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R00A03

Funding for Educational Organizations

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Maryland State Department of Education

Response to the Analyst's Review and Recommendations

Senate Education, Business & Administration Subcommittee –

March 6, 2026

House Education & Economic Development Subcommittee –

March 9, 2026



Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent of  
Schools

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) welcomes this opportunity to share with the Committee some of its success stories and to address questions raised by the analyst.

**Performance Analysis: Managing for Results**

**MSDE should quantify the annual impact of the fiscal 2022 outreach student undercount on MSB's formula funding through fiscal 2027.**

**MSDE Response:**

This request is addressed in the response provided separately by the Maryland School for the Blind.

**MSDE should comment on the reasons for the steep rise in personnel costs since fiscal 2025.**

**MSDE Response:**

This request is addressed in the response provided separately by the Maryland School for the Blind.

**Issues**

**1. BOOST**

**The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) notes that the budget language is not updated to refer to the immediately preceding school year and recommends a technical correction to refer to updated school years throughout the language.**

**MSDE Response:**

MSDE concurs.

**DLS recommends that language from the fiscal 2026 Budget Bill be restored regarding awards for special education students and a report on the BOOST Program.**

**MSDE Response:**

MSDE concurs.

**BOOST Student Awards**

**MSDE should comment on why special education awards did not meet the \$617,522 legislative directive.**

**MSDE Response:**

MSDE offered awards to students according to the priorities set out in the legislation (renewals, siblings, new/public/free, new/public/reduced). MSDE offered a special education award equal to the base award to every qualifying student on the wait list. For Fiscal Year 2026, the BOOST program

allocated \$881,000 in supplemental awards for 228 special education students. This allocation is based on the parent's identification of the child in the application as receiving special education services. Parents declined awards for 56 students (\$207,050) and schools could not verify that 35 students were receiving special education services (\$104,150). Lastly, a student's total BOOST award, which could include a special education adjustment, a high school adjustment or both, is adjusted based on the other financial aid offered by the school such that a BOOST award does not exceed the cost paid by the parent. For fiscal 2026, the program awarded \$569,800 in special education awards to families.

### **Review of Assessment Data**

**MSDE should comment on the efforts of BOOST schools to close the gap between BOOST and non-BOOST students on standardized assessments.**

### **MDSE Response:**

BOOST schools are not required to report on how they are closing the gap in BOOST student vs. non-BOOST student performance, nor is MSDE required to collect this information.

### **Operating Budget Recommended Actions**

1. Add the following language to the special fund appropriation:

Further provided that \$569,800 of this appropriation shall be used only to provide an additional award for each student with special needs that is at least equal in amount to the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) Program scholarship award that a student is awarded in accordance with paragraph (6) above.

Further provided that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) shall submit a report to the budget committees by January 15, 2027, that includes the following:

- (1) the number of students receiving BOOST Program scholarships;
- (2) the amount of the BOOST Program scholarships received;
- (3) the number of certified and noncertified teachers in core subject areas for each nonpublic school participating in the BOOST Program;
- (4) the assessments being administered by nonpublic schools participating in the BOOST Program and the results of these assessments. MSDE shall report the assessment results reported by nonpublic schools to the budget committees in an aggregate manner that does not violate student data privacy;
- (5) in the aggregate, for each BOOST Program scholarship awarded (a) the nonpublic school and grade level attended by the student; (b) the school attended in the 2025-2026 school year by the student; and (c) if the student attended the same nonpublic school in the 2025-2026 school year,

whether, what type, and how much nonpublic scholarship aid the student received in the 2025-2026 school year and will receive in the 2026-2027 school year;

(6) the average household income of students receiving BOOST Program scholarships;

(7) the racial breakdown of students receiving BOOST Program scholarships;

(8) the number of students designated as English language learners receiving BOOST Program scholarships;

(9) the number of special education students receiving BOOST Program scholarships;

(10) the county in which students receiving BOOST Program scholarships reside;

(11) the number of students who were offered BOOST Program scholarships but declined them as well as their reasons for declining the scholarships and the breakdown of students attending public and nonpublic schools for students who declined scholarships;

(12) the number of students who received BOOST Program scholarships for the 2025-2026 school year who are attending public school for the 2026-2027 school year as well as their reasons for returning to public schools; and

(13) the number of students who received BOOST Program scholarships for the 2025-2026 school year who withdrew or were expelled from the nonpublic schools they were attending and the reasons for which they withdrew or were expelled; the schools they withdrew or were expelled from; and the length of time students receiving BOOST Program scholarships were enrolled at a nonpublic school before withdrawing or being expelled.

**Explanation:** This language requires MSDE to report, by January 15, 2027, on the distribution of the BOOST scholarships; information on the students receiving BOOST scholarships; teacher certifications for nonpublic schools participating in the BOOST Program; and assessments being administered in nonpublic schools participating in the BOOST Program, including student performance. The language also requires that MSDE report on students who choose to decline scholarships or attend public schools after participating in the BOOST Program in the past, along with their reasons for doing so, and information on students receiving scholarships for the 2025-2026 school year who withdrew or were expelled from the nonpublic schools that they were attending. Finally, the language requires that the BOOST Advisory Board shall take into account the special needs of students with disabilities as it is determining scholarship award amounts and that \$569,800 of the BOOST appropriation shall be used to provide higher awards for these students.

<b>Information Request</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
BOOST Program participation	MSDE	January 15, 2027

**MSDE Response:**

MSDE concurs.

2. Amend the following language:

, provided that this appropriation shall be for a Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) Program that provides scholarships for students who are eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program to attend eligible nonpublic schools. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) shall administer the grant program in accordance with the following guidelines:

(1) To be eligible to participate in the BOOST Program, a nonpublic school must:

(a) have participated in Program R00A03.04 Aid to Non–Public Schools Program for textbooks and computer hardware and software administered by MSDE during the ~~2024–2025~~ 2025-2026 school year;

(b) provide more than only prekindergarten and kindergarten programs;

(c) administer national, norm–referenced standardized assessments chosen from the list of assessments published by the U.S. Department of Education ~~used for the 2024–25 school year~~ to qualify nonpublic schools for the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program. The nonpublic schools must administer the assessments to all students as follows:

(i) English/language arts and mathematics assessments each year for students in grades 3 through 8, and at least once for students in grades 9 through 12; and

(ii) a science assessment at least once for students in grades 3 through 5, at least once for students in grades 6 through 8, and at least once for students in grades 9 through 12; and

(d) comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, Title 20, Subtitle 6 of the State Government Article, and not discriminate in student admissions, retention, or expulsion or otherwise discriminate against any student on the basis of race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression. Nothing herein shall require any school or institution to adopt any rule, regulation, or policy that conflicts with its religious or moral teachings. However, all participating schools must agree that they will not discriminate in student admissions, retention, or expulsion or otherwise discriminate against any student based on race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression. If a nonpublic school does not comply with these requirements, it shall reimburse MSDE all scholarship funds received under the BOOST Program for the ~~2025–2026~~ 2026-2027 school year and may not charge the student tuition and fees instead. The only other legal remedy for violation of this provision is ineligibility for participating in the BOOST Program.

**Explanation:** This language makes technical changes to align annual language related to the BOOST Program with policies set in the fiscal 2026 Budget Bill. This language specifies that to be eligible to participate in the BOOST Program, a nonpublic school must have participated in the program for textbooks and computer hardware and software administered by MSDE during the prior school year

(2025-2026), and must administer national, norm-referenced standardized assessments chosen from the list of assessments published by the U.S. Department of Education to qualify nonpublic schools for the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program. This language also specifies that if a nonpublic school does not comply with these requirements, it shall reimburse MSDE all scholarship funds received under the BOOST Program for the 2026-2027 school year.

**MSDE Response:**

MSDE concurs.