

Hope Scholarship Board Meeting Minutes

315 70th Street, SE – 2nd Floor Conference Room

Charleston, WV 25304

December 9, 2024

The special meeting of the Hope Scholarship Board was called to order by Treasurer Riley Moore, Chair, on Monday, December 9, 2024, at 2:03 p.m., after determination that a quorum of members was present through a silent roll call. The following Board members attended the meeting: State Attorney General Designee, Steven Travis; Director of the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs, Jill Upson; Chancellor of Higher Education's Designee, Brian Weingart, and parent representatives Zak Ritchie, Alice Bonnell, and Jamion Wolford. State Auditor Designee, Anthony Woods and State Superintendent of Schools Designee, Dustin Lambert, were absent.

The following West Virginia State Treasurer's Office (WVSTO) staff members attended the meeting: Deputy Treasurer, Steve Bohman, Gina Joynes, Lindsay Marchio, Mindy Parsley, James Fuerhoff, Amy Willard, Michelle Penaloza, Riley Keaton, Carrie Hodousek, Christian White, Kayla McNair, Amy Constable, Kortnie Workman, and Elizabeth Liston.

The agenda for the meeting consisted of the following:

- I. Welcome – Introductions/Roll Call – Call to Order
- II. Approval of Minutes from the November 12, 2024, Meeting
- III. Hope Scholarship Program Update
- IV. Consideration of the Hope Scholarship Program 2023-2024 Annual Report
- V. Consideration of qualified expense requests pursuant to W.Va. Code §18-31-7(a)(13). This agenda item may result in an amendment to Board's Non-Qualifying Expense List and/or Reimbursement Policy.
- VI. Future Meetings
- VII. Other Business
- VIII. Adjournment

I. Welcome – Introductions

The Chair began the meeting by recognizing two new parent members to the Hope Scholarship Board. Alice Bonnell from Wood County and Jamion Wolford from Jackson County were recently appointed by the Governor and the Chair thanked them for their willingness to serve as a member of the Board.

The Chair took a moment to allow Alice and Jamion an opportunity to introduce themselves. Alice Bonnell noted that her children are IIP students who used the 45-day pathway to become eligible for the program and Jamion Wolford noted that he is using the program for one of his daughters to attend a nonpublic school.

The Chair also extended his gratitude and well wishes to two of the previous parent members of the Board, Charlie Russell and Amanda Hoylman.

II. Approval of Minutes

The Chair indicated the first item on the agenda was the approval of the meeting minutes from November 12, 2024, which were distributed to the members prior to the meeting. The Chair asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes. None were heard. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Steven Travis and was seconded by Zak Ritchie. There being no discussion, the Chair polled the members and the motion to approve the minutes was adopted.

II. Hope Scholarship Program Update

The Chair indicated the next order of business before the Board was an update regarding the Hope Scholarship Program. The Chair recognized Assistant Treasurer of Hope Scholarship, Amy Willard, to give the update.

Ms. Willard began the update with the 2024-2025 application counts as of this the morning of December 9, 2024:

Approved	11,312
On-Hold	156
Declined	711
Submitted	17
<u>Ineligible</u>	<u>1,021</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>13,217</u>

Ms. Willard advised this was an increase of 221 total applications received since the last meeting.

She further noted that the number of Approved students will soon be reduced by 612 students who returned to public school at the beginning of the school year but who failed to notify the Board. These students were identified through an analysis performed with the WV Department of Education to identify Hope students still actively enrolled in public school. None of these student accounts had been funded for the school year because they have not submitted their Notice of Intent to their county board of education. Student First Technologies is working on a script to do a mass update of the status of these accounts. After the script is complete, the Approved count will stand at 10,700 and the Declined count will stand at 1,323.

Ms. Willard added that \$16,923,748.28 in approved payments has been disbursed to schools, service providers, and parents as of Saturday, December 7, 2024.

Ms. Willard stated as of Saturday, December 7, 2024, we have received 22,266 TheoPay orders which is an increase of 4,883 orders since the last meeting on November 12, 2024, with only 395 orders awaiting fulfillment, which demonstrates the fulfillment team is doing a great job in keeping up with the orders.

Board staff manually onboarded 41 additional service providers during the month of November. Staff continue to hold monthly office hours for our school and service providers to advise of updates and help resolve issues and have continued to provide regular newsletters to Hope participants.

Ms. Willard advised the Board's Legislative rules were heard and approved by the Legislative Rule Making Review Committee on November 13, 2024. As mentioned at the November Board meeting, language was added to the rules to allow the authorization of a residency verification system and authentication process in lieu of providing the other residency documentation set forth in the rules. As a result, Board staff are moving forward with implementing a simplified option for parents to utilize PLAID to verify their residency using their state issued license or ID. The PLAID option will expedite the review process and result in a faster decision on a student's application especially for continued participation confirmation applications. Families who do not wish to utilize Plaid, or where PLAID is unable to confirm the address, will be able to upload the existing proof of residence documentation in the legislative rules, such as utility bills, vehicle registrations, etc. for manual review. Again, use of PLAID will be completely optional for applicants. We anticipate that it will be live on January 3, 2025.

Ms. Willard added current Hope Scholarship participants wishing to continue participation in the program for the 2025-2026 school year, the Continued Participation Confirmation will be available in the online portal on January 3, 2025, and running through June 15, 2024, giving families five and half months to let Board staff know they wish to continue participation in the program for next year. This process was formerly known as a Renewal Application, but the name was changed by House Bill 4945 during the 2024 legislative session.

Ms. Willard concluded by advising that new students will be able to continue to apply for the current 2024-2025 school year at the 25% funding rate up through February 28, 2025, and then be able to apply for the 2025-2026 school year beginning March 1, 2025.

The Chair asked if there were any questions for Ms. Willard. None were heard.

IV. Consideration of the Hope Scholarship Program 2023-2024 Annual Report

The Chair indicated the next order of business is a presentation and consideration of the Hope Scholarship Annual Report. The Chair recognized Assistant Treasurer of Hope Scholarship, Amy Willard, to give the presentation.

Ms. Willard briefly went through the report. She did advise the version included in the board packet is a draft version, as they are still working on tweaking some final formatting and anticipate the final version will be released soon. She noted that all the data included in the draft was accurate and would not change.

Ms. Willard noted that page three of the report contains a letter from Treasurer Moore, Chairman of the Board, outlining some accomplishments for the school year. Page four is

a list of the Hope Scholarship Board members, noting it was not updated to include the two new members since Charlie Russell and Amanda Hoylman were on the Board for the full 2023-2024 year. Page five contains some basic FAQs about the program and page six is a summary of key information about the program. At the top of page six are the final application counts for the year. We ended the year with 5,443 awarded applications out of 7,250 total applications. In the middle of the page, the full-year award amount for 2023-2024 was \$4,488.82. At the bottom of page six is the financial summary as follows:

Unspent Balance from 2022-2023	\$ 1,416,265.04
Funds Transferred to Student accounts 2023-2024	\$26,448,179.48
Student Account Rebates/Refunds 2023-2024	\$ 261,701.59
Total Spending – Student Accounts 2023-2024	\$22,347,675.03
<u>Total Funds Returned to State 2023-2024</u>	<u>\$ 2,653,130.02</u>
<u>Unspent Balances in Student Accounts 2023-2024*</u>	<u>\$ 3,125,341.06</u>

Ms. Willard advised that page seven is a list of Hope Scholarship Recipients by County, with McDowell County being the only County that did not have a Hope Recipient. She pointed out the counties with the largest Hope population are Kanawha, with 720 students, Berkeley, with 439 students, and Raleigh, with 308 students. She noted that those counties also have a large total population. Page eight lists the Hope Scholarship Recipients by Grade, with Kindergarten and First grade having the highest number of participants. The bottom of page eight is Recipients by Gender – there is nearly a fifty-fifty split between male and female students.

Page nine reflects Hope Scholarship Recipients by Educational Pathway – 74.59% are enrolled in non-public schools, 23.87% are under an Individual Instructional Plan or IIP student. Additionally, it is noted that 1.54% of the students did not submit an NOI to their local county board of education.

Page 10 reflects Recipients by Race and includes a comparison to the state’s overall population. Page 11 is the spending summary as follows:

Parent Reimbursements (0.9%)	\$ 194,810.54
Payments to Nonpublic School (77.4%)	\$17,295,513.09
Payments to Education Service Providers (ESPs) (7.0%)	\$ 1,575,082.07
<u>Payments to MyScholarShop Suppliers (14.7%)</u>	<u>\$ 3,282,269.33</u>
Total	\$22,347,675.03

Ms. Willard noted that page 12 reflects the Location of Nonpublic School Payments. Payments to WV-based schools totaled \$16,356,229.27 and comprised 94.57% of total school payments. Page 13 reflects the Location of Education Service Provider Payments – which included tutors, therapists, micro schools, and virtual education programs. Payments to WV based education service providers was \$1.4 million that comprised 92.20% of total payments. Page 14 reflects MyScholarShop payments to suppliers by category with Books/Curriculum and Technology Purchases with the highest amount of expenditures.

The appendix of raw data begins on page 15. Pages 16 and 17 show nonpublic school

payments by nonpublic school in alphabetical order by state. All the WV schools are first before it moves to the other states. The top five schools receiving the highest total payments for the year were Cross Lanes Christian (Kanawha), Faith Christian Academy (Berkeley), Bible Center (Kanawha), Heritage Christian Primary & Preparatory School (Logan), and St. Joseph School (Berkeley).

Pages 17 and 18 show the Service Provider Payments. The top five providers of educational services are Airborne Christian Academy (Berkeley), City on a Hill Christian Academy (Harrison), West Logan Church, Homeschool Ministry (Logan), Center Branch Academy (Harrison), and Gilmore County Christian Academy. The top five providers were all microschoools or hybrid homeschool providers.

In conclusion, Ms. Willard advised pages 20 and 21 show the MyScholarShop Spending by Vendor. The top five suppliers were Best Buy for Business, Rainbow Resource, Lakeshore Learning, ODP Business Solutions, and Timber Doodle.

The Chair asked if there were any questions for Ms. Willard. None were heard.

The Chair asked for a motion to adopt the Hope Scholarship Annual Report, included in the Board packet. Steven Travis made the motion and Zak Ritchie seconded the motion. When asking for discussion, the Chair advised the Annual Report is completed in concert with our efforts to always be transparent in what we are doing and thanked staff for their work on the report. Hearing no other discussion, the Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

V. Consideration of Qualified Expense Request pursuant to W.Va. Code §18-31-7(a)(13) and amendment to the Board's Nonqualifying Expense List

The Chair advised at the previous meeting there were questions raised regarding some of the qualifying expense requests and discussion about whether the Board should consider limiting the amount of Hope Scholarship funds that could be spent on various extracurricular activities. The Chair stated he knows that every member of the Board has the best interest of students participating in this program in mind and we all want to ensure that every child is getting the best education that they possibly can.

The Chair stated with regards to limiting dollars for certain extracurriculars, there is a hesitancy for the Board to take such action – ESA programs were created and intended for parents to have the flexibility to create an educational plan that works best for them. Under the Hope Scholarship Act, part of that education includes, *“To afford the Hope Scholarship student opportunities for educational enrichment such as organized athletics, art, music, or literature.”* This is not an exhaustive list and it is clear the intent of this program is to aid in a diverse spectrum of educational attainment. Additionally, the Act makes clear, *“The rules or policies by the board should avoid excessive bureaucracy and overly prescriptive mandates and instead shall focus on encouraging participation in the program and encouraging educational service providers to provide parents and Hope Scholarship students with a broad array of education options.”*

The Chair continued, stating that it was noted last meeting the Hope scholars could spend

all of their funds on extracurricular or elective type activities, but that does not mean the parent still isn't required to provide an education for their child in the required subjects of reading, language, mathematics, science and social studies. If a parent elects to use their Hope funds for supplemental activities, they would be required to pay out-of-pocket for the required subjects. As a reminder, all Hope Scholarship students must demonstrate annual academic progress at the end of each school year.

The Chair advised, with the above in mind, that we move on to the next order of business. The Chair recognized Assistant Treasurer of Hope Scholarship, Amy Willard, to give the presentation regarding the consideration of qualified and nonqualified expenses for the Hope Scholarship Program.

Ms. Willard advised pursuant to W.Va. Code §18-31-7(a)(13), Hope Scholarship Board (Board) staff have identified multiple items for which they are requesting the Board to help make a determination regarding whether an item should be considered a qualifying expense for the program, whether any limitations should be placed on the purchase of certain items, or whether items should be added to the Board's nonqualifying expense list.

Ms. Willard continued by briefly covering each item on the list:

Horse Rental Fees for Riding Lessons.

An interested service provider who owns a stable and provides horseback riding lessons submitted a service offering for a horse rental fee to use the stable's horses for the riding lessons. The horseback riding lessons themselves have already been approved by Board staff as a physical education qualified expense. Failure to approve the associated horse rental/usage fee would disproportionately impact low-income Hope Scholarship families who do not own their own horse for their riding lessons. Board staff therefore recommend that rental fees for the use of stable horses for riding lessons be considered a qualified expense as part of the cost of the riding lessons to ensure that all Hope Scholarship students interested in pursuing this type of physical activity have access.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding horseback riding rental fees before we consider a motion. No discussion was heard.

The Chair asked for a motion to interpret rental fees for the use of stable horse for riding lessons as part of the cost of the riding lessons and therefore a qualified expense. Jill Upson made the motion. Zak Ritchie seconded the motion. No discussion was heard. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Athletic Equipment

Board staff seek clarification from the Board on how to handle athletic equipment. The Board's qualifying expense list includes both extracurricular activities provided by a public school as well as tuition and fees for programs of study, curriculum, or supplies needed for supplemental or elective educational courses, which would include physical education and athletics. There are a variety of physical education and athletic related services approved for Hope Scholarship students, including but not limited to horseback riding, gymnastics,

karate, dance, basketball, soccer, homeschool sports teams, recreational sports teams, etc.

Requests for athletic equipment are extremely common. Many such requests are low dollar amounts and for small pieces of equipment which are easily approved, but program staff also receive a high volume of requests for equipment purchases that are either large or a high dollar amount. Program staff have attempted to look at manufacturer's age recommendations on such equipment but that is time consuming and often results in parental disputes over the appropriateness of such items for purchase. Examples include weightlifting equipment, large gymnastics mats, large nets for hitting baseballs, pitching machines, snowboards, etc.

Possible options for sports equipment would include a prohibition on all sports equipment, a prohibition on each sports equipment item over a certain dollar amount, or no limitation on sports equipment unless program staff have a reasonable suspicion that the purchase to be for someone other than Hope Scholarship student for which it is being purchased, such as the attempted purchase of a thousand-dollar weight set for a first grader. Board staff do not recommend the first option because it would be very restrictive to our Individualized Instructional Plan families.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding athletic equipment before we consider a motion. Brian Weingart asked if the Board staff had a recommendation as to what that threshold should be if the Board were to select a dollar limit. Ms. Willard stated it would be difficult to come up with a dollar amount because it can vary greatly depending on the type of activity. Ms. Willard feels if the Board were to put some type of dollar limit, like \$200, that would cover most of what families would need. Ms. Bonnell said she feels putting a dollar limit could hurt the Junior and Senior High School population as the older kids tend to need the more costly equipment. She also pointed out, for consistency, this needs to be viewed in the same light as the decision made regarding horseback riding. Mr. Wolford asked if there are any parameters around reselling of equipment. He also pointed out the concern for Board staff to be scrutinized for having to make these decisions. Ms. Willard advised there is something in the parent agreement that says the Hope Scholarship families will not resell any of the items purchased with their Hope Scholarship funds, so this is a prohibition on reselling the items. Ms. Bonnell also wanted to confirm that if an item requested for purchase was denied by Board staff, does the parent have the option to offer an explanation and explain lesson objectives. Ms. Willard advised the parent can submit a Qualifying Expense Form, then it could be presented to the Board.

The Chair asked for a motion to permit Board staff to approve athletic equipment purchases unless there is a reasonable suspicion that the purchase is for someone other than the Hope Scholarship student. Alice Bonnell made the motion. Jill Upson seconded the motion. No discussion was heard. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Exception for Insects Under Live Animals

Board staff recommend an exception for insects be added to the live animals currently included on the nonqualifying expense list. Several parents have inquired about purchasing ant farms and butterfly gardens. Those are common educational tools for science

courses/lessons but are currently not being approved due the inclusion of live animals on the unallowable expense list. Due to the educational value of such studies, Board staff believe insect kits such as this be allowable for purchase with Hope Scholarship funds.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding insect kits such as ant farms and butterfly gardens before we consider a motion. No discussion was heard.

The Chair asked for a motion to amend the existing nonqualifying expense language for live animals to add an exception for insect kits. Jill Upson made the motion. Brian Weingart seconded the motion. No discussion was heard. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Exception for Kinetic Sand

Board staff recommend adding an exception to the Board's existing nonqualifying expense item for toys to allow the purchase of kinetic sand. The Board has already granted exceptions for molding clay and play-doh, which are very similar in nature to kinetic sand. Kinetic sand can help with the development of fine motor skills and is often used by children with ADHD for sensory stimulation.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding kinetic sand before we consider a motion. No discussion was heard.

The Chair asked for a motion to amend the existing nonqualifying expense language for toys to add an additional exception for kinetic sand. Brian Weingart made the motion. Steven Travis seconded the motion. No discussion was heard. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Greenhouses

Board staff received a Qualifying Expense Request form from a parent requesting greenhouses be approved as a qualifying expense. The request indicated that the greenhouse could be used to provide hands-on learning to study Botany, agriculture, and assist with the student's STEM education. Many public schools have greenhouses for these same reasons.

Greenhouses can vary significantly in cost. In a search of the website of an approved TheoPay vendor, prices ranged from as low as \$60 for a mini, walk-in portable greenhouse to large greenhouses costing thousands of dollars. While Board staff are not experts on greenhouses, there are several greenhouses with excellent reviews for under \$200.

Due to the educational value of the purchase of a small greenhouse for agriculture and botany studies, Board staff would recommend that some greenhouses be allowed for purchase by adding greenhouses over \$200 to the Board's nonallowable expense list. This would allow the purchase of greenhouses under \$200.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding greenhouses over \$200 before we consider a motion. No discussion was heard.

The Chair asked for a motion to add greenhouses over \$200 to the Board's nonallowable expense list. Jill Upson made the motion. Brian Weingart seconded the motion. No discussion was heard. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Library Membership Fees

Board staff received a qualifying expense request form from a parent living in the Eastern Panhandle who asked for nonresident membership fees at libraries to be a qualified expense under the Hope Scholarship Program. The parent indicated that while they often utilize their local library in their county of residence, there are other libraries out of state which offer additional resources for their child that they can't obtain through their local library. These out of state libraries charge roughly \$25 per year for an out of state membership.

Board staff recommend adding individual library membership fees to the qualifying expense list and adding them to the Board's reimbursement policy due to the nature of the expense, and also add them to the reimbursement policy to allow flexibility.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding individual library membership fees before we consider a motion. Jill asked if there were any examples of resources in-state versus out-of-state. Ms. Willard advised the parent stated they were studying the Civil War, stating the family had checked out Civil War Song CDs from the Morgan County library, and library books and audio books from the Hanley Library in Winchester, VA. The parent also stated they utilize a computer game at the library in Hancock, MD, to learn about Civil War Heroes. Ms. Upson asked if the parent's contention is that those audio books are not available at a West Virginia Library. Ms. Willard advised the parent stated they wish to enhance the student's access to the wealth of resources that various public libraries offer. Ms. Upson stated that answered her question.

The Chair asked for a motion to add individual library membership fees to the qualifying expense list and amend the Board's reimbursement policy to permit these expenses to be reimbursable. Brian Weingart made the motion. Jill Upson seconded the motion. No discussion was heard. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Composters

Board staff received a qualifying expense request form from a parent requesting to purchase a composter with Hope Scholarship funds. The parent argues that composting helps kids understand the importance of ecosystems and the natural cycles of life and about the importance of sustainable practices. They further argue that composting teaches children about biology, chemistry and physics along with recycling, biodegradable materials, etc.

Composters are available through a TheoPay enabled provider. Prices range from as low as around \$30 to as high as \$490. There are a large variety of options available for under \$150 that would allow families to educate their children on this topic at a reasonable price.

Due to the educational value of composters, Board staff recommend adding composters in excess of \$150 to the Board's nonqualifying expense list. This would allow the purchase of composters \$150 or less with Hope Scholarship funds.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding composters before we consider a motion. Alice Bonnell asked if the \$150 cap including the shipping cost and any sales tax. Ms. Willard advised that shipping and taxes would be considered separately and not be included in the \$150.

The Chair asked for a motion to add composters over \$150 to the Board's nonallowable expense list. Brian Weingart made the motion. Jill Upson seconded the motion. No discussion was heard. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Flight Simulation Equipment

Board staff received a request from a parent for flight simulation equipment such as a flight yoke system and flight rudder pedals. The parent indicated that their student wants to attend the Air Force Academy and be a pilot. The student is taking a free course through the Civil Air Patrol but would like to purchase this equipment to practice flying for his future career. The flight simulation equipment specifically requested by the parent are each around \$170. In researching other flight simulation equipment, there are more extensive flight simulators available for higher dollar amounts such as \$800.

Board staff recommend that this student's request for flight simulation equipment be approved but that future requests for flight simulation equipment be considered on a case-by-case basis by Board staff.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding this specific student request for flight simulation equipment before we consider a motion. No discussion was heard.

The Chair asked for a motion to approve this specific student's request for flight simulation equipment based upon the individual circumstances but that any future requests for flight simulation equipment be considered on a case-by-case basis by Board staff. Brian Weingart made the motion. Jill Upson seconded the motion. No discussion was heard. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Hunting and Fishing Licenses

Board staff received a request from a parent for hunting and fishing licenses to be covered by the Hope Scholarship. The parent has also sent correspondence to the Governor's Office and the WV Division of Natural Resources. The parent believes that yearly and lifetime licenses would provide Hope Scholarship students with the ability to enjoy the great outdoors of our state. The parent argues that all subjects can be touched with hunting and fishing licenses, from science to math to social studies and even English.

West Virginia lifetime hunting and fishing licenses for children range from \$603.75 for

children ages 5 to under 10 and \$724.50 for children ages 10 to under 15. For children 15 and older, an adult hunting and fishing license is \$805. Annual licenses vary depending on the type and class of license being purchased.

If the Board wishes to allow this as a qualifying expense, Board staff would recommend adding it to the Board's reimbursement policy due to the difficulty of getting this set up for purchase directly in the online platform. Also, as a reminder, the Board recently added lifetime subscriptions or memberships, other than Rosetta Stone, to the Board's nonqualifying expense list. The Board has also deemed weapons to be unallowable expense.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding hunting and fishing licenses before we consider a motion. Mr. Wolford asked if we try and compare the qualifying expense requests to what is made available to students in public schools. Ms. Willard stated yes, when we are considering the allowability of certain items, we do consider if the items are available to a student in public school. Ms. Upson advised, in a prior meeting, she did have an issue with the lifetime subscription of Rosetta Stone, but given the cost annually, a lifetime subscription made sense for that particular program, but she feels this item is a bit different and it may be more cost effective to allow payment on an annual basis. Conversation ensued regarding the actual cost of an annual license plus the additional stamps needed, and as to what age a student must be before having to buy a license. Mr. Wolford stated the annual license could be around \$150. The Chair advised he feel this item really straddles the line in between recreational and educational, and may open the program up to other things, since this is not an offering in the public schools. Mr. Wolford said as an avid hunter and fisherman, he would not advise the support of lifetime licenses. Mr. Travis noted the public perception regarding the approval of hunting and fishing licenses. Ms. Upson asked if Board staff could look at each request for this item on a case-by-case basis. Ms. Willard stated that if we are doing it on a case-by-case basis, then it would have to be added to the Board's reimbursement policy, and documentation would have to be provided with the reimbursement request. Ms. Upson said she would be ok with approving it as a reimbursement.

The Chair made a motion to table the discussion to allow time to think about it and gather more information. Jill Upson seconded the motion. During discussion, Mr. Wolford requested that staff perform more research on hunting and fishing licenses and the necessary age requirements for them. The Chair polled the members and the motion carried.

Kitchen Equipment, Clothing Items and Footwear

Board staff received a request for the Board to reconsider kitchen equipment as a qualifying expense. The request reads as follows:

"These materials (and others!) are required for an APPROVED herbal medicine course my son is taking. They were ALL recently denied:

Mortar and Pestle Set; Meat Thermometer; Coffee and Spice Grinder; Glass Spray Bottle Kit x10; Mesh Strainers; Stainless Steel Funnels; Glass Graduated Cylinder Set

Please revise your policy on NO KITCHEN EQUIPMENT. It is necessary for many agricultural uses that we have as homeschoolers.

My children are also raising meat birds and learning to butcher. They should be able to use their funds to purchase necessary equipment like:

Butchering knives, chicken pluckers, an outdoor burner, and boots!

Gardening, herbal medicine, animal husbandry and other agricultural practices are comprising our science studies this year and we are being severely limited in what we can do due to the current prohibition of kitchen equipment, clothing, etc. Please reconsider this policy to allow homeschoolers the freedom to pursue specialized educational interests with their Hope funding.”

Board staff recommend no changes in the Board’s current policy regarding kitchen equipment, clothing items and footwear. A few of the denied items listed in the parent’s request, such as the stainless-steel funnels and glass graduated cylinder set could be approved as science equipment.

Board staff believe that is important to note that parents are permitted to teach their children about any topic – the Hope Scholarship Program does not restrict the elective courses being taught to Hope Scholarship Students. The program just may not fund every possible item or subject of interest to a Hope Scholarship student. Just like public school students often must pay for supplies out of pocket, there may be instances when Hope Scholarship students will need to do the same.

For example, if the Board were to lift the restriction on shoes and footwear, program staff will be in the position of having to determine which specific footwear is required by a course or nonpublic school. There have been footwear requests for athletic sneakers, rain boots, steel-toe boots, etc. Some nonpublic schools may require a specific type of dress shoe while others may allow white or black sneakers. This places a significant administrative burden on program staff and would reduce the speed of processing orders for all other Hope Scholarship students if staff are routinely having to research whether a footwear purchase should be permitted as a course or school requirement. It is not unreasonable to expect parents to provide footwear for their children, even specialized footwear needed for a specific elective course. The Board Staff recommended that no changes be made to the Board’s current policy.

The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding the Board’s current policy regarding kitchen equipment, clothing items or footwear. Ms. Upson stated in looking at the list provided by the parent, it seems some of the items are Science related. Ms. Upson asked if some of these items would be available from some of our vendors that sell science kits. Ms. Willard advised we will work with this parent and should be able to get some of the items like the mesh strainers, the funnels, and the graduated cylinder set purchased through Amazon.

The Chair advised if the Board wishes to make no changes to the current policy regarding kitchen equipment, clothing items, and footwear, a motion is not necessary, and the Board’s current policy will remain in effect. No motions were heard.

VI. Future Meetings

The Chair moved to the next order of business, future meetings. He announced the next meeting of the full Hope Scholarship Board will be announced in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. He asked for discussion regarding future meetings, and none was heard.

VII. Other Business

The Chair asked if there was any other business to come before the board. None was heard.

The Chair also advised this was his last Hope Scholarship Board Meeting. The Chair advised it has been an honor and privilege to serve in this capacity. He stated he is looking forward to seeing where the program goes and feels it will be on the cutting edge as it relates to ESAs.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. Weingart made a motion to adjourn the meeting and the motion was seconded by Ms. Upson. Hearing no discussion, the Chair polled the members and the motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 3:11 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Elizabeth Liston

Minutes approved by the Board on February 27, 2025



Steve Bohman, Deputy State Treasurer