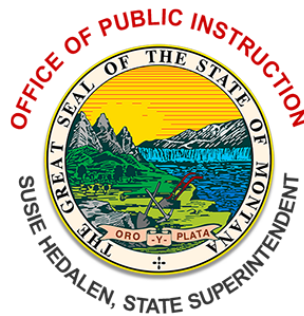


High School Equivalency Program Handbook: Montana Options Guidelines 2026-2027

Office of Public Instruction



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Table of Contents

Guideline 1. School District Expectations	4
Percentage of Students Allowed in the Program	4
Student/Teacher Ratio.....	4
Instructor Qualifications	4
School Guidance Counselor Obligation	4
Student Attendance	4
Professional Development.....	4
Program Modifications and Gap in Service	5
Guideline 2: Montana Options Student Account Creation.....	5
Guideline 3: Montana Options Coordinator Expectations	5
HSE Training for Montana Options Coordinators	5
Communicating Personally Identifiable Information (PII) with the OPI	6
Student Rosters.....	6
Dropped Students.....	7
End-of-Year Narrative and Final Roster	7
Annual Review of Guidelines and School Application	7
Guideline 4. Student Eligibility.....	7
Student Enrollment.....	7
Credit Deficiency Range	8
Academic Ability	8
Students with Disabilities.....	8
Voluntary Participation	8
Program Orientation.....	8
Student Contract.....	9
Guideline 5. Instructional Components	9
Class Instruction.....	9
College and Career Readiness.....	10
Credit Expectations	10
Distance Learning.....	10
Guideline 6. HiSET Testing	10
Use of HSE Tests in the Montana Options Program	10

Allowable Testing Window	11
Requesting Test Accommodations	11
Scheduling HiSET Tests	11
Test Administration	12
<u>Guideline 7. Scores, Credentials, and Record Retention.....</u>	<u>12</u>
Reporting to the OPI	12
HSE Records	12
DiplomaSender - Official Database of Record	12
Montana Options Student Access to DiplomaSender	12
HSE Diploma – § 20-7-131, MCA.....	12
High School Diplomas and Transcripts.....	13
<u>Guideline 8. Accountability and Compliance</u>	<u>13</u>
Monitoring and Compliance	13
Data Validation	13
<u>Provisions.....</u>	<u>14</u>
Fifth Year Senior Provision.....	14
Unaccompanied Minor/Homeless or Foster Care Youth Provision.....	14
<u>Definition of Terms</u>	<u>15</u>

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 Montana 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 Montana 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 (OPI) [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 to include a greater percentage of students may be granted on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the OPI. This exception considers local and at-risk variables. Contact the OPI Adult Education Unit for beginning-of-year enrollment allowances. Specific student enrollment ranges per school year are as follows:

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

Student/Teacher Ratio

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

Instructor Qualifications

Montana Options Program instructors must be currently 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 Montana Options Program. School guidance counselors are expected to provide postsecondary and career pathway counseling.

Student Attendance

The student must maintain full-time attendance, as locally defined and in alignment with [Montana Code Annotated](#), 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 Montana Options Program students to participate in school-based opportunities on school grounds. If attendance requirements are not fulfilled, the participant must be dropped from the program ([Montana Options School Attendance Letter Template](#)).

Professional Development

Staff members involved with the Montana Options Program must participate in professional development (PD) facilitated by an approved [OPI Renewal Unit Provider](#) each year of participation. PD Certificates must be provided to the OPI upon monitoring request.

The PD should be:

- a planned and structured experience,
- of benefit to the staff member's professional development,

- an exposure to a new idea or skill or an extension of an existing idea or skill, and
- consistent with Montana Options goals and student outcomes.

Program Modifications and Gap in Service

- Program Modification:
 - New coordinator: If a new Montana Options Coordinator is appointed and replaces who is recorded on the School Application, the Montana Options School will notify the OPI of the change, and the new Montana Options Coordinator will sign an updated statement of assurances and attach it to the existing application.
 - New school administrator/principal: If a new school administrator/principal is appointed and replaces who is recorded on the School Application, the Montana Options School will notify the OPI of the change, and the new school administrator/principal will sign an updated statement of assurances and attach it to the existing application.
 - Adjustments to the School Application: changes to program entry assessments, curriculum adjustments, variations with credits needed to graduate, updates to school schedule, etc. must be communicated to the OPI prior to implementation with Montana Options students.
- Gap in Service:
 - If a Montana Options Program has been previously established but has not operated for one school year or more, it is the responsibility of the Montana Options Program to *submit a new Montana Options School Application* to the OPI Adult Education Unit.

Guideline 2: Montana Options Student Account Creation

Montana Options students are expected to create accounts with HiSET during the first two weeks of the semester.

Montana Options students will create their own test taker account via the public [HiSET website](#).

- Students must use their full legal name and accurate date of birth, as it appears on their government-issued ID, to register.
- Students must register with their mailing address, phone number, and their personal email account.
 - If the student does not have a personal email account, the Montana Options Coordinator will assist with creating a new email account.
 - Students should not use the school mailing address, phone number, or email.
- Students will retain HiSET account login information for future access and use.

Guideline 3: Montana Options Coordinator Expectations

HSE Training for Montana Options Coordinators

Montana Options Coordinators (non-examiner) who have access to the [Test Center Associate \(TCA\) Client Portal](#) are referred to as “Test Center Associates” or TCAs.

TCAs must review the following training resources and PDF documents and return eLearning certificates and the Montana HSE Data Confidentiality Agreement to the OPI Adult Education Unit.

After the required training is completed and eLearning Certifications with the Montana Data Confidentiality Agreement are returned to the OPI Adult Education Unit, associate access to the TCA Client Portal will be provided.

Training Video #4: TCA Client Portal Training

Introduction to the TCA Client Portal used by test center staff to register or schedule test takers – for sites that

schedule appointments on the test taker's behalf.

[View Resource](#)

[View PDF](#)

Training Video #5: TCA Client Portal Additional Functions

Introduction to the additional functionality available in the TCA Client Portal.

[View Resource](#)

[View PDF](#)

Scheduling and Paying Online on Test Taker's Behalf

Introduction to the process to schedule and pay for a HiSET test on a test taker's behalf.

[View PDF Guide](#) (review, no certificate)

[Voucher Order Form](#) – available for use, if applicable.

Testing Accommodations

Review the process for requesting testing accommodations on a test taker's behalf.

[View Resource](#) (review, no certificate)

Communicating Personally Identifiable Information (PII) with the OPI

To comply with [FERPA](#) (34 CFR PART 99—FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY), the OPI utilizes the State of Montana File Transfer Service to send personally identifiable information (PII). PII under FERPA is any information that could reasonably be tied to an individual student.

Personally Identifiable Information

The term includes, but is not limited to—

- a) The student's name;
- b) The name of the student's parent or other family members;
- c) The address of the student or student's family;
- d) A personal identifier, such as the student's social security number, student number, or biometric record;
- e) Other indirect identifiers, such as the student's date of birth, place of birth, and mother's maiden name;
- f) Other information that, alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a specific student that would allow a reasonable person in the school community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty; or
- g) Information requested by a person who the educational agency or institution reasonably believes knows the identity of the student to whom the education record relates.

Montana Options Coordinators will review the State of Montana [File Transfer Service instructions](#) and create a user account to communicate PII with the OPI Adult Education Unit.

Visit the [State of Montana File Transfer Service](#) to access the secure service.

Student Rosters

- Enrollment in the Montana Options Program must take place during the first two weeks of the semester.
- [Montana 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, first name, last name, HSE ID, student contract complete date, HSE subtests to complete, start date in Options Program, start date of fall semester, start date of spring semester, anticipated graduation date, and drop date, if applicable.

- Contact the OPI Adult Education Unit 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.
- The OPI Adult Education Unit will provide age waivers to all Montana Options student accounts after the roster is submitted and notify Montana Options Coordinators when completed so that the TCA may schedule and pay for exams.

Dropped Students

- The Montana Options Coordinator must notify the OPI immediately after a student drops.
- Notify the OPI by submitting an updated roster. 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 - list the drop date.
- These students may be referred to their local [HSE Preparation Provider](#) or [HSE Testing Center](#).

End-of-Year Narrative and Final Roster

- Narrative and final roster are due no later than two weeks after graduation.
- Include any programmatic changes in the narrative.
- Confirm no changes to the number of credits needed to graduate, and possible credits earned in a semester.
- List supports your program needs to be more successful next school year.
- The [Narrative for Montana Options Programs](#) and final roster must be submitted confidentially and securely via the State of Montana File Transfer Service.

Annual Review of Guidelines and School Application

Montana Options Coordinators will review the Montana Options Guidelines and School Application annually with Montana Options teachers, school guidance counselors, school administrators, and other staff involved with the Montana Options Program before a cohort is selected. Refer to the “Program Modifications and Gap in Service” section in these guidelines to determine if an updated application is needed.

Guideline 4. Student Eligibility

Selection procedures should ensure that students who enroll in the Montana Options Program (1) will not graduate with their class because of credit deficiency, and (2) are otherwise capable of completing graduation requirements. Montana Options candidates should be capable of attending class full time, have sufficient academic ability to complete the program, and exhibit the necessary motivation to graduate with their peers. The school or district may use the [OPI GEMS Early Warning System](#) to identify high school seniors at risk of dropping from school.

Student Enrollment

Qualifying students must be at least 16 years of age and may enroll at the start of the first or second semester of their senior year.

Montana 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. Fifth-year seniors may participate in the program. The Montana Options Program may not be offered during summer school.

Credit Deficiency Range

The Montana Options Program can be recommended by school officials after a review of student records confirms that the student is within the credit deficiency range for the Montana Options Program.

Upon enrollment in the fourth academic year, a student in the Montana 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.

Reference the School Application for the “Credit Deficiency Range” or contact the OPI Adult Education Unit to confirm the range. If the district changes the number of credits needed to graduate or the number of credits that can be earned in a semester, this must be reported to the OPI, and the credit deficiency range will be adjusted. If the district allows students to graduate with fewer credits than the school district standard, that information must be recorded on the Montana Options School Application. Multiple credit deficiency ranges will be recorded on the School Application for schools with varying credit requirements.

Academic Ability

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

Sufficient reading ability must be demonstrated by at least an 8th-grade reading level or higher on the [Test of Adult Basic Education \(TABE\) 13/14](#) (NRS Level 4) or other standardized tests demonstrating sufficient academic merit as documented and approved in the Montana Options School Application. Academic ability must be established before the student is allowed entry into the program. Exceptions to reading level requirements may be pre-approved by the OPI on a case-by- case basis based on local needs and other variables. The student must complete HiSET testing in all subjects by the time his or her ninth-grade cohort graduates, unless the student is a fifth-year senior.

Students with Disabilities

Students with physical/cognitive disabilities are eligible for participation in the program with proper documentation such as 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, including the testing component, and have a psychological report no older than three years.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the Montana Options Program is voluntary and the student, his or her parent(s) or legal guardian(s), or the homeless liaison for unaccompanied homeless youth, Montana Options teacher, school guidance counselor, administrator, and Montana 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 Montana Options Student Contract. Parties must agree that the time outside the Montana Options Program will be devoted to credit recovery or activities related to the student’s “College and Career Goals and Action Plan” as listed in the Montana Options Student Contract.

Program Orientation

Montana Options Coordinators are expected to facilitate a program orientation meeting before allowing the student to enter the Montana Options Program. Montana Options students must be assessed to determine 8th

grade level reading level proficiency *prior* to the program orientation meeting. The student and all advocates must participate in an orientation meeting regarding the requirements and expectations as outlined in the student contract for the Montana Options Program. The orientation meeting should outline the program's expectations, academic options, participation requirements, post-graduation goals, activities to support academics, and a transition plan.

Student Contract

The orientation meeting emphasizes the [Montana Options Student Contract](#). The OPI will provide a standard contract template for the school to use. Programs will attach assessment results that substantiate 8th grade reading level or above to the Student Contract. Credits earned to date must fall within the school's credit deficiency range. Participation requirements must outline specific weekly hourly requirements to ensure students attend Montana Options classes at least 12-15 hours per week and attend regular instruction as a full-time student.

Additional documentation relevant to the student's academic plan can be attached to the standard contract template. Participants will discuss academic options, participation requirements, college and career goals, action plan, and activities to support academics.

The following individuals must be in attendance:

- Student
- Parent/Guardian(s)
- Montana Options Teacher(s)
- School Guidance Counselor(s)
- Principal/Administrator(s)
- Montana 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.

If any portion of the contract with the student is not in compliance, the school will notify the student and parent or guardian that the district cannot award a high school diploma, and the student will be dropped from the program. See "Dropped Students" in Guideline 2.

Guideline 5. Instructional Components

Instructional methods should align with the student contract and career pathway plan in the Montana Career Information System (MCIS 360), or other career information system outlined in the School Application.

Class Instruction

The Montana Options Program class must be a minimum of 12-15 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, smartphones) 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 subtests. 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 Montana Options Program will encourage best practices and student-centered instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

College and Career Readiness

The Montana 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. Students should complete modules that are most applicable to their pathway and of benefit to their future goals. 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](#).

If the district uses a college and career readiness resource other than MCIS, the program must be explicitly outlined in the application and pre-approved by the OPI. Access to career pathway portfolios must be granted to the OPI for monitoring.

Montana Options Schools are encouraged to integrate Jobs for Montana Graduate (JMG) programs for college and career readiness. JMG actively promotes student success by connecting students with local employers and teaching them workplace professional skills, leadership skills, and career readiness. Visit the [JMG Website](#) to learn more.

Credit Expectations

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

Distance Learning

If distance learning is deemed necessary, it must be a synchronous model, and pre-approved by the state office in the Montana Options School Application. *Asynchronous distance learning cannot count toward the required 12- 15 hours a week of instruction.*

Guideline 6. HiSET Testing

The Montana Options Program must abide by scheduling processes as outlined in this policy and conform to all test administration regulations. Best practices suggest limiting HiSET testing to two sessions per day to minimize testing fatigue.

Use of HSE Tests in the Montana Options Program

Students enrolled in the Montana Options Program may use HSE subject area tests to demonstrate proficiency in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Successful completion of the Montana Options Program does not require students to complete or pass the full HSE test battery unless required by the district's approved Montana Options Program plan.

Participating districts have flexibility to determine how HSE subject area tests are incorporated into their Montana Options Program, provided their approach is documented in the district's approved Montana Options Program plan. Each participating district shall submit its proposed use of HSE testing to the OPI as part of its Montana Options Program plan.

Allowable Testing Window

Because the Montana Options Program is an academic program that includes test preparation, HiSET testing is only allowed after certain programmatic parameters have been met. 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 may not commence until *four weeks* after the semester or trimester start date if students are in Montana Options classes *15 hours* or more a week (minimum 60 instructional hours in Montana Options Class). *
- Testing may not commence until *five weeks* after the semester or trimester start date if students are in Montana Options classes *12-14 hours* a week (minimum 60 instructional hours in Montana Options Class). *
- Prior to taking the official HiSET subtests, Montana Options students must demonstrate academic preparedness by obtaining [HiSET Practice Test](#) scores substantiating that they are likely to pass the exam.

*A student participating in the Montana Options Program during the first semester may test in the second semester before the four- or five-week mark of the second semester if the student is sufficiently prepared, as determined by HiSET Practice Tests.

Requesting Test Accommodations

If test accommodations are needed for a student, navigate to the [HiSET Test Accommodations](#) website and complete the application process. HiSET candidates with approved accommodations must be scheduled through the HiSET Accommodations team.

HiSET Accommodations:

Phone: 800-367-1565 x 6750 or Email: eaalerts@psionline.com

Scheduling HiSET Tests

Inform the Chief Examiner at the test center at the beginning of each semester of:

- the anticipated test window, and
- the anticipated number of seats needed to ensure adequate testing slots are available.

Note: Additional dates for retakes may be needed closer to the end of each semester.

Each student should share their HiSET ID number with the TCA. The TCA may then use the [TCA Client Portal](#) to search for the student accounts by HiSET ID number, schedule testing, and pay for the exams if the local district covers test fees. HiSET charges \$18 per subtest (\$90 for the battery), which includes two free retakes within 12 months. Local test center fees may apply (up to \$10 per subtest).

The HiSET Assessment includes five separate subtests, including:

- Language Arts Reading (65 Minutes);
- Language Arts Writing (120 Minutes);
- Science (80 Minutes);
- Mathematics (90 Minutes); and
- Social Studies (70 Minutes).

Each subtest is scored on a scale of 1-20. To pass, a score of 8 or above on each subtest and a battery total of 45 or above is required. The Language Arts Writing subtest includes an essay portion, and a minimum score of 2 out of 6 is required to pass. Scores of at least 15 out of 20 and a 4 or higher on the Language Arts Writing Essay portion indicate college and career readiness. Three versions of the test are published each year, and candidates

may attempt each subtest up to six times per calendar year. There is a 60-day waiting period after each attempt following the third attempt.

Test Administration

All tests will be administered in an official HiSET Test Center. See the [OPI HSE Website](#) for a comprehensive list of all public HiSET Test Centers.

The test center examiner will admit Montana Options students for exams after test takers provide state-issued photo identification and residency is established. See the [HiSET Montana Website](#) for more information.

The Montana 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.

Candidates must bring ID on the day of testing. ID must be government-issued and include full legal name, address, date of birth, photo, and signature. No other personal items may be brought to the test center.

Guideline 7. Scores, Credentials, and Record Retention

Reporting to the OPI

Record final credential outcomes and status on the roster template and submit via File Transfer Service to the OPI Adult Education Unit no later than two weeks after graduation.

HSE Records

HSE records – including, but not limited to, examination scores, transcripts, and credentials – are part of candidates' permanent academic record. Candidates' HSE records may not be rescinded, revoked, blocked, invalidated, withheld, or rendered otherwise unavailable based on their standing in any educational program (e.g., Montana Options Program; Montana Youth Challenge Academy). This includes, but is not limited to, current enrollment, withdrawal, dismissal, or program completion status.

DiplomaSender - Official Database of Record

The OPI has partnered with [DiplomaSender](#) to manage High School Equivalency (HSE) credentials and transcripts. DiplomaSender is the sole entity entrusted to provide an official high school equivalency attainment record for Montana HSE earners.

Montana Options Student Access to DiplomaSender

After taking at least one subtest, Montana Options Coordinators will instruct all Options students to create an account with DiplomaSender so they are able to access their official HSE records. Candidates will enter their full legal name, date of birth, and HiSET ID number into the DiplomaSender system to create a user account. Invitations to create a DiplomaSender account are sent to the email address on file with the HSE testing vendor after one subtest is attempted. *Note: HiSET score reports are not official records.*

Programs may print DiplomaSender [Contact Cards](#) for students.

HSE Diploma – § 20-7-131, MCA

HSE Diplomas are issued by the State of Montana (§ [20-7-131](#), MCA). Test takers who meet Montana's requirements for an HSE Diploma shall be awarded the credential. Eligibility for an HSE Diploma is based solely on meeting the state's HSE requirements and may not be conditioned on a candidate's standing in any educational program (e.g., Montana Options Program or Montana Youth Challenge Academy). This includes, but is not limited to, current enrollment, withdrawal, dismissal, or program completion status.

Earning an HSE Diploma does not preclude a student from also earning a local high school diploma, provided all

local graduation requirements are met.

HSE diploma earners will order their first set of complimentary documents (diploma and transcript) via [DiplomaSender](#). Additional copies of the diploma, transcript or verification letter, if needed for postsecondary education, employment, military etc., are \$20 each.

High School Diplomas and Transcripts

Students who complete and satisfy all the Montana Options Program requirements may be awarded a credential by the school district that includes the term “diploma.”

Montana Options Programs utilize HSE tests as a measure of proficiency. Local 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 transcripts for Montana Options students should be maintained the same as traditional high school student records. Local districts may utilize the following SCED Course Codes to award/transcribe credit.

SCED	Course Title
01997	MT Options Proficiency - English
02997	MT Options Proficiency - Math
03047	MT Options Proficiency - Science
04097	MT Options Proficiency - Social Studies

Guideline 8. Accountability and Compliance

The OPI is responsible for the planning and oversight of Montana Options Programs in Montana. The OPI Adult Education Unit oversees the Montana Options Program.

Monitoring and Compliance

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

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

Data Validation

The OPI will receive data and information about the Montana Options Program from the HiSET vendor to validate testing outcomes.

Provisions

Fifth Year Senior Provision

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

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 Montana Options Program after the two-week deadline at the start of each semester.

Unaccompanied Minor/Homeless or Foster Care Youth Points of Contact: Any Montana 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 entry 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.

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 Montana 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 Montana 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 Montana 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. Work-based learning should be in addition to the minimum hourly requirement of in-person instruction.

Definition of Terms

Montana 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. Montana Options Program students must devote 12-15 hours a week toward HiSET preparation.

Student Contract: A binding document signed by the administrator, Montana 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.

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): 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 (POC): 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 ensuring that foster care youth are placed in an educational setting that best meets their needs and connects 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.