notes

The funds available to award will fluctuate as responses are received and recorded, and issues are resolved.

Funding	9/9/2016
Award Budget:	4,850,000
Amount Awarded:	4,892,600
Balance:	(42,600)
Declined Awards:	327,000
Amount committed from MSDE admin*:	12,000
Available to Award:	296,400

** Can be somewhat further increased*

The Board unanimously agreed that awards should be made from funds available from: Declined Awards, MSDE’s commitment of \$12,000 of the administrative funds for scholarships, and applicants who have still Not Responded as of end of day Tuesday, September 20. To the extent possible, funds should be used for awards to Waiting List students with the first round of award payments. As of Sep. 9, 2016, the amounts associated with the categories were:

\$296,400 = From Declined Awards + MSDE \$12,000; and
 \$235,800 = Not Responded.

MSDE staff confirmed that the Board is awarding to the categories as described rather than a particular dollar amount, because the amount could change as responses are received and issues are resolved.

Discussion of the Board’s transmittal letter:

The Board then discussed the draft Board transmittal letter to the Governor and the General Assembly. Mr. Gallagher asked whether there are still substantive issues that need to be

addressed in the letter. For example, should we include the information on the schools that declined to participate due to the non-discrimination requirement?

Ms. Harbinson said that the letter needs to discuss the implications of the award process and timing, and she asked whether the Board can recommend that awards are made in January. Mr. Gallagher said that he agrees that it would be ideal to make awards earlier, but he doesn't know if that timing will occur. He suggested that MSDE could accept provisional applications and include footnotes for the applicants about the availability of funds depending on action taken by the General Assembly. Mr. Gallagher said that the Governor has been supportive of BOOST and that thousands of families are now receiving scholarships, so it is more likely than not that the Governor will include BOOST funding in his budget.

Dr. Grasmick said that she thinks the letter needs to include the word "urgency," and it needs to mention "continuity." Dr. Grasmick said that the Board should advocate this for the recipient families. Ms. Harbinson agreed.

Ms. Harbinson said that another point needs to be modified in the letter about assessing program impacts. She said that it is not realistic to require nonpublic schools to adopt nationally-normed assessments. Ms. Eberhart asked if the Board should prompt the Legislature to define what it means by assessments.

Ms. Green said that there should be a balance between allowing a school to do whatever kind of assessment it wants with mandating expensive tests that will not align with the school's curriculum.

Ms. Harbinson said that she is not sure whether the Board should ask the Legislature to weigh in on the assessment issue, and she said that the school choice movement has used requirements related to attendance and a family contribution toward tuition.

Ms. Eberhart said that several states have evaluated these types of nonpublic programs and they have found that the programs are not always effective. She said that she does not support putting public funds into a program that does not help students. Assessment data is needed to help evaluate results.

Dr. Grasmick said that she likes the way the Budget Bill language related to assessments is worded because it does not specify certain assessments to be used. She said that she agrees with Ms. Green that the assessments have to be aligned with the curriculum. Dr. Grasmick said that assessments are expensive and the Board should avoid being too prescriptive. If the requirements are too prescriptive, it will result in many schools leaving the program.

Mr. Gallagher said that he would hesitate to ask the General Assembly to affirm the advice of counsel that has been received on the issue of assessments. At some point, he said, someone will want to look at the assessment data at participating schools. Mr. Gallagher asked Board members to provide suggested edits for the paragraph in the letter on assessments if they have thoughts.

Ms. Eberhart said that schools could choose from a group of possible assessments. She also said that she thinks the letter should include information about some schools not participating due to the non-discrimination requirements.

Mr. Gallagher said that he would like to send the letter by the end of September. He will address the suggestions from today's Board meeting in the letter, and Board members should send any additional edits in redline format and circulate them. Mr. Gallagher said he will then send the letter to MSDE staff to fill in the data details.

Other discussion:

It was noted that MSDE staff are still investigating the status of some awardees, and if the issues are resolved and the awardees should receive payments, then they will receive the payments in the second check run.

Ms. Green asked if we should solicit feedback from participating schools. Ms. Eberhart said that a survey of schools and parents could occur in January. Mr. Clark said that the Superintendent's Nonpublic Workgroup meeting in November would be a good forum for soliciting feedback from the schools. MSDE staff will let the Board know of the date of the upcoming MSDE Nonpublic Workgroup meeting.

Ms. Harbinson said that in the discussion of urgency in the Board's letter, there needs to be mention of the importance of urgency for the public schools as well, so that they are aware of potential enrollment changes. She said that an earlier timeframe for the program would help public schools as well.

The minutes for the June 30 Board meeting were approved.

For now, meetings will be scheduled on an as needed basis.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.