

**Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST)  
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – March 3, 2017**

**Date:** March 3, 2017  
**Time:** 9 am – 11 am  
**Location:** MSDE, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room #4

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

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

**Attorney General’s Staff Present:** Elizabeth Kameen, Esquire.

Meeting was called to order about 9:20 by Chair Matt Gallagher; there was a delay due to conference call-in difficulties.

**Review of most recent data on awards:**

Jim Clark reviewed the most recent data on awards. There is \$156,400 from the Initial Round of awards that needs to be paid that was not included on the first check run. There are 261 students on the “Wait List” (eligible students who did not receive an award in fall 2016) who would receive \$1,000 each. Altogether, if the 261 students on the current Wait List are given awards, then about \$100,000 is remaining in BOOST funds. Mr. Gallagher clarified that if the Wait List students are not awarded, then \$361,000 is remaining in BOOST funds.

**Discussion of remaining balance:**

Mr. Gallagher said that we should look into recommending that the remaining funds carry over into the next fiscal year. He expressed concern about awarding funds to students on the Wait List this late in the school year. Somehow those families have covered their tuition obligations to the schools. Liz Kameen clarified that if the remaining funds are not spent or obligated then they would revert.

Ms. Eberhart said that she thinks that funds should be awarded to Wait List students. Dr. Grasmick said that she thinks funds should not be awarded to Wait List students and that the Board should ask that the funds be carried over. Ms. Green said that some families are on a 10-month or 12-month tuition payment plan, and that an award even this late in the school year would be meaningful for many families.

Mr. Gallagher asked if the Board can get advice from Liz Kameen. Specifically, the Board would like to know if remaining funds must be issued to students who are qualified and on the

Wait List. Ms. Kameen said that she can write an advice memo to address this, and that her first thought is that the Board has discretion on this issue. Ms. Kameen said that she will review the language that was sent to notify Wait List students of their status.

It was asked how the Wait List came about. Monica Kearns said that the Wait List was established because not enough was known in fall 2016 to award all the funds. For example, many applicants had received an award in the first round but had not accepted it, and others had to provide proof of residency. It was asked whether any Wait List students had received payments yet this year, and Ms. Kearns said yes.

Ms. Harbinson said that this is a tough issue. She said that the public perception is important – that the Board is being a responsible steward of the funds. However, the students have a demonstrated need in that all the eligible students are low income. She said it would be helpful to know if the program will have additional funds next year.

Mr. Gallagher said that there are seven counties who have a reduced level of State public education aid funding next year, and it would be difficult to justify giving funds to BOOST students who have already met their tuition obligation through this point in the school year. He suggested that the Board waits on the decision to award funds to remaining Wait List students.

Mr. Gallagher said that “Wait List” may not be the correct term. All of the students on the list are eligible children.

The Board agreed that MSDE can move forward with award payments of \$156,400 for 80 students who were given awards in the Initial Round but were not included in the first check run for various reasons. This is Line 8 on the handout. Jim Clark clarified that MSDE continues to receive enrollment information from parents and schools, and this amount may change somewhat. The Board confirmed that MSDE can move forward with other award payments that get resolved that were part of the Initial Round but not included in the first check run.

### **Considerations if the program continues:**

*Applications: If a student wants to continue in the BOOST program at an eligible school, does the parent complete an application each year?*

Mr. Gallagher said that he thinks applications should be required each year.

Ms. Harbinson said that her organization requires income documentation each year, and continuing recipients must complete a requalification form.

*Income verification: Is income verification needed each year if a student is continuing in the program? If the parent completes an application each year, could the application include a question/certification about any change in income, and documentation is required if there is a change?*

Mr. Gallagher said that he thinks income should be re-certified each year.

Ms. Eberhart said that she likes the idea of a different process for the requalification of continuing applicants versus starting from the same point as new applicants. We don't know if the amounts will be the same again next year, and we don't want people to think they automatically will receive what they had in the current year, she said.

Mr. Gallagher said perhaps we can let MSDE decide on whether they can do two applications (one for continuation and one for new applicants) or a single application.

Dr. Grasmick needed to leave the meeting via the conference call line. Mr. Gallagher asked if she had anything in particular she wanted to say before she had to leave, and Dr. Grasmick said only that she is eager to hear what Ms. Kameen says about the issue of awarding to students on the Wait List.

The Board asked whether there is legislation related to BOOST that had a hearing recently. Monica Kearns said that she will find out about legislation related to BOOST and whether MSDE is providing information on it.

*Award amounts: Do continuing students receive the same amount from year to year if the program's appropriation is equal to or greater than the prior year?*

Ms. Green asked if two lists need to be maintained moving forward: One for continuing students and one for new students.

Mr. Gallagher said that he thinks incumbent students should be prioritized moving forward. It likely was not the intention of the Board to reduce amounts awarded from year to year. Specifically, he proposed that if a student moves from the category of qualifying for Free Meals in one year into the category of qualifying for Reduced Price Meals the next year, then the award amount could be adjusted. However, moving from a public school to a private school would not reduce the award amount.

Ms. Harbinson said that, in the experience of the scholarship program that she administers, there are families whose income changes from one year to the next and they may not continue to qualify.

Ms. Eberhart said that because the program did not have any lead time this year, the public school families did not have much time to find additional funds that could help them afford the private school tuition. Ms. Eberhart said that she looked at the list of Baltimore City public schools from which BOOST students transferred this year, and many of those schools are not considered low-performing. Therefore, there are still many students who may be interested in pursuing BOOST funds to help them transfer from their low-performing public school to a private school as an alternative.

Mr. Gallagher said that he thinks the Board should wait to discuss the question of award amounts until the final budget is known for Fiscal 2018 (July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018). From a timing standpoint, the program is in the same position as last year, where funding will not be known until the Budget Bill is passed.

Mr. Gallagher asked Jim Sellinger, Chancellor of Education of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, who was attending the meeting as an audience member: Are the Catholic Schools assuming, for budgeting purposes, that the BOOST award amounts will be the same in the 2017-2018 school year? Mr. Sellinger confirmed that this is what the schools are assuming.

Mr. Gallagher said that he would like to see the applications and the income certification occur as soon as possible. He said that the program needs to be publicized more this year.

Mr. Gallagher asked whether some of the remaining current funds could be encumbered for an income verification contract that would occur in Fiscal 2018. Monica Kearns said that she would check on this. Ms. Kearns said that if an outside vendor was used for income verification of the applications received for the current year, the cost would have been about \$100,000. Ms. Kearns also said she is looking into whether the BOOST program can use income verification data collected by the Department of Human Resources.

The Board asked MSDE staff to provide information on how much time will be needed to conduct income verification for applicants for the 2017-2018 school year.

*For Kindergarteners: Should there be a set award amount for students entering kindergarten no matter the type of PreK they may have attended?*

Jim Clark said that for the current year, different award amounts were given to students going into kindergarten based on whether the parent indicated that the student was in public or private school the prior year. The Board agreed that the question about kindergarteners should be addressed at a future meeting. Ms. Eberhart said that home schooled students also need to be considered.

#### **Update on data from participating schools concerning their assessments and teacher certification:**

Monica Kearns said that the survey data on assessments and teacher certification is being normalized, and it is expected that the report will be submitted to the General Assembly in March. The report will be distributed to Board members.

#### **Update on MSDE's preparations for Year 2 of applications if the program continues:**

Monica Kearns said that MSDE has purchased software to support the BOOST program, and that this will improve coordination of the program.

#### **Concluding discussion:**

The Board decided to postpone action on the Wait List students and other questions until the budget for Fiscal 2018 is known. The Budget Bill likely will be passed in early April.

Mr. Sellinger asked when the next round of payments would be distributed and if a list can be provided to the Archdiocese of those payments. Jim Clark and Monica Kearns indicated that it will be 2, 3, or 4 more weeks until the next round of checks is distributed; a firm time is difficult to indicate because of the multiple steps and agencies involved. Ms. Kearns said that she can provide a student count (without names) by school for the next round of payments.

Mr. Gallagher asked the audience members if they had any questions or comments. Garrett O'Day of the Maryland Catholic Conference said that he is concerned that if the balance of current year funds is not spent, then it will appear as if the need for the funds was not there. Mr. Gallagher said that he understands this viewpoint but that he is more concerned that if funds are awarded to the remaining Wait List students and then the budget is reduced for next year, then there will be even more students whose awards will have to be reduced next year. Ms. Eberhart said that the Nonpublic Textbook program has reverted funds in recent years and it did not affect the next year's funding. Mr. Gallagher said that he does not think the Board should try to amend awards for the current year.

The Board asked that additional meetings be scheduled for mid-April (after the General Assembly adjourns), mid-May and mid-June. The decision on awarding remaining funds to remaining Wait List students will be made at the April meeting. The poll of meeting times for Board members should include two weeks of possible times for each meeting, with two-hour meeting time blocks.

The Board asked MSDE staff to provide a proposed schedule for next year's program at the April meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 10:45 a.m.