Intro to High School Equivalency for K12

Overview

Local Education Providers (LEPs) may opt to provide High School Equivalency (HSE) programming—or partner with an outside provider to provide HSE programming—to enrolled students. Students do **not** need to unenroll from school to attend HSE programming through an LEP.

HSE programming is not meant to be an "easy out" for students wanting to exit high school. Instead, it is rigorous and integral curriculum leading to an equivalent credential, allowing eligible students[1] to stay enrolled and maintain access to educational professionals, school counselors, and public education services.

While there are two State Board-approved HSE exams in Colorado[2]—GED® and HiSET®—this document focuses on GED® because it is most commonly chosen for K12 HSE programming.

About the GED® Test

The current version of the GED® test—the 2014 series—underwent rigorous review, revisions, and psychometric validation. LEPs are encouraged to read the 2014 GED® Test Performance Standards for detailed background on the development of this version and the performance indicators assessed in each subtest, which align with the national College and Career-Readiness Standards for adult education.

Enrollment and Completion Facts

In 2025-26, there are 22 Colorado school districts that provide HSE programming for their students. While the structure of these programs varies by district, some factors are consistent:

- Students do not need to unenroll from school
- School districts may receive per-pupil revenue (PPR) for HSE students
- HSE completers count towards the completion rate
- Districts may provide a separate graduation ceremony for HSE students (encouraged)
- HSE completers receive the Colorado High School Equivalency Diploma issued by CDE
- A district may opt to become an approved test center for their students

[1] Eligible students are at risk of dropping out of school or are so credit deficient that their ability to graduate on time with their peers is jeopardized.

[2] C.R.S. 22-33-102(8.5): "High school equivalency examination" means the state-board-approved battery of tests that are designed to measure the major outcomes and concepts generally associated with four years of high school education and that are administered at a testing center that has been approved by the department of education based on geographic need and testing volume.

Role and Rigor of HSE Programming

It is important to understand the purpose of HSE programming as a tool to support certain high school students.

What it IS:	What it is NOT:
A valid, alternative way to complete high school	A punitive track for unsuccessful students
A screened-entry program using academic pre-testing to predict success	An easy-access program for any level of academic performance
A credential-producing program upon completion	A certificate-producing program
A content-substantive program: aligned with high school material and delivered via quality instruction	Merely a test-prep course or packet-based instructional experience
A program that integrates counseling services: before, during, and in transition	A program with isolated, random contact with counseling services
An enriching alternative that provides closure and future direction	A second-class option to finishing high school

Resources

- Colorado High School Equivalency Website
- GED Option™ Guidelines for Implementation - guidelines for best practices
- CDE 2025-26 Entry/Exit Codes - click the "SSA Record Guide" button
- Connections to existing K12 HSE programs available from Alena

Contact

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