



Office of Public Instruction

Montana HiSET Options Program Guidelines 2024-2025

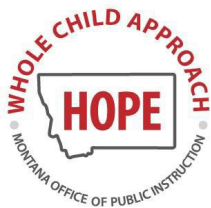


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Guideline 1. School District Expectations

To ensure sufficient intensity of services, enrollment caps and small class sizes with qualified staff are required. Financial support must be allocated to the HiSET Options Program in the school district to provide ample resources and effective instructional delivery.

Percentage of Students Allowed in the Program

At the end of three years, the average population of HiSET Options Program graduates should not exceed a specific percentage of the three-year average of the total general population of high school graduates. This calculation will be determined by graduation and dropout ranges posted to the Office of Public Instruction [Growth and Enhancement of Montana Students \(GEMS\) Website](#).

If applying as a district-wide program, the total graduation numbers of each school in the district may be utilized. If high schools/districts fall 5% below the average statewide graduation rate for the previous year, an exception may be granted on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the OPI. This exception considers local and at-risk variables.

Specific student enrollment ranges per school year are as follows:

- 1000+ students = no more than 3% enrolled in HiSET Options
- 500-999 students = no more than 4% enrolled in HiSET Options
- 200-499 students = no more than 5% enrolled in HiSET Options
- 100-199 students = no more than 7% enrolled in HiSET Options
- 50-99 students = no more than 8% enrolled in HiSET Options
- 0-49 students = no more than 10% enrolled in HiSET Options

Student/Teacher Ratio

The student/teacher ratio is not to exceed 15/1.

Instructor Qualifications

HiSET Options Program instructors must be current certified and licensed teachers in the State of Montana.

School Guidance Counselor Obligation

School guidance counseling is required before enrollment and must be available throughout participation in the HiSET Options Program. School guidance counselors are expected to provide postsecondary and career pathway counseling.

Student Attendance

The student must maintain full-time attendance until the last day all seniors attend classes. Attendance must be monitored by the school district, and transportation and organizational arrangements must be made to make it possible for HiSET Options Program students to participate in school-based opportunities on school grounds.

Professional Development

Staff members involved with the HiSET Options Program must participate in professional development facilitated by an approved [OPI Renewal Unit Provider](#). COMING SOON (Fall 2024) - HiSET Options Coordinators must complete the HiSET Options Hub Course before applying to become an Options school.

Gap in Service or Establishment of a New HiSET Options Coordinator

- If a HiSET Options Program has been previously established but has not operated for one school year or more, it is the responsibility of the HiSET Options program to resubmit the school district application to the OPI Adult Education Unit.
- If a new HiSET Options Coordinator is appointed, it is the responsibility of the HiSET Options program to resubmit the school district application to the OPI Adult Education Unit.

Guideline 2: HiSET Options Coordinator Expectations

Student Registration in the TCA Portal

- HiSET Options Coordinators are expected to register each student with HiSET during the first two weeks of the semester.
- Each student must be registered by the HiSET Options Coordinator who has access to the [HiSET TCA Portal](#).
 - HiSET Options students may not be registered independently or by a HiSET examiner.
 - Do not share account information with HiSET Options Students.
- Upon registration, HiSET Options Coordinators must:
 - Use the HiSET Options Coordinator email address for each HiSET Options student account. Do not use the student's email address. HiSET Options student accounts should include the school's mailing address and the HiSET Option Coordinator's phone number.
 - Designate the school association in the TCA Portal/edit details section.
- Training for the TCA Portal is available on the [HiSET Website](#) (videos 3-5).
 - Training is mandatory for HiSET Options Coordinators before access to the TCA Portal is granted. Submit proof of completion to OPI.

Student Rosters

- Enrollment in the HiSET Options Program must take place during the first two weeks of the semester.
- [HiSET Options Rosters](#) are due two weeks after the start of each semester (fall or spring) and must be submitted confidentially and securely via the [State of Montana File Transfer Service](#).
- Rosters must include the school name, student first name, student last name, HiSET identification number, student contract completion date, start date in the HiSET Options program, start date of the fall semester, start date of the spring semester, graduation date if applicable, and drop date if applicable.
 - Contact the OPI High School Equivalency Specialist if your school requires a trimester or alternative roster template.
- Rosters should document the entire school year.
 - If the program spans multiple semesters, update the roster to include students added to the second semester.
 - If you need to add a student to the roster, this must be done within the first two weeks after each semester starts.
 - Students will be denied completion of the program if their name is not on the roster after the two-week deadline.

Dropped Students

- Submit the *updated* roster to the OPI Adult Education Unit *no later than one week after the drop date*. This document must be submitted confidentially and securely to the OPI via the State of Montana File Transfer Service.
- Report the date the student dropped on the roster.
 - Do not remove the student from the roster.
- The OPI will "block" the account and render it unavailable.
- Do not share account information with HiSET Options students.
- *HiSET Options scores cannot be retained for future use*.
 - Dropped students must create a new HiSET account to take the battery after being unenrolled from the HiSET Options Program.

End-of-Year Narrative and Final Roster

- *Narrative and final roster is due no later than two weeks after graduation.*

- The [End-of-Year Narrative](#) and final roster must be submitted confidentially and securely via the State of Montana File Transfer Service.

Annual Review of Guidelines

- HiSET Options Coordinators will review the HiSET Options Guidelines annually with HiSET Options teachers, school guidance counselors, school administrators, and other staff involved with the HiSET Options Program before a cohort of students is selected for the program.

Guideline 3. Student Eligibility

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

Student Age

Qualifying students must be at least 16 years of age.

Student Enrollment

Qualifying students may enroll at the start of the first or second semester of their senior year.

HiSET Options students must complete the program in a time frame that allows them to graduate with their cohort and remain in school until the last day all seniors must attend classes. Rosters are due two weeks after the start of each semester (fall or spring). Fifth-year seniors may participate in the program.

Credit Deficiency

The HiSET Options Program can be recommended by school officials after a review of the student's records shows that the student will be lacking credits to graduate.

Upon enrollment in the fourth academic year, a student in the HiSET Options 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. Upon enrollment in the fifth academic year, the same credit limits will apply.

Academic Ability

Students must be able to read at a level sufficient to complete HiSET instruction and testing to qualify for the HiSET Options Program.

Sufficient reading ability must be demonstrated by at least an 8th-grade reading level or higher (TABE NRS Level 4) on the [Test of Adult Basic Education 11/12](#), or other standardized tests demonstrating sufficient academic merit as documented and approved in the School District Application. The student must complete HiSET testing in all subjects by the time his or her ninth-grade cohort graduates.

Students with Disabilities

Students with physical/cognitive 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.

The IEP or Section 504 Plan must document any educational services and related accommodations necessary for the successful completion of the program, include the testing component, and have a psychological report no older than three years.

Information on HiSET test accommodations is available on the [HiSET Website](#). Accommodation requests must be submitted by the student and parent/guardian and approved by the test provider before scheduling exams. Accommodation requests may take two weeks or longer to be approved.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the HiSET Options Program is voluntary, and all advocates (the student, his or her parent(s) or legal guardian(s), or the homeless liaison for unaccompanied homeless youth, classroom teacher, school guidance counselor, administrator, and HiSET Options Coordinator) must agree that this program is in the best academic interest of the student and indicate as such with their signature on the HiSET Options Program contract. Parties must agree that the time outside the HiSET Options Program will be devoted to credit recovery or activities related to the student's transition plan.

Program Orientation

HiSET Options Coordinators are expected to facilitate a program orientation meeting before allowing the student into the HiSET Options Program. The student and all advocates must participate in an orientation meeting regarding the requirements and expectations as outlined in the student contract for the HiSET Options Program. The orientation meeting should outline the expectations of the program, academic options, participation requirements, post-graduation goals, activities to support academics, and a transition plan.

Student Contract

The orientation meeting emphasizes the [HiSET Options Student Contract](#). The OPI will provide a standard contract template for school districts to use. Additional documentation relevant to the student's academic plan can be attached to the standard contract template. Participants will discuss academic options, participation requirements, post-graduation goals/transition plans, and activities to support academics. The following individuals must be in attendance:

- Student
- Parent/Guardian
- Classroom Teacher
- School Guidance Counselor
- Principal/Administrator
- HiSET Options Coordinator

Each section of the contract must be completed, and all parties must sign off on the document before a student is granted access to the program.

Guideline 4. Instructional Components

Instructional methods should align with the student contract and career pathway plan in the Montana Career Information System (MCIS 360).

Class Instruction

The HiSET Options Program class must be a minimum of 15 hours a week of *in-person instruction*. That dedicated time must include test preparation and college and career readiness activities. Additional HiSET preparation, classroom credit opportunities, and experiential learning should be made available to students consistent with the outlined academic activities.

Instructional materials must be at the secondary school level to ensure students are college and career-ready, as outlined in the [OPI Content Standards](#). School districts must provide an adequate supply of textbooks, practice materials, and technology (i.e., iPads, Smart Phones) and educational software to support students in preparing to successfully pass the HiSET tests.

Instructional strategies should deepen understanding of reading, math, writing, social studies, and science in

direct preparation for the HiSET battery. These may include individual direct instruction, group instruction, and the use of digital learning platforms. Although students must develop test-taking skills, most of the HiSET Option class time should be spent on activities that promote higher-level thinking and further skill development consistent with college and career readiness. The HiSET Options Program will encourage best practices and student-centered instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

Workforce Development

The HiSET Options Coordinator or school guidance counselor will actively support students in developing a career pathway portfolio in [MCIS 360](#) that must include a career plan, self-surveys, as well as education and employment exploration. Portfolios should be utilized throughout the semester, be consistent with student goals, and outline a post-graduation transition plan. When a student completes HiSET preparation and testing, college and career readiness activities must continue throughout the semester. To request support or training with MCIS 360, contact the [Montana Department of Labor and Industry](#).

Credit Expectations

Students in the HiSET Options Program must go to school full time, and the hours outside the HiSET Options Program classroom should be devoted to coursework normally required for graduation or classes aligned to their career portfolio.

Distance Learning

If distance learning is deemed necessary, it must be a synchronous model, and pre-approved by the state office in the school district application. *Asynchronous distance learning cannot count toward the required 15 hours a week of instruction.*

Guideline 5. HiSET Test Administration

The HiSET Options Program must abide by prescribed scheduling processes and conform to all test administration regulations.

Allowable Testing Window

Because the HiSET Options Program is an academic program that includes test preparation, HiSET testing is only allowed during specific time frames. Exceptions for early testing may be pre-approved by the OPI on a case-by-case basis based on local needs and other variables.

Testing before October 1 of the first semester or March 1 of the second semester is prohibited. A student participating in the HiSET Options Program during the first semester may test in the second semester before March 1.

If a school participating in the HiSET Options Program uses a trimester schedule, the testing window may be adjusted to fit the school's needs, as documented in the School District Application and pre-approved by the OPI. An example of a typical trimester schedule:

- **August – November:** Testing starts October 1
- **November – February:** Testing starts January 1
- **February – May/June:** Testing starts April 1

Test Seat Availability

The HiSET Options Coordinator must inform the Chief Examiner at the test center at the beginning of the semester of the anticipated number of seats needed, and the anticipated test window to ensure adequate testing slots are available.

Underage Waiver Requests

- Contact the regional Chief Examiner for an age waiver if HiSET Options students will be testing at a test

- center.
- Contact the OPI Adult Education Unit for an age waiver if HiSET Options students will be utilizing the online-proctored exam.

Test Center Check-In and Identification Requirements

The test center examiner will admit HiSET Options students for exams after test takers provide state-issued photo identification and residency is established. The HiSET Options Coordinator, school guidance counselor, or homeless liaison/foster care point of contact shall work with the youth upon enrollment in the program to obtain identification before testing. Assistance may include payment of any fees if necessary.

Test administration

All tests will be administered in an official HiSET Test Center or via the HiSET online-proctored exam.

Guideline 6. Diploma and Record Retention

The HiSET tests are a nationally normed, standards-based means of measuring high school competency. HiSET has been permitted to use the HiSET battery to demonstrate proficiency, provided the program leads to a high school diploma.

HiSET Score Requirements

HiSET scores are reported on a 1–20 score scale in 1-point increments. There is a set passing score of 8 for each of the five subtests and a combined score of 45 to pass the HiSET exam. Visit the HiSET Website to learn more about [HiSET Exam Scoring](#). If a student fails to pass the HiSET battery after the allotted opportunities within the time of study, they do not meet the requirements of the program and are not given the credit waiver. *HiSET scores cannot be banked for future use if students drop from the HiSET Options Program.*

Local HiSET Options Programs may require a higher passing score on the HiSET battery than the state minimum score or make any of the guideline elements more rigorous to meet their program’s standards. A score of 15 on each subtest and a 4 on the Language Arts – Writing essay demonstrates College and Career Readiness.

High School Diploma

Students who complete and satisfy all the HiSET Options Program requirements will be awarded a credential by the school district that includes the term “diploma.” Students will be allowed to participate in the high school graduation ceremony.

Student Records

School records must be maintained for HiSET Options Program students the same as for other high school students and graduates.

Guideline 7. Accountability and Compliance

The OPI is responsible for the planning and oversight of HiSET Options Programs in Montana. The OPI High School Equivalency Administrator and OPI High School Equivalency Specialist oversee the HiSET Options Program.

Monitoring and Compliance

The OPI will conduct periodic monitoring and compliance reviews to ensure the HiSET Options Guidelines are adhered to. Monitoring may include, but is not limited to, attendance records, student contracts, MCIS portfolios, rosters, end-of-year narratives, and testing timelines.

Schools with an approved HiSET Options Program should be prepared for monitoring that may occur without notification via an in-person site visit or desk/document monitoring. If irregularities are found, technical assistance will be provided. Failure to abide by the HiSET Options Guidelines or satisfy requests of the OPI may result in suspension of account privileges and/or program status.

Data Validation

HiSET Options Coordinators must report the number of graduates in their program no later than two weeks after graduation. The OPI will receive data and information about the HiSET Options Program from the HiSET vendor to validate testing outcomes.

Provisions

Fifth Year Senior Provision

Fifth year seniors may participate in the HiSET Options Program provided they meet guidelines as outlined in the HiSET Options Guidelines and have a current HiSET Options Program Contract with the school.

These students may leave the program at the end of the ninth semester (first semester of the fifth year) if the contract requirements have been met and they have passed the HiSET.

Montana Youth Challenge Academy and HiSET Options Program Provision

For existing Montana HiSET Options Programs:

- Students who are under contract in an existing Montana HiSET Options Program and wish to attend Montana Youth Challenge Academy (MYCA) must be identified. Their contract must be amended to include the MYCA as a component of fulfilling their HiSET Options Program Contract.
- Any additional coursework and/or credit recovery required for the completion of the student's contract must be negotiated between the home school district and MYCA with the details included in the amended contract.
- The district/school must contact the OPI and submit a copy of the amended MYC candidate's HiSET Options Program contract to the OPI High School Equivalency Specialist.
- Once the contract has been received by the OPI, students can begin at the specified semester enrollment date at MYCA.
- It is the responsibility of the home school district's HiSET Options Coordinator to register the student with HiSET and schedule testing at MYCA.

For Montana schools that *do not* have a HiSET Options Program:

- Students who are not under contract for HiSET Options can participate through MYCA if MYCA is operating a HiSET Options Program. MYCA offers multiple alternative pathways to graduation.
- Students must be currently enrolled in high school and must be intending to enroll in MYCA.
- MYCA in coordination with the cadet's high school district will submit a copy of the MYCA candidate's HiSET Options Program contract to the OPI High School Equivalency Specialist.
- Once the contract has been received by the OPI, students can begin at the specified semester enrollment date at MYCA.
- It is the responsibility of the MYCA HiSET Options Coordinator to register the student with HiSET, enroll the student in MCIS 360, and schedule testing.

Unaccompanied Minor/Homeless or Foster Care Youth Provision

Students should be immediately enrolled in school so that they can access all the services and supports as required under ESSA and the McKinney-Vento Act. However, students may not enroll in the HiSET Options Program after the two-week deadline at the start of each semester.

Unaccompanied Minor/Homeless or Foster Care Youth Points of Contact: Any HiSET Options Program students identified as homeless or in foster care should be referred to district staff assigned to provide services to these populations. These students have a right to transportation to and from school, free school meals, and additional support as required under ESSA and the McKinney-Vento Act.

Unaccompanied Minor/Homeless or Foster Care Youth Evidence of Academic Ability: Regarding evidence of academic ability, districts may set reading and achievement levels that exceed state-required levels, however in compliance with ESSA and the McKinney-Vento Act, districts are encouraged to remove barriers for homeless or foster care students. Local HiSET Options Programs may require a higher passing score on the HiSET battery than the state minimum score or make any of the guideline elements more rigorous to meet their program's standards. A score of 15 on each subtest and a 4 on the Language Arts – Writing essay demonstrates College and Career Readiness. However, in compliance with ESSA and the McKinney-Vento Act, districts should eliminate

exceeded levels or other barriers for homeless or foster care students.

Unaccompanied Minor/Homeless or Foster Care Youth Program Orientation Meeting: Students identified as unaccompanied homeless youth do not need their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to sign the contract. These students self-enroll. If the student is an unaccompanied homeless youth, then the student may request that the district homeless liaison attend the orientation meeting in place of a parent or guardian. Students in foster care can enroll in the program with the consent of their case worker or other individual authorized to make educational decisions for the youth. Students in foster care may request that their case worker, or other educational representative, attend the HiSET Options orientation meeting.

Unaccompanied Minor/Homeless or Foster Care Youth Financial Support: Districts may need to set aside Title I, Part A, Title I, Part D, or McKinney-Vento funding to meet the needs of homeless or foster youth who are participating in the HiSET Options Program. Such funds may be used to cover additional costs of transportation, school supplies, tutoring, testing fees, fees for required identification, or other costs related to the student's enrollment, attendance, and successful completion of the program. The homeless liaison or foster care point of contact should be consulted when a HiSET Options student is identified as homeless or in foster care.

Unaccompanied Minor/Homeless Students and Work-Based Learning: Programs should consider work-based learning opportunities for students who are homeless and may need to work to support themselves if the work aligns with the student's career plan outlined in MCIS 360.

Definition of Terms

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

Student Contract:-A binding document signed by the administrator, HiSET Options Coordinator, and school guidance 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 Options Program can be banked for future use.

Graduation Plan: 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.

Montana Career Information System (MCIS 360): 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.

Homeless: A student may be identified as homeless if they are living in any of the following situations: emergency shelter, hotel, motel, doubled-up (couch surfing), sleeping in a car, camping out, or living in substandard housing. Program staff who suspect a student may be homeless should consult with the district homeless liaison. Students identified as homeless are entitled to transportation, free school meals, and additional support and services.

Unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY): This is a homeless student who is not living with a parent or legal guardian. They have the right to self-enroll in school and in alternative educational options. The district homeless liaison should act as an advocate on behalf of these students.

McKinney-Vento Act: This is the federal law that provides students identified as homeless with certain rights and protections. These include, but are not limited to, the right to attend school, transportation, and free school meals. Some districts may receive grant funding from the OPI to provide additional services to homeless students.

Homeless Liaison: Every district is required to appoint a staff member to serve as the liaison. The liaison is charged with identifying students who may be homeless and providing them with services as required under the law. The liaison is also tasked with advocating on behalf of unaccompanied homeless youth who need assistance navigating educational issues.

Foster Care: Any student who is in an out-of-home placement where they receive 24-hour care. This may be a group home, foster family home, or a kinship care placement. Like homeless students, foster care children have the right to attend school, transportation, and free school meals.

Foster Care Point-of-Contact: Every district is required to appoint a staff member to serve in this position if they have enrolled a child in foster care. The POC is charged with insuring that foster care youth are placed in an educational setting that best meets their needs and connecting students to services.

Title I, Part D: This is a grant funded program to provide services to students who have encountered the juvenile justice system. These students may be living in a county/tribal juvenile detention center, a group home, a foster home, or with their families. Title I, Part D funds can be used to provide additional services to these students, or

to other students at risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

Title I, Part A: Most districts in Montana receive funding through Title I, Part A. ESSA requires that districts set aside a portion of these funds to provide additional services to students identified as homeless. Montana's ESSA plan requires a minimum of \$35 per identified student to be set aside. These funds can be used to pay for school supplies, transportation, testing fees, or other educational expenses for students identified as homeless.