

BOOST scholarship program accepting applications

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is now accepting applications for the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST), a scholarship program designed to help students from income-eligible families attend nonpublic – including Catholic – schools.

The program is being funded through the state budget for the second year. This year's \$5.5 million allocation includes \$500,000 more than was allocated for the 2016-17 school year. That increase plus remaining funds from last year make a total of nearly \$6 million in scholarships available for the 2017-18 school year.

Scholarships range from \$1,000 to \$4,400 each, with the highest amount going to students who qualify for the federal government's free or reduced-price meals program and are transferring from public schools.

Students who received a BOOST scholarship in 2016-2017, and who still meet the eligibility criteria, are eligible to renew their scholarships, but must complete an application to receive an award in 2017-2018. The application deadline is June 15.

Additional information, including a link to the application, can be found at educationmaryland.org.

In a statement, Garrett O'Day, associate director for education for the Maryland Catholic Conference, the Maryland bishops' legislative lobbying arm, credited both Gov. Lawrence J. Hogan Jr. and the state legislature for "their work in continuing and expanding the opportunities that this program is providing to thousands of families."

"The demand for information about the program has been high since the legislative session began," O'Day added, "and we expect many more parents to apply this year."

Established in March 2016, the BOOST scholarship is administered by the MSDE and a seven-member BOOST advisory board appointed by the state legislature. The program is available for students either already attending or hoping to attend a nonpublic school.

Students must have either applied to be enrolled in a participating school before completing the application. Priority is given to students coming from public schools.

“There are so many parents who want educational options for their children, especially in the lower-income areas of the state,” O’Day said. “This program is delivering and more and more parents are counting on it.”

Nearly 2,500 students, from 20 of the 24 counties in the state (including Baltimore City), received scholarships in the inaugural year.

Students coming from public schools received 46 percent of the total scholarship assistance for 2016-17 and received higher scholarship amounts than their counterparts who were already attending a nonpublic school.

Students coming from public schools were offered scholarships totaling \$2.25 million of the \$4.85 million awarded.