

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education
February 1, 2021

Note on potential for funding Montana HiSET initiative using existing federally funded college access programs:

OPTION #1 – Funding HiSET from Montana Educational Talent Search

Montana Educational Talent Search (METS) funds cannot be used for statewide initiatives like the existing HiSET initiative, nor is it the intention of the grants to be used for those types of purposes. The funds are awarded to carry out the **services for the students eligible to participate from the specified target areas**. They cannot be used for initiatives that would support students who are not METS participants. Simply put, the Dept. of Ed would take away the grant for the funds being misused.

OPTION #2 – Funding HiSET from Montana GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness & Readiness for Undergraduate Programs)

While our GEAR UP funding is occasionally more flexible than our METS funding, there are a number of reasons why GEAR UP is not well suited for support of the specific statewide HiSET initiative being discussed. A list of challenges includes, but is not limited to:

- HiSET testing is not part of our approved GEAR UP grant and adding this would require approval from the federal program officer. Without approval from the DOE, we cannot use GEAR UP funds to support HiSET.
- We do not currently provide resources for programs that service students who have dropped out (nor do we count dropout students as part of our cohort). Thus, those students would not be eligible for GEAR UP services.
- Limitations on the length of our GEAR UP cohort will severely constrain potential participation in HiSET (cohort ends one year after graduating from HS).
- HiSET testing is routinely funded through Adult Education (permissive levy), thus we will be running into supplanting issues which will likely be problematic.
- Finally, HiSET funding would divert from maintaining and/or expanding previously approved contracts such as SSA and iTutor.