

**Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST)
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – June 21, 2017**

Date: June 21, 2017
Time: 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Location: MSDE, 8th Floor, conference Room #4

Board Members:

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

Absent: Mr. Michael McLeese.

MSDE Staff Present: Monica Kearns, Jim Clark, Kenya DeCosta, Chandra Haislet, Felicia Holloway, Debbie Lichter.

Attorney General's staff present: Ms. Elizabeth Kameen Esquire, Alan Dunklow Esquire.

The meeting was called to order at 9:08 a.m. by Chair Matt Gallagher.

The minutes from the April 28, 2017 meeting were approved.

Update on 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 funds:

Mr. Gallagher summarized the information on the handouts provided by Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) staff concerning the status of the remaining 2016-2017 funds and total funds available for the 2017-2018 program. The General Assembly provided \$5.5 million for 2017-2018, plus about \$500,000 remains from 2016-2017 that the BOOST Budget Bill Language allows to be carried forward. Monica Kearns clarified that for 2017-2018 the \$150,000 for administration of the program is budgeted in the MSDE Headquarters budget, separate from the scholarship funds.

Assessment reporting:

Ms. Kearns introduced Chandra Haislet from the MSDE Division of Assessment and Accountability. Ms. Kearns said that Ms. Haislet and her staff are handling the BOOST assessment reporting requirements and will be gathering data from the schools. Ms. Haislet said that to maintain student privacy, aggregated scores by school will not be reported by grade and subject in cases where there are fewer than 10 students in that “data cell.”

Ms. Haislet explained that MSDE received a request from the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. to keep the names of schools anonymous in the BOOST assessment reporting whether or not there are 10 students in a data cell. MSDE staff would like to ask the BOOST Advisory Board whether they think it is appropriate for school names to be anonymized or suppressed in the assessment score reporting.

Ms. Eberhart said that in states such as Ohio, Louisiana, and Indiana there are major reports on assessments and evaluation of student performance in programs like BOOST. Dr. Grasmick said that other states may not have the same student data suppression threshold as Maryland; she said there is no uniform criterion on this issue. Ms. Harbinson said that there is a lot of data from Pennsylvania and national data may be available for programs similar to BOOST. Ms. Harbinson said that she does not think there is a national standard.

Ms. Green said that getting the data from the schools is important and that reporting by school name is not as important. Dr. Grasmick, Dr. Sanders, and Ms. Harbinson agreed. Ms. Haislet said that there are methods for grouping school data to avoid clear identification of schools. Mr. Gallagher said that public schools have to report their assessment data by school name. He asked the Board members to clarify if they are proposing to not identify the name of schools who have more than 10 students per data cell. Ms. Harbinson confirmed that is what she means.

Dr. Grasmick asked Ms. Kameen if she anticipates there will be pressure to release the names of nonpublic schools if the names are not provided in the reports. Ms. Kameen said that she is not sure if this would happen, but it is possible that there would be a request for the names of schools. Mr. Gallagher asked if the threshold of 10 students is a guideline or a law, and Ms. Kameen responded that FERPA (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) states that when aggregated data is released, it cannot be released in a way that allows individual students to be identified. Mr. Gallagher asked whether it could be justified to not provide the school names if an advocate asked for data by school name. He asked if the Board can successfully argue that the names of schools with student counts above 10 should be anonymized. Ms. Kameen said that if the question is viewed through the lens of the Public Information Act, it may be difficult to justify anonymizing the school names. Ms. Kameen said that in the end this is a policy question that needs to be decided by the Board.

Dr. Grasmick said that Ms. Kameen has stated reasons why assessment reporting for public schools and nonpublic schools is not comparable, and Dr. Grasmick thinks these are good reasons for not reporting the school names. Ms. Eberhart said that if there are more than 10 students then not reporting the school names may violate the Freedom of Information Act. Ms. Harbinson said that parents who are interested in a nonpublic school will ask the school for the data in which they have an interest. Ms. Green agreed that assessment reporting for public and nonpublic schools is not comparable; for example, the cost of assessments at nonpublic schools is not being supported with public funds. The schools already are trying to figure out which assessments need to be used to meet BOOST reporting requirements. If they decide that they need to order additional tests and the cost is too high, they may exit the program.

Mr. Gallagher said that the Board should be careful about any decision that appears to reduce transparency. He said that the program receives a lot of scrutiny, and it will be impossible to get a meaningful expansion of the program unless there is data that shows its progress. Dr. Grasmick said that it makes sense to release the data by school name for schools with 10 or more students in a data cell at some point in the future, perhaps in three years. She said she thinks it would be premature to release data by school name at this point.

Ms. Harbinson said that if students are performing below grade level when they enter a nonpublic school through the BOOST program and then they score a B grade, that is a good outcome. She said that the Board should consider the original intent of the BOOST bill, which is to fund school choice. She said that she does not see why releasing the assessment data by school name would make a better case for support of the program. Mr. Gallagher said that he is not comfortable with the idea of answering questions from a General Assembly Committee on why school names are not included in the BOOST data when school names are always included in public school data. He added that the BOOST Board should have a policy direction, a long-term plan, and a vision for the program to deal with issues such as assessment reporting.

Dr. Grasmick asked if the Board can decide what is appropriate for 2017-2018, and then the Board can revisit the issue and develop a policy for future years in a separate meeting. Mr. Gallagher agreed with this approach. Ms. Kearns clarified that the reporting requirements under discussion are associated with the 2017-2018 BOOST program, but the assessment scores need to be from the 2016-2017 school year because the reports are due to the General Assembly in December 2017. For clarification, Ms. Lichter read the BOOST Budget Bill Language concerning assessment reporting requirements. Ms. Haislet said that she and her staff expect to collect assessment data from the BOOST schools from July through September or October 2017.

Ms. Green and Ms. Eberhart agreed that further discussion on assessment reporting is needed. Ms. Harbinson said that she is going to reach out to a contact at Johns Hopkins University for information on data from other states. Mr. Gallagher asked Ms. Kameen to reflect more on whether the Board would have a valid argument for anonymizing school names in cases where there are more than 10 students.

Ms. Eberhart asked how many schools are in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., and Brian Radziwill, the representative of the Archdiocese, responded that there are 35. Mr. Gallagher asked how many schools in the Washington, D.C. Archdiocese would be affected if the assessment data includes school names for schools with more than 10 students. Mr. Radziwill reviewed a listing of schools and said that 13 schools would be affected. Mr. Gallagher asked Mr. Radziwill how the topic of BOOST assessment reporting arose in the Washington, D.C. Archdiocese. Mr. Radziwill said that question arose from principals. He said that the Archdiocese is using a new science assessment, and the principals are concerned that parents of prospective students will compare scores among schools without adequate information and context.

Ms. Eberhart said that Washington, D.C. has a voucher program similar to BOOST, and she asked Mr. Radziwill if he knows whether assessment data is reported by school name for that program. Mr. Radziwill replied that he does not know, but he will try to find out and provide that information to the BOOST Board.

Mr. Gallagher said that the Board cannot decide this assessment issue at this meeting. It is too large a question. He also recommended that the Washington, D.C. Archdiocese think further about this issue. He said that even if it is decided by the BOOST Board to anonymize some school names at this point, moving forward it is likely that school names will need to be released for schools with more than 10 students. Ms. Eberhart said that it is her long-term goal to make

sure that schools are accountable and that BOOST funds are going to schools that demonstrate they improve student performance. Ms. Green agreed with Ms. Eberhart.

Application data for the 2017-2018 program:

Ms. Kearns explained the handout provided on application data as of June 20, 2017. At this point, the count of applications is 5,571, but there is remaining work to eliminate duplicates and to review applications to determine income eligibility. As a point of comparison, 4,400 applications were received for 2016-2017, and 2,500 awards were given.

Mr. Gallagher asked how many renewal applicants did not apply for 2017-2018, how many 2016-2017 recipients graduated, and how many were from public versus private schools. He said that as the program moves forward, these responses and other information about erosion of continuing enrollment will be important to know.

Ms. Green said that it will be frustrating and difficult for students if they received BOOST in 2016-2017 and they transferred from a public to a private school, but their family income was at the top of the income threshold and for 2017-2018 they exceed the threshold and do not receive an award. There could be a conversation with schools about making an extra financial effort to help those students with additional scholarships to make up the difference. It will be important to analyze how many renewal applicants changed income categories and how close they were below and above the thresholds.

Mr. Gallagher said that more applications were received for 2017-2018 than for 2016-2017, and the proportion of students previously attending public school versus private school is about the same in 2017-2018 as in 2016-2017. He said the beginning point is to look at renewal awards.

Mr. Gallagher suggested that if a renewal applicant's household income increases, causing a change in status from "Qualified for Free Meals" (higher award amount) to "Qualified for Reduced Meals" (lower award amount), then the recipient should receive the lower Reduced Meal award amount. Ms. Green asked if the amount necessarily has to be reduced. Ms. Eberhart asked if the BOOST award could be increased for students who used BOOST funds to transfer from a public to a private school and the tuition at the private school has increased. As a point of comparison, Ms. Harbinson said that the award amount at the scholarship program she administers has not increased since 1998.

Mr. Gallagher said that the first question that needs to be answered is the cost to sustain renewal awards. Then the Board can see how many more awards can be made, and the Board can consider adjustment of award amounts. Ms. Kameen asked how the Board would be able to justify keeping an applicant at a higher award amount if the household income increases and the applicant moves from the "Qualified for Free Meals" to "Qualified for Reduced Meals" category. Ms. Green said that in any aspect of the program where the Board has discretion, there should be a discussion of options and a decision. Mr. Gallagher agreed, and said that the first step is to figure out the cost of renewal awards. Ms. Kearns said that MSDE staff will present the Board with two scenarios: One that projects the cost of renewal awards with the income categories carried forward for renewal applicants (Qualified for Free Meals or Qualified for Reduced

Meals), and one that projects the cost of renewal awards based on the income information provided in the 2017-2018 application.

Mr. Gallagher said that the Board needs to consider the issue of students entering kindergarten in 2017-2018. Ms. Eberhart said that this was a difficult issue for the 2016-2017 program, and it raises the issue of whether there is a sibling preference. Ms. Eberhart asked how many kindergarteners in 2016-2017 came from a public versus a private school in the prior year. Ms. Kearns said that she will let the Board know this information. Mr. Gallagher said that the Board needs more information about the 496 potential kindergarten awardees. This is a grey area and it has a significant effect on the program. Ms. Kearns said that the application data includes the name of the school attended in the prior year, and this can provide more information on the issue.

Ms. Green asked if there is anything that can be or should be done with the 785 applications that remain in “draft” status. Ms. Eberhart asked if notifications were sent to those with applications in draft status. Ms. Kearns said that a notification was sent. Ms. Kearns said that MSDE staff will review the 785 draft applications, and it is possible that some of them are duplicates of submitted applications.

Timeline for next steps:

Ms. Kearns said that the income verification process for applications is continuing. Data cleaning, including identifying and separating off duplicate applications, is continuing. Surveys to collect assessment data and teacher certification data, per the reporting requirements, will be sent soon. It is hoped that award criteria decisions can be made in July, and awards can be sent in late July. Ms. Eberhart said that if additional information on application data is ready by the next meeting, then the Board can decide award criteria. Ms. Kearns said that MSDE staff will work to have the information available for the meeting. Mr. Gallagher asked if there is anything that can be done to get information on kindergarteners more quickly and also to continue working on application data. Ms. Kearns said MSDE will provide the Board with kindergartener data broken out in various categories.

The next meeting was set for July 14, 2017. It was decided that three hours is needed for the July 14 meeting instead of two hours. Mr. Gallagher summarized the information needed and topics for the July 14 meeting: costs of renewal awards, income eligible applicants by award category, discussion of applicants entering kindergarten, and possible adjustments of award amounts.

The morning of July 24 was identified as a tentative meeting date and time. It was decided that the assessment reporting question will need to be addressed at a separate meeting in August, and August 7 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. was decided as a meeting time.

Mr. Gallagher called for any final questions, and there were none.

The meeting adjourned at 10:56 a.m.