



## Office of Public Instruction

# Montana HiSET Options Program Guidelines Year 2021-22

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

- **Age of the student:** Minimum 16 years of age.  
**When student may enroll:** Must enroll and be accepted either before 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 or her cohorts and remain in school until the last day all seniors must attend classes. 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). Fifth year seniors may participate in the program.
- **Degree of credit deficiency:** The Montana 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 Montana 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. Students who are eligible for graduation with a state minimum diploma (20 credits) as allowed under SB18 should work with their school counselors to graduate under that option whenever possible. Upon enrollment in the fifth academic year, the same credit limits will apply. Students who are homeless or in foster care may be granted a waiver for lower than allowed credit deficiency if the student possesses the minimum academic reading and math ability needed. See next section below for evidence of academic ability.
- **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 Montana HiSET Option Program instruction and testing in all subjects by the time his or her ninth-grade cohort graduates. 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.
- **Students who are identified as homeless or in foster care:**
  - Students who are suspected of being homeless or who have been identified as homeless should be referred to the district homeless liaison for additional supports and services.
  - If the student has been identified as an “unaccompanied homeless youth” (someone who is not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian) then the student may self-enroll in the program. If needed, the district homeless liaison may sign enrollment forms or documents with the student.
  - Students in foster care may enroll with the permission of an educational decision maker and should be referred to the district foster care point of contact for

additional supports and services.

- 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 formally enroll in the Options program after the two-week deadline at the start of each semester.

▪ **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](http://www.hiset.ets.org))

- **Program orientation meeting and planning procedures:** The student, his or her 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 Montana HiSET Option Program. If the student is an unaccompanied homeless youth, then the student may request that the district homeless liaison attend the meeting in place of a parent or guardian. Students in foster care may request that their case worker, or other educational decision maker, attend the meeting. 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 Montana 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. The Montana HiSET Option Program class time can be spent earning other academic credit related to the student's career pathway.

Because the Montana 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 Montana HiSET Option Program 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, test preparation and scheduled testing times can be adjusted to fit the schools needs on an individual basis. A typical trimester schedule and calendar:

- **August – November:** Testing starts October 1
  - **November – February:** Testing starts January 1
  - **February – May/June:** Testing starts April 1
- **Procedures for explaining the Montana HiSET Option Program and expectations for student performance:** Participation in the Montana HiSET Option Program is voluntary, and all parties (the student, his or her parent(s) or legal guardian(s), or the homeless liaison for an unaccompanied homeless youth, 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 HiSET Option Program contract. Parties must agree that the time outside the Montana HiSET 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 or her 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. Students identified as an unaccompanied homeless youth do not need their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to sign paperwork. These students self-enroll. 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.

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

- **Access to certified counselors:** All Montana HiSET Option Program students will continue to have access to their school guidance counselors.
- **Homeless liaisons and Foster Care Points of Contact:** Any Montana HiSET Option Program students who have been 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 supports as required under ESSA and the McKinney-Vento Act.
- **Counselor’s role in the program:** Montana HiSET Option Program students will have access to postsecondary career pathway counseling. These students must participate in the Montana Career Information Service or an equivalent process to develop career portfolios to ensure college and career readiness. Career portfolios can be the foundation for Montana 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 HiSET 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:** Montana HiSET Option Program students are required to maintain full-time attendance as defined locally and successfully complete the academic plan outlined in the Montana HiSET Option Program Contract. The Montana 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, 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. Note that an unaccompanied homeless youth is self-enrolled in the program and they do not need to have permission from a parent or legal guardian. Additional classroom credit courses and experiential learning should be made available to Montana 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 Montana HiSET Option Program must be full-time students, and the hours outside the Montana HiSET Option Program classroom should be devoted to course work normally required for graduation or classes aligned to their career portfolio. Programs should consider work-based learning opportunities or other options for students who are homeless and may need to work to support themselves as long as the work aligns with the student's career plan outlined in MCIS.
  
- **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 district's 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 Montana HiSET Option Program.***

- **Instructor qualifications:** Montana HiSET Option Program instructors must be certified teachers by the state of Montana unless approved by the Montana 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 Montana 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 Montana HiSET Option Program Specialist if the ratio in the classroom is higher.
- **Expectations pertaining to instructional materials (e.g., print materials and electronic materials):** 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 and meet college and career readiness standards.
- **Stipulations related to professional staff development:** Representative staff members involved with the Montana 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 Montana HiSET Option Program students must be monitored by the school district, and transportation and organizational arrangements must be made to make it possible for Montana HiSET Option Program students to participate in school-based opportunities on school grounds.

***Guideline 5. Students who successfully complete the Montana 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 test 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 by the student.
- Students who satisfy all of the Montana 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. However, in compliance with ESSA and the McKinney-Vento Act districts should eliminate exceeded levels or other barriers for homeless or foster care students.

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

- The organizational unit and person primarily responsible for the Montana HiSET Option Program:
  - Montana HiSET Administrator
  - High School Equivalency Specialist
  
- Site monitoring will be conducted to ensure compliance with the guidelines. Programs that show no irregularities will be monitored on a three-year rotation. New programs will be monitored the year they begin the program and cycle into the three-year rotation process. Programs with irregularities will be provided with technical assistance.
  
- Programs in good standing will complete and submit an end of the year narrative to the Montana HiSET Option Program Specialist by July 1 of the academic year.

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

Schools must report the number of graduates in their program by July 1.

***Guideline 8. HiSET test administration for the Montana 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 Montana HiSET Option Program:** Montana HiSET Option Program schools must contact their associated test center at the beginning of the semester. The program coordinator or classroom teacher must inform the center as to the potential examinee numbers and general timing of test taking to ensure adequate seating for the students.
  
- **Procedures for identifying test takers who are Montana HiSET Option Program students:** The HiSET Test Center Examiner will admit the students for testing after the obligatory online registration, and when shown proper identification as prescribed by the testing company. Homeless or foster care youth may need assistance in obtaining the proper identification. The HiSET teacher or the homeless liaison/foster care point of contact should work with the youth upon enrollment to ensure that all documentation has been obtained prior to the testing date. Such assistance may include payment of any fees necessary.

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

At the end of three years, the average population of Montana HiSET Option Program graduates should not exceed a specific percentage of the three-year average of the total general population high school graduates. Specific student enrollment ranges 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

**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.

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 Option 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 Option Program student is identified as homeless or in foster care.

**Fifth Year Senior provision**

Fifth year seniors may participate in the Montana HiSET Option Program provided they meet the prescriptions of these guidelines and are under the Montana HiSET Option Program contract with the school.

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

**Montana Youth Challenge and Montana HiSET Option Program Provision**

- **For existing Montana HiSET Options Programs**
  - a. Students that are under contract in an existing Montana HiSET Option Program and wish to attend Montana Youth Challenge (MYC) must be identified. Their contract must be amended to include the MYC Academy as a component of fulfilling their Montana HiSET Option Program contract.
  - b. 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.
  - c. The district/school must contact the OPI and submit a copy of the amended MYC candidate’s Montana HiSET Option Program contract to the OPI Montana HiSET Option Program Specialist.

- d. Once the contract has been received by the OPI, students can begin at the specified semester enrollment date at MYC.
- e.  the responsibility of the home school's HiSET Option Program Coordinator to register the student with ETS and schedule testing at MYC.

- **For Montana schools that do NOT have a HiSET Options Program**

- a. Schools and students that are not under contract for HiSET Options can participate in the HiSET Options Program through the Montana Youth Challenge Academy.
- b. Students must be currently enrolled in high school and must be intending to enroll in the MYC.
- c. The MYC in coordination with the Cadet's High School will submit a copy of the MYC candidate's Montana HiSET Options Program contract to the OPI Montana HiSET Option Program Specialist.
- d. Once the contract has been received by the OPI, students can begin at the specified semester enrollment date at MYC.
- e. It is the responsibility of the MYC HiSET Options Program Coordinator to register the student with ETS, enroll the student in Montana Career Information Systems (MCIS) and schedule testing at MYC.

## Definition of Terms

**Montana 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. Montana 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 Montana HiSET Option Program can be banked for future use.

**The 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 (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.

**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 supports 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 on connecting students to services.

**Title I, Part D:** This is a grant funded program to provide services to students who have come into contact with 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 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.