



Graduation Incentives Program

Minnesota's Graduation Incentives Program, one of the nation's first, was created in 1987 to provide incentives to students who have experienced difficulty in the traditional education system and encourage reenrollment in alternative programs that meet their needs. The law is designed specifically for students ages 16-21, who are struggling in school because of personal, legal, or health situations; who are behind in credits or are making slow academic progress; or who have been out of school for some time. Just like their general education peers, students with disabilities are eligible for the Graduation Incentives Program and will receive the same diploma when they finish their program.

Who is eligible?

The program is open to a wide variety of students who are struggling in traditional schools, including students with disabilities. To be eligible, a student must be under age 21 and:

- Performs **substantially below performance** levels as same-age peers in a locally determined achievement test
- Is **behind** in coursework
- Is **pregnant** or is a **parent**
- Has been assessed as **chemically dependent**
- Has been **excluded or expelled**
- Was **referred by a school district** for enrollment in an alternative program
- Was a **victim of physical or sexual abuse**
- Has experienced **mental health problems**
- Has experienced **homelessness** sometime within the past six months, before requesting a transfer
- Speaks **English as second language** or is an English language learner
- Has **withdrawn from school** or been **chronically truant**
- Is being **treated in a hospital** in the seven-county metro area for **cancer or a life threatening illness**, or is a sibling of the hospitalized student and resides with family at least 60 miles beyond the boundary of the seven-county metro area

What programs are allowed under the Graduation Incentives Program?

Under this law, the specific programs allowed include:

- **State-approved alternative programs** designed for students who are behind academically or need a nontraditional educational approach.
- If the eligible student is a high school junior or senior, he or she may enroll in a **postsecondary education option (PSEO)** program or course. The postsecondary institution must inform the student of the support services available at that institution. **If the student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that provides federal education support and accommodations, the postsecondary institution must provide the support services as described in the student's IEP.**
- **Any** public elementary or secondary education program

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- Any district-**contracted alternative services programs**
 - Approved **Adult Basic Education** programs.

What are the requirements for application?.....

An eligible student may apply to **any** eligible program at **any** time. The student’s resident district is not required to give its approval for enrollment. Students may apply to a:

- Nonresident district
- State-approved alternative program
- Approved Adult Basic Education program

Exception: If the student was expelled, the nonresident district must approve the enrollment under state statute 121A.45.

Summary:.....

The Graduation Incentives Program is one of the alternative education programs called the “Quiet Giant” in Minnesota Public Education by the Center for Policy Studies and Hamline University in 2003. The Center found in an examination of the data, which was also confirmed by a 2010 report by the Legislative Auditor, that “Alternative-education programs have been highly successful in serving a population of students not served well in traditional settings.” It is important that both students who struggle in traditional schools and their families are made aware of this avenue to graduation and postsecondary education.