Questions and Answers on the BOOST Scholarship Program

January 2021

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. **The online application states to upload my Federal Income Tax Return for the year 2020. I have not filed taxes is there another option?**

   If you are required by federal law to file an Federal income tax return**,** you must upload the complete, 2020 Federal income tax return with supporting documents, to your BOOST application**.** The completed Federal income tax return is used to determine income eligibility. The following documents will **not** be accepted in lieu of your 2020 Federal income tax return:

   - Missing pages or forms for the income tax return
   - W-2 statement
   - Statement from employer
   - Applicant statement taxes not filed

   If you believe that you are not required by law to file a 2020 Federal income tax return, you should carefully review the detailed IRS information regarding who is required to file an Federal income tax return which can be found at www.irs.gov/faqs/filing-requirements-status-dependents-exemptions. There is also an interactive, on-line IRS interview that will further help you determine if you're required to file a Federal income tax return or if you should file to receive a refund. This on-line interview can be found at www.irs.gov/help/ita/do-i-need-to-file-a-tax-return.

2. **I have reviewed the federal filing requirements and determined I am not required to file an Federal income tax return for 2020 tax year. Is there another option to provide my income verification to the BOOST application?**

   If by law, you are not required to file a federal income tax return and have not submitted a tax return to the IRS, you may submit an alternative form with the required documents. The BOOST application provides an option to download, complete and upload to your application the BOOST

Alternate Form for Income Verification **and** supporting written documents. The BOOST Program will substantiate if you are not required to file a federal tax return. If it is determined that you are not exempt from filing a tax return and only a BOOST Alternate Form for Income Verification has been uploaded to your application; the BOOST Program will determine that your application is incomplete and will not be considered for a scholarship.

3. **If a student received a BOOST scholarship in the 2020-2021 school year, will the student be eligible for a BOOST scholarship in the 2021-2022 school year?**

The legislation that governed the BOOST program for the 2020-2021 school year stated 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."

To be considered for a 2021-2022 renewal award however, a 2021-2022 BOOST application still must be submitted, and the family must still meet income eligibility guidelines.

Continuance of the BOOST program beyond 2020-2021 is contingent upon action taken by the Maryland General Assembly in the current session, which will end April 12, 2021.

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

A list of potential participating schools is available on the BOOST web page. As of January 2021, the list includes schools that are participating in the fiscal year 2021 Nonpublic Textbook Program and that offer programs beyond kindergarten. To be fully eligible, schools must also certify in spring 2021 that they will administer certain assessments, provide assessment results for BOOST students in a manner that does not violate student privacy, comply with certain non-discrimination laws, and meet other requirements of the program.

Participating school eligibility requirements are contained in House Bill 588 of the 2021 legislative session (the Fiscal 2022 Budget Bill). A link to the final version of House Bill 588 will be posted on the BOOST webpage. You can also find versions of the bill at the Maryland General Assembly web site: http://mgaleg.maryland.gov

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

Yes, students currently attending an eligible school can apply for the scholarships. In fact, as noted above, they **must re-apply every year**.

6. **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 2021 Nonpublic Textbook Program and the school offers educational programs for grades above kindergarten.

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

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

8. **How do I apply?**

The link to the online application is posted on the BOOST web page. You will need to provide the following as PDF electronic attachments with your application:

- Your completed Federal Income form for the year 2020; and

- Documentation showing that the student has pursued enrollment in an eligible nonpublic school for the 2021-2022 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.

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

The electronic application for 2021-2022 is set up so that applicants create a single login ID and account. Applicants enter household information once, then add each student to the application separately.

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

Applications will be reviewed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to ensure that they are complete. Incomplete applications will **NOT** be processed.   If the parent's gross household is income eligible, then the student is 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 - except for special education students, 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 endorse the payment over to the school. Because of COVID-19, schools may obtain the parental check endorsement by email or other electronic methods.

11. 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?

Yes. 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.

12. 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 written information denoting the foster parent as the guardian, and the family income should be reported as zero ($00.00).

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. Informal 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.

13. 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.

14. 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