

Montana HiSET Option Program

Guideline Manual



Montana
Office of Public Instruction
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Guideline 1. Selection procedures should ensure that students who enroll in the Montana Option Program (1) will not graduate with their class because of credit deficiency, and (2) are otherwise capable of completing graduate requirements.

- **Age of the student:** Minimum 16 years of age.
- **When student may enroll:** Must enroll and be accepted before either the start of the first or second semester of school. Enrollment may begin at the start of the first or second semester of the student's senior year. The student must complete the program in a time frame that allows them to graduate on time with his cohorts, and remain in school until the last day all seniors must attend. A list of all HiSET participants must be submitted to the Montana HiSET Option Specialist by the second week of the semester. Out of district transfer students may apply for an enrollment waiver from the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI).
- **Degree of credit deficiency:** The HiSET Option Program can be recommended by school officials after a review of the student's records show that the student will be lacking credits to graduate. Upon enrollment in the fourth academic year, a student in the HiSET Option Program should be no less than one semester and no more than three semesters behind their ninth grade cohort as calculated by credits that can be earned in a traditional setting by graduation.
- **Evidence of academic ability:** The student must be able to read at a level sufficient to complete HiSET instruction and testing. Sufficient reading ability may be demonstrated by a reading level of 8.0 or higher on the Test of Adult Basic Education, other standardized tests, or other evidence. The student must have sufficient academic ability to complete the HiSET Option Program instruction and testing in all subjects by the time his ninth grade cohort graduates. Districts may set reading and achievement levels that exceed state required levels.
- **Students identified with disabilities are eligible for participation in the program with proper documentation:**
 - A current Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 Plan that indicates participation in the program is appropriate for the student.
 - IEP or Section 504, documenting any educational services and related accommodations necessary for successful completion of the program, must include the testing component and have a psychological report no older than three years.
 - Accommodation requests must be submitted and approved by the test provider. (Educational Testing Service www.hiset.ets.org)

- **Program orientation meeting and planning procedures:** The student, his parent(s) or legal guardian(s), the student's guidance counselor, administrator or designee, and at least one teacher must participate in an orientation meeting outlining the requirements and stipulations of the HiSET Option Program. The meeting will include a discussion of the educational options available to the student; the academic, attendance, and behavioral expectations of the student once accepted into the HiSET Option Program; and the anticipated goal of the program. If a student completes academic preparation before he takes the final HiSET test, the educational options should also be discussed with the parties involved. Within the context of the meeting, the student's academic plan must be discussed. The academic plan decided upon at the team meeting should clearly outline provisions for pre- and post-HiSET test instruction. Students must remain full-time students until graduation and cannot be released from school. HiSET Option Program class time can be spent earning other academic credit related to the student's career pathway. Because the HiSET Option Program is an academic program that includes test preparation, HiSET testing before October 1 of the first semester or March 1 of the second semester is prohibited. A student participating in the HiSET Option Program the first semester may test in the second semester before March 1.

- **Procedures for explaining the Montana Option Program and expectations for student performance:** Participation in the Montana Option Program is voluntary, and all parties (the student, his parent(s) or legal guardian(s), the student's guidance counselor, administrator, and at least one teacher) must agree that this program is the best course for the student and indicate as such with their signature on the Montana Option Program contract. Parties must agree that the time outside the option program will be spent devoted to credit recovery or activities related to the student's transition plan.

- **Procedure for obtaining written agreement from the student and his parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to voluntary program participation:** The Montana HiSET Option Program will provide a standard contract for school districts to use. Schools may include additional documentation relevant to the student's academic plan and attach it to the OPI version.



Guideline 2. Counseling is required prior to enrollment and must be available throughout participation in the Montana Option Program.

- **Access to certified counselors:** All HiSET Option Program students will continue to have access to their school guidance counselors.
- **Counselor's role in the program:** HiSET Option Program students will have access to postsecondary career pathway counseling. These students must participate in the Montana Career Information Service (MCIS), or an equivalent process, to develop career portfolios to ensure college and career readiness. Career portfolios can be the foundation for HiSET Option Program students' individualized learning plans. A transition plan must be included in the career portfolio.
- **Records:** School records will be maintained for Montana Option Program students the same as for other high school students and graduates.



Guideline 3. Curricula and instructional content must be at the high school level.

- **Expectations:** HiSET Option Program students are required to maintain full-time attendance as defined locally, and successfully complete the academic plan outlined in the HiSET Option Program Contract. The HiSET Option Program class must be a minimum of 15 hours a week. That time must include test preparation and college and career readiness activities. Should a student's school district feel that a student needs more time working on the curriculum provided to him, then a change in hours may be made as long as the program coordinator, school principal, and student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) are notified prior to changing the student's hours. Additional classroom credit courses and experiential learning should be made available to HiSET Option Program students to meet the full-time attendance policies of the local district. Release prior to the last day is not allowed by any senior class student.
- **Credit Expectations:** Students in the HiSET Option Program must be full-time students, and the hours outside the HiSET classroom should be devoted to course work normally required for graduation or classes aligned to their career portfolio.
- **Expectations pertaining to the range of types of instructional materials and procedures for supporting the districts' efforts:** Curricula and instruction must be at least at the secondary school level according to the OPI policies and procedures for the direct purpose of ensuring students are college and career ready. Instructional methods and materials in the program classes should emphasize the development of improved skills and understanding in reading, math, writing, social studies, and science in direct preparation for the HiSET test. Participants need to develop test-taking skills in relation to those subject areas, but a majority of their time should be spent on activities that develop higher-order thinking skills applicable at home, work, and in postsecondary educational situations.
- **Expectations pertaining to the integration of workforce development instruction procedures for supporting the districts' efforts:** Schools will be prepared to support students' postsecondary goals beyond the classroom. The counselor or classroom teacher will actively support the students in their development of a career pathway portfolio and transition plan. This process should continue throughout the semester.

Guideline 4. To ensure effective instructional delivery, sufficient instructional resources and qualified staff must be allocated to the HiSET Option Program.

- **Instructor qualifications:** Montana HiSET Option Program instructors must be certified teachers by the state of Montana unless approved by the HiSET Option Program Specialist.
- **Expectations pertaining to instructional delivery strategies (e.g., individual direct instruction, group instruction, and the use of computer assisted instruction):** The HiSET Option Program will encourage best practices and student-centered instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Instructional support will be provided by the OPI.
- **Expectations pertaining to student/teacher ratio:** The student/teacher ratio is not to exceed 15/1. A waiver must be submitted to the HiSET Option Program Specialist if the ratio in the HiSET classroom is higher.
- **Expectations pertaining to instructional materials (e.g., print materials and electronic materials):** School districts HiSET Option Program must provide an adequate supply of textbooks, practice materials, and technology (i.e., iPads, Smart Phones, etc.) and educational software to support students in preparing to successfully pass the HiSET tests and meet college and career readiness standards.
- **Stipulations related to professional staff development:** Representative staff members involved with the HiSET Option Program in school districts must participate in staff development provided by the OPI and/or the school district.
- **Off campus stipulations:** The attendance of HiSET Option Program students must be monitored by the school district, and transportation and organizational arrangements must be made to make it possible for HiSET Option Program students to participate in school-based opportunities on school grounds.



Guideline 5. Students who successfully complete the HiSET Option Program must be awarded a credential by the school district that includes the term “diploma.”

- The HiSET tests are a nationally normed, standards-based means of measuring high school competency. Educational Testing Service (ETS) has granted Montana permission to use the HiSET test battery as a means to demonstrate proficiency, provided the program leads to a high school diploma. If a student fails to pass the HiSET after the allotted opportunities within the time of study, then they do not meet the requirements of the program and are not given the credit waiver. HiSET scores cannot be banked for future use by the student.
- Students who satisfy all HiSET Option Program requirements will be given official school recognition of their achievement. Their successful attainment will be celebrated by participating in the high school graduation ceremony.
- Local options programs may require a higher passing score on the HiSET test than the state approved score or make any of the guideline elements more rigorous to meet their program’s standards.

Guideline 6. Planning and oversight of the implementation of the HiSET Option Program will be the responsibility of the OPI.

- **The organizational unit and person primarily responsible for the Montana Option Program:**
 - Montana HiSET Administrator
 - High School Equivalency Specialist
- Site monitoring will be conducted to ensure compliance with the guidelines.

Guideline 7. The state agency will receive data and information about the HiSET Option Program from ETS.

Guideline 8. HiSET test administration for the HiSET Option Program must conform to all regulations protecting the integrity of the tests.

- **Test administration:** All tests will be administered in an official HiSET testing center under the direction of a chief examiner, or test site supervisor, skilled in the administration of the HiSET test.

- **Procedures for ensuring that the test centers are adequate to absorb the additional number of test takers resulting from the HiSET Option Program:**
Option program schools must contact their associated test center at the beginning of the semester. The program coordinator or HiSET classroom teacher must inform the center as to the potential examinee numbers and general timing of test taking to ensure adequate seating for the option program students.

- **Procedures for identifying test takers who are HiSET Option Program students:**
The HiSET Test Center Examiner will admit the students for testing after the obligatory online registration.

Guideline 9. General Implementation Plan and Procedures (Accountability).

- **Criteria for closing a HiSET Option Program:** It will be required of each participating district to meet or exceed the state of Montana's HiSET Option Program passing rate of 80 percent of those students who tested in the program. If said program does not meet the HiSET Option Program passage rate, a probationary term of one year will be assigned. If, at the end of the probationary year, the program still has not reached the state level of passage the option program will be closed. A school may reapply after a one year hiatus.

- **Programs must meet the obligations outlined in their application:** Modifications must be submitted to and approved by the OPI. An improvement plan may be initiated to solve the problem before closure of the program is implemented.



Guideline10. Financial Support.

To ensure effective instructional delivery, sufficient instructional resources and qualified staff financial support must be allocated to the Montana HiSET Option Program in the school district.

Montana Youth Challenge and HiSET Option Program Provision

1. Students that are under contract in an existing HiSET Option Program and wish to attend Montana Youth Challenge (MYC) must be identified. Their contract must be amended to include the Montana Youth Challenge Academy as a component of fulfilling their HiSET Option Program Contract.
2. Any additional coursework and/ or credit recovery required for the completion of the student's contract must be negotiated between the home school and MYC with the details included in the amended contract.
3. The district/school must contact the OPI and submit a copy of the amended Youth Challenge candidate's HiSET Option Program contract and the Permission to Test Waiver Form to the OPI HiSET Option Program Specialist.
4. Once the contract has been received by the OPI, students can begin at the specified semester enrollment date at MYC.
5. It will be the responsibility of the home school HiSET Option Program Coordinator to register the student with Educational Testing Service and schedule testing at MYC.



Definition of Terms

HiSET Option Program: In accordance with the local board of trustees' policy, it is the plan of study fashioned by the administration counselors and teachers with parent approval to enable students to graduate with their ninth grade cohort. HiSET Option Program students must devote 15 hours a week toward their academic plan.

The contract is a binding document signed by the administrator, program coordinator, and counselor of the participating school, as well as the parent or guardian and the student. It details the schedule, plan of study, and behavioral expectations necessary for the student to be allowed to test and subsequently graduate. Failure to complete any part of the contract negates the ability to graduate with the cohort. No HiSET test scores achieved while in the HiSET Option Program can be banked for future use.

Graduation Plan for the HiSET program will specify the regular high school classes the student must attend to graduate, the career readiness action they will take, and the academic plan to be used for passing the HiSET test.

Graduation: The point at which the senior or fourth-year student ends their high school career.

The Montana Career Information System, or MCIS, is a comprehensive Internet-based system that delivers accurate and useful local and national information to assist users in making career plans and learning how to achieve their educational and career goals.

