



## Questions and Answers on the BOOST Scholarship Program

April 25, 2017

The Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) Program provides scholarships for some students who are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program to attend eligible nonpublic schools. Awards are granted based on household income, with the lowest income served first.

**1. If a student received a BOOST scholarship in the 2016-2017 school year, will the student be eligible for a BOOST scholarship in the 2017-2018 school year?**

The legislation that governs the BOOST program for the 2017-2018 school year states that “Students who received a BOOST Program scholarship award in the prior year who still meet eligibility criteria for a scholarship shall receive a scholarship renewal award.” In order to be considered for a renewal award, an application still must be submitted.

Continuance of the BOOST program beyond the 2017-2018 school year is contingent upon action taken by the Maryland General Assembly in the next session, which will be January to mid-April 2018.

**2. At which schools can the scholarships be used?**

A list of potential participating schools is available on the BOOST web page. As of April 2017, the list includes schools that are participating in the Fiscal 2017 Nonpublic Textbook Program and that offer programs beyond kindergarten. To be fully eligible, schools also will have to certify in spring 2017 that they will administer certain assessments, provide assessment results for BOOST students in a manner that does not violate student privacy, and comply with certain non-discrimination laws.

These eligibility requirements are set forth by House Bill 150 of the 2017 legislative session (the Fiscal 2018 Budget Bill), beginning on page 135. A link to House Bill 150 can be found on the BOOST web page.

**3. Can students currently attending an eligible school apply for the scholarships?**

Yes, students currently attending an eligible school can apply for the scholarships.

**4. Are kindergarten students eligible for the scholarships if they are attending an eligible school?**

Yes, kindergarten students are eligible if they attend a school that is participating in the Fiscal 2017 Nonpublic Textbook Program and the school offers educational programs for grades above kindergarten.

**5. Are pre-kindergarten students eligible? Are half-day pre-K students eligible?**

No, neither half-day nor full-day pre-kindergarten students are eligible.

**6. How do I apply?**

The link to the online application will be posted to the BOOST web page in late April or early May 2017. You will need to provide the following as electronic attachments in PDF format to your application:

- Documentation showing your household size and income (see the application for details); and
- Documentation showing that the student has pursued enrollment in an eligible nonpublic school for the 2017-2018 school year. This documentation could include a letter of acceptance/continuation, a letter that the student is on the waiting list, or acknowledgement that an admissions application has been submitted.

If you need assistance with the online application, you may wish to contact the nonpublic school at which you intend to use the scholarship.

**7. If I want to apply for scholarships for more than one of my children, can I submit a single application?**

The electronic application for 2017-2018 is set up so that applicants create a single login ID and account. They enter their household information once, and then they enter information specific to each student separately.

**8. How does the program work?**

Applications will be reviewed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to ensure that they are complete. If the student's household is income eligible, then the student will be placed on a list of eligible applicants (without personal identifying information) that ranks family incomes as a percent of the most recent federal poverty levels. The BOOST Advisory Board will determine scholarship award amounts, and awards will be issued based on the funds available. Awards are granted based on household income, with the lowest income served first.

Applicants who receive an award will be asked to log in to the application system to indicate whether they accept or decline their award. For accepted awards, MSDE will verify the student's enrollment with the selected nonpublic school. BOOST awards are not to substitute for other financial aid. MSDE will work with the selected school to determine whether the BOOST award plus any non-BOOST financial aid exceed the tuition amount owed. In those cases, the BOOST award will be reduced.

BOOST scholarship checks will be made payable jointly to the parent/guardian and the nonpublic school. The checks are sent directly to the school, and the parent/guardian must go to the school and endorse the payment over to the school.

**9. If a student changes schools during the course of the school year to another eligible nonpublic school, can the scholarship follow the student to the other eligible school?**

Cases where a student changes enrollment from one eligible nonpublic school to another eligible nonpublic school during the course of the school year will need to be handled on a case-by-case basis and will involve the sending school, the receiving school, and MSDE.

**10. How is income determined for foster children and children in informal kinship care?**

For children in foster care, the BOOST application should be completed with information on the foster parent as the guardian, and the family income should be reported as zero.

For students in informal kinship care, the BOOST application should be completed with information on the relative providing kinship care as the guardian, and the family income of the kinship care family should be reported. The application must include an electronic attachment of an affidavit verifying informal kinship care. The BOOST application page will include a link to an MSDE kinship care affidavit form. Kinship care affidavits also can be obtained from the local school district, local department of social services, or local office on aging in the county in which the kinship care family resides.

**11. If the student's parents are divorced or separated, which parent information should be submitted in the application?**

Information for the parent that claims the child as a dependent on the tax form should be submitted in the application. If income documentation other than a tax form is provided, then information for the parent with primary custody should be submitted in the application.

**12. Can a student attending an eligible nonpublic school be considered for a BOOST scholarship if the family resides outside of Maryland?**

No, the family must reside in Maryland.