

**Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST)
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes - April 28, 2017**

Date: April 28, 2017
Time: 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.
Location: MSDE, 8th Floor, Conference Room #2

Board Members:

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

Absent: Mr. Michael McLeese.

MSDE Staff Present: Monica Kearns, Jim Clark, Debbie Lichter, James Klarman, Felicia Holloway-Wise, Kenya DeCosta.

Attorney General's Staff Present: Ms. Elizabeth Kameen Esquire, Mr. Alan Dunklow Esquire.

Meeting was called to order at 2:30 p.m. by Chair Matt Gallagher.

The minutes from the September 19, 2016 and March 3, 2017 meetings were approved.

Update on the 2016-2017 program:

Jim Clark provided information on payments and the fund balance for the 2016-2017 program. A second round of 85 payments is still in progress and is expected to be sent to the relevant schools in May 2017. These payments represent the Initial and Second Round Awards that were not included in the first check run due to outstanding issues, particularly enrollment confirmation.

Mr. Clark stated that as of April 24, 2017, the balance of funds from the 2016-2017 program is expected to be \$460,055. The final remaining balance of 2016-2017 funds will be encumbered with a special code provided by the General Accounting Division so that it may be carried into Fiscal 2018 and used for 2017-2018 awards. As of April 24, 2017, the refunds from schools totaled \$232,973.

Ms. Eberhart asked why there are refunds. Mr. Clark said that in some cases a student ended up enrolling at a non-BOOST school and in other cases a student withdrew after part of the year. Ms. Eberhart asked for information on how many students received and accepted BOOST awards but never enrolled in BOOST schools, and how many students were enrolled in BOOST schools only part of the year. Mr. Clark said that this information will be available at a later time after processing of refunds from schools has been completed.

Dr. Grasmick followed up with a question about students who enrolled in BOOST schools but withdrew: Is information available on why the students left the BOOST schools? Ms. Kearns said that MSDE has some anecdotal information but there was no mechanism in place to capture the reason for a student's withdrawal. Mr. Gallagher asked for examples of anecdotes. Ms.

Kearns said that MSDE received some parent calls indicating that the BOOST school was not a good fit for the student after all, and the parents wanted MSDE's help in navigating the situation with the BOOST school. Dr. Sanders said that it would be helpful to have information about why students left BOOST schools as the program gains more attention in the media.

Ms. Harbinson asked if students can use the BOOST funds at a different school. Ms. Kearns said that BOOST funds can be transferred from one BOOST school to another BOOST school. Mr. Clark clarified that if a student has attended part of the school year at one BOOST school and wishes to transfer to another BOOST school, it is a lengthy process to move the funds: The first school calculates the amount of the BOOST award to retain based on the number of school days the student attended, the first school sends a refund check to MSDE representing the remaining BOOST award amount, and then MSDE processes a payment of the remaining award amount to the second school.

Review of the Budget Bill Language for the 2017-2018 program:

Mr. Gallagher said that the group should discuss the Budget Bill Language and the funds available for the 2017-2018 program. The Budget Bill Language (House Bill 150) specifies that if a student remains eligible, the student receives a renewal award. Some erosion is expected from students who graduate, students who move out of Maryland, and other changes. The Fiscal 2018 budget includes \$5.5 million for scholarships plus a remaining balance of approximately \$400,000 from 2016-2017, which gives the program nearly \$6 million for 2017-2018. There are sufficient funds for renewal awards and some new awards.

The Budget Bill Language also states that preference must be given to students who attended public school in the prior year. Ms. Green asked if the Budget Bill Language is consistent with what the Board decided was the priority for 2016-2017. The categories of awards for 2016-2017, from highest amount to lowest amount, were: students who qualify for Free Meals and attended public schools, students who qualified for Reduced Meals and attended public schools, students who qualified for Free Meals and attended private schools, and students who qualified for Reduced Meals and attended private schools. It appears that the legislation says to prioritize students who qualify for Free Meals and then students who qualify for Reduced Meals. Ms. Harbinson said that it could be argued that the Budget Bill Language calls for a different approach than what was used for the 2016-2017 awards.

Mr. Gallagher said that if we receive \$2 million in new applications that qualify for Free Meals, then the decision is made for the Board because the funds will be exhausted before the next category can be served. If the application counts are more nuanced, then the Board will need to make decisions about prioritizing awards.

Ms. Green asked how priority is defined. She said that there is a priority in terms of the award amounts but not in the ranking of household income. Ms. Eberhart said that the Board tried to ensure that students attending public school in the prior year were given an award. Dr. Grasmick said that a list of key priorities should be developed, and two big priorities are renewal students and students attending public school in the prior year. Ms. Green asked if siblings of 2016-2017 recipients should be given priority.

Mr. Gallagher said that the Board will need to review data for the applicant pool before making any decisions. The Board's decisions last year were guided by trying to be fair, inclusive, and responsive. It is not known how many 2016-2017 recipients will apply for renewal awards, and it is not known how many new applicants there will be.

Discussion of the 2017-2018 application process:

Mr. Gallagher said that the application process should be discussed. Ms. Harbinson suggested that the renewal candidates should be contacted and invited to apply first, and they should be given an earlier application deadline. Dr. Grasmick and Dr. Sanders agreed. Ms. Eberhart suggested that new applicants should be given as much time as possible to apply.

The Board directed MSDE staff to ensure that an email is sent to parents of 2016-2017 recipients to notify them when the application is available, and to tell them that they need to submit an application if they want to be considered for a renewal award.

Ms. Kearns said that the application period for 2016-2017 was six weeks, and MSDE intends to have the application period for 2017-2018 to be the same length of time. Ms. Green said that the application period should begin as soon as possible, and Dr. Grasmick agreed. Ms. Kearns said that the application software is expected to be configured and launched the week of May 1. She said that MSDE plans to hire two temporary staff to help review the income documents that are submitted with the applications.

Mr. Gallagher asked if the BOOST application will be posted on the MSDE web site, and what type of publicity will be conducted to promote the program. Ms. Kearns said that the link to the electronic application will be posted on the BOOST page of the MSDE web site. She said that a press release will be distributed and other publicity likely will be conducted by the MSDE Communications Office.

Ms. Kearns said she is not sure that MSDE can conduct two separate application processes and meet the goal of allocating awards by the end of July. Mr. Gallagher asked if the application process is the same for renewal and new applicants, and Ms. Kearns responded that the process is the same.

Mr. Gallagher asked the group why having an earlier deadline for renewal applicants would be beneficial. Dr. Grasmick said that it would provide information sooner on the amount available for new awards. Mr. Clark said it would not be beneficial to have two separate application processes because the income verification and data cleaning efforts will need to conclude at the same time for all application data. Ms. Green said that schools need to be part of the effort to prompt current BOOST recipients to submit an application.

Ms. Eberhart asked if the income verification process could be conducted on new recipients first, and then they could be notified of their awards by the beginning of July. Mr. Clark said that the sooner all the applications are completed and the income information is verified, the sooner the potential award pool will be known.

Ms. Harbinson asked if renewal applicants can be allowed to complete the application first. Ms. Kearns said that the link to the application can be sent first to those who received an award in

2016-2017. Ms. Harbinson said that this approach might cause concern among new applicants if they hear that renewal applicants are allowed to apply first. Ms. Harbinson asked if the application will be the same for renewal applicants and new applicants, and Ms. Kearns replied that they will be the same. Ms. Harbinson asked why there is not a separate, condensed application for renewal applicants. Ms. Kearns said that the software only allows for one version of the application. Ms. Harbinson said that parents should not have to provide all of their information again if they are applying for a renewal award.

Discussion of requirements for schools to participate in 2017-2018:

Ms. Kearns said that a School Assurances form similar to the one used for the 2016-2017 program is nearly complete. Schools will log in to an electronic form, read the terms and conditions to participate, and click a box to indicate if they agree or do not agree with the terms and conditions. The principal or head of school should complete the form. The 2017-2018 form includes the new assessment reporting requirements from House Bill 150.

Ms. Kearns said that she has been working with Ms. Kameen to finalize the Assurances form. Mr. Gallagher asked when the Assurances will be complete. Ms. Kearns said that the form will be finalized and sent to the schools in May. Mr. Gallagher asked if the Assurances process can be completed sooner. Ms. Kearns said that if the intent is to have a final list of eligible schools available for the application period, then the beginning of the application period will need to be delayed to allow schools time to review and respond to the Assurances.

Dr. Grasmick asked what happens if a school is selected by an applicant but the school doesn't meet the requirements. Ms. Kearns said that the student would need to apply to another BOOST school in order to use the BOOST funds.

Dr. Grasmick said that the requirements for schools are much different for 2017-2018 and asked how MSDE can help the schools understand the details of the requirements. She said it is important to send the Assurances form to schools as quickly as possible to allow schools time to review the requirements, particularly because the school year will be ending soon. She said it is important that schools understand that they have to meet all the requirements in order to participate in BOOST. Dr. Sanders said that MSDE should clarify the requirements for schools.

Mr. Gallagher asked if MSDE has scheduled information sessions for schools to be able to ask questions about the requirements and to get answers. Ms. Kearns said that there is a nonpublic schools workgroup meeting on May 2 and information can be provided at that meeting. Mr. Gallagher said that MSDE needs to have an informational meeting specifically to address the BOOST school requirements. Ms. Green said that there were a number of schools that were unclear on the information that was needed from them for the 2016-2017 program, and she agreed that a meeting for schools would be helpful. Dr. Grasmick said that MSDE should conduct a meeting and should also distribute information to schools in paper communication. Ms. Eberhart said that MSDE should conduct a webinar for schools to explain the requirements.

Mr. Gallagher summarized the general next steps that MSDE needs to follow:

- The application for 2017-2018 launches the week of May 1.
- MSDE notifies the nonpublic schools and the nonpublic associations that the application for 2017-2018 is available.

- MSDE sends a press release stating that the application is available.
- MSDE notifies the schools and the 2016-2017 recipient parents that an application is required to be considered for a renewal award for 2017-2018.
- MSDE conducts an informational meeting for the schools on the requirements in the Assurances.
- The schools indicate whether they agree or do not agree with the Assurances.

Discussion of students with disabilities:

Dr. Grasmick said that the issue of students with disabilities needs to be discussed. The nonpublic schools are not required to provide the same services that the public schools provide to students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Parents should be made aware of this. Mr. Dunklow said that he will look further into whether nonpublic schools have to provide certain educational services to students with IEPs.

Follow-up concerning payments for the 2016-2017 program:

Ms. Eberhart asked why a second check run is needed for the program, given that each check run takes a considerable amount of time. She said that if MSDE reviews the reasons that checks were refunded for the 2016-2017 program, then perhaps a second check run can be avoided for the 2017-2018 program.

Mr. Clark said that the BOOST check processing is lengthy because a unique procedure is being used. The recipient information is not entered into the state's accounting system the way that it is for other payees. He said that it is likely there will always be a need for a follow-up batch of checks, given that some students transfer schools, or an enrollment issue that was unresolved becomes resolved.

Discussion of schools' reporting requirements for the 2017-2018 program:

The group reviewed the report provided by MSDE to the General Assembly in mid-April that included the results of a survey on teacher certification and on the names of assessments used by the participating schools. Mr. Gallagher said that when MSDE sends information to the General Assembly, it should be sent simultaneously to BOOST Board members. Ms. Kearns said that this will be done moving forward.

Per the Budget Bill Language, participating schools must report the number of their teachers who are certified and the number who are not certified. Ms. Green asked about the definition of certified. Dr. Grasmick said that the definition is determined by MSDE's certification division. Ms. Kearns said that the definition from the certification division was included on the survey for 2016-2017 certification data. Ms. Green said that some schools that responded to the survey were not clear on how certification should be defined. Ms. Kearns said that she will review the survey to see if the explanation on teacher certification can be made clearer.

Ms. Eberhart asked about the new reporting requirements related to assessments. The Budget Bill Language refers to norm-referenced assessments. Ms. Kameen said that MSDE assessment staff need to be involved in clarifying these requirements for the nonpublic schools.

Dr. Grasmick asked for confirmation that student-level data cannot be revealed. Ms. Kameen confirmed that student-level data cannot be reported publicly. The schools can report student-level data to MSDE, and then it must be aggregated before it is sent out. Ms. Eberhart said that student-level data on norm referenced tests will be important. Ms. Green said that she is concerned about the personal information, including test scores, that is being requested from applicants. She received feedback from a parent that he is concerned about losing his public assistance benefits if he receives a BOOST scholarship. Dr. Sanders said that the Budget Bill Language is written to not delve into student-level details. Ms. Kearns said that MSDE assessment staff may ask the nonpublic schools to aggregate the assessment results data before sending it to MSDE.

Mr. Gallagher said that MSDE should schedule two informational meetings for schools on the assessment requirements to ensure that the schools have a chance to attend one of the meetings. Dr. Grasmick said that it is important that MSDE assessment staff are at the informational meetings to answer questions.

Discussion of the status of students entering kindergarten:

The Board revisited the question of whether all students entering kindergarten should be given the same status as far as attending public versus private school in the prior school year.

Ms. Eberhart said that students who attended a public pre-kindergarten program could be categorized as attending a public school the prior year and all others could be categorized as private. Also, Ms. Eberhart said that the application could include a question pertaining to students entering kindergarten that asks if the student has siblings attending a public school, siblings attending a private school, or siblings at both public and private schools. Dr. Grasmick did not agree that the application should ask about siblings. Dr. Grasmick said that she would agree with a set award amount for students entering kindergarten.

Mr. Gallagher asked if there are private schools that operate public pre-kindergarten programs such as Head Start. It was confirmed by the group that this can occur. Mr. Gallagher said that this is a complex issue and he suggests that the Board defers a decision until more is known about the applicant pool for 2017-2018.

Discussion of siblings of applicants:

Ms. Green asked if the application should request information on whether the family has other children in nonpublic schools. Mr. Gallagher asked whether it is possible to determine this information from the way the data is being collected. Ms. Kearns said that the application asks for number of household members. Also, the application asks for household data once and then it asks for information on each student, and all this data is linked so it would be possible to analyze sibling data.

Ms. Green asked if siblings of existing BOOST students will receive a preference for new BOOST awards. Mr. Gallagher said that this question should be considered when more is known about the applicant pool. Ms. Green said that the Board may want to ask the General Assembly for guidance on the question of sibling preference.

The Board decided to cancel its May meeting and to schedule the next meeting for June 2017.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.