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CHAPTER 600 - SELF-INITIATED PROGRAMS (SIP) - EDUCATION/TRAINING

610 OVERVIEW

An approvable SIP must be for an undergraduate degree or certificate program that leads to employment or a post-baccalaureate degree program for a California teaching credential in which a CalWORKs participant is enrolled prior to his/her GAIN orientation and appraisal appointment date.

611 KEY POINTS

- A participant in a SIP must be progressing satisfactorily, and fulfill the CalWORKs 32/35 hour weekly participation requirement.

- Two-parent (one or both) households may combine their work activity hours to meet the required 35 hours per week participation requirement.

- The 32/35 hour weekly requirement can be made up of a combination of classroom, laboratory, internship, supervised study time, and work study hours. If the hours of school participation do not add up to 32/35 hours per week, the participant must participate in other appropriate Welfare-to-Work (WtW) activities.

- A SIP that does not meet approval criteria can be continued only until the next semester or quarter break.

- Participation in all SIPs is to be documented in a WtW plan.

- The requirements of the WtW core activities (see Section 912.62) do not apply to SIP participation. SIP participants are:

  - Not required to participate 20 hours per week in core activities; and
  - Are not limited to 12 months of vocational education and training.

  Note: A SIP can be approved for as long as a participant continues to receive cash aid and longer, in some cases, under the Post-Time Limits regulations.

- GAIN participants are notified 15 days prior to completion of their Self-Initiated Program (SIP) or post assessment activities via the GN 60102-a, GAIN Services Worker Appointment Letter.

- GAIN participants who are attending a Self-Initiated Program or a Vocational Education/Training activity are to be referred to a Bridging Activity during any school summer break. (See Section 912.4.)

- When referring a participant to a Bridging Activity the GSW worker should not close the SIP component, unless the participant no longer meets the SIP criteria.

- Participation hours for all education and training WtW activities must be monitored and verified on a monthly basis using the GN 6365, Monthly Attendance Report

form. Hours for unsubsidized employment will continue to be verified through the QR 7 or Verification of Employment process on a quarterly basis. The GN 6365 will be automatically mailed via GEARS to the participant on a monthly basis.

- Supervised study time is counted toward participation hours. On the other hand, unsupervised study time is not allowable towards hours of participation in a Self-Initiated Program unless it is part of the class such as a lab, tutorial, or part of an externship or internship and credit is received.

- Online Education is approvable as long as the school and course/program are accredited by a reputable accrediting board such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission (WASC) or other major Regional accreditation associations. Additionally, the participant must confirm via a PA853-Affidavit that he/she has access to a computer and enrollment and attendance can be verified in accordance with the Monthly Attendance Report policy.

612 POLICY

.1 Appraisal

All CalWORKs participants are to attend a one-day appraisal, which begins with motivational training and orientation conducted by a contracted services provider, and concludes with a one-on-one appraisal interview with a GAIN Services Worker (GSW).

A participant in a SIP may be excused from motivational training and orientation when participant cannot miss school to attend the full-day motivational program. However, the GSW must stress the importance of attending the orientation/motivational training to provide the SIP participant with detailed information about the GAIN program flow, rights and responsibilities, and services provided through GAIN.

The GSW should discuss the participant's schedule and the ability to be flexible when attempting to reschedule the participant to attend motivational training. A participant should be encouraged to attend motivational training at the earliest opportunity during his/her day off when it falls on a week day.

The appraisal interview is mandatory. The GSW shall be flexible in the scheduling of the appraisal to accommodate the participant's schedule. During the appraisal interview, the GSW will provide an overview of the GAIN program and services, the participant's rights and responsibilities, participation options and the GAIN flow. The GSW will discuss the participant's SIP and establish if the participant has provided enough information to approve or deny it. SIP forms will be provided to the participant to be completed and/or returned by the educational/training provider by the due date specified on the form(s).

.2 SIP Criteria/Requirements

.21 Approval of SIP as WtW Activity

.211 A SIP may be approved as a WtW activity when all of the following criteria are met:

(a) The participant was enrolled on or before the date of appraisal, or on the date the individual would have been appraised if he/she had not failed, with good cause, to attend the appraisal appointment;

(b) The program leads to an undergraduate degree or certificate, or a California regular teaching credential;

Note: **A participant who possesses a baccalaureate degree will not be eligible to participate in a SIP unless he/she is pursuing a California regular classroom teaching credential.**

(c) The program is on the GN 6141, Los Angeles County's Listing of Approved Self-Initiated Programs Which Lead to Employment, GEARS Vocational Training Inventory, or the participant provides alternative documentation that the program will lead to employment; and

(d) The participant is making satisfactory progress.

.212 Study time is counted toward participation hours in a SIP activity if the participant receives educational credit and/or units that count toward the completion of his/her degree or certificate program, provided the study time also meets criteria (a) through (d) above.

Note: Study time is the time required outside of the regular class period to complete assignments.

.213 Non-credit study time that is supervised and documented by the educational service provider also counts toward participation hours in a SIP activity.

.214 Unsupervised study time is not allowable towards hours of participation in a Self-Initiated Program unless it is part of the class such as a lab, tutorial, or part of an externship or internship and credit is received.

.215 A participant may receive child care for study time needed for a class, which is part of their approved activity

.216 The participant must attach verification of his/her supervised study time monthly with the GN 6365.

.22 Processing of SIP as WtW Activity

A participant identified during the appraisal interview as enrolled in a SIP is to complete the GN 6004, Self-Initiated Program Identification form. The form is used to obtain information from the participant to assist the GSW in evaluating and documenting the SIP disposition. Additionally, the GSW must give the participant a GN 6005A, Verification of Self-Initiated Programs, to take to the educational/training provider to confirm the participant's SIP, determine the length of the program, hours of participation and so forth. The GN 6005A is to be completed by the service provider and returned to the GSW by the due date.

When the SIP is approved as a WtW activity, the participant and GSW complete and sign the WTW 1, Welfare-to-Work Plan and WTW 2, Welfare-to-Work Plan-Activity Assignment. The WTW 2 is to state that whenever the participant stops attending the SIP, refuses to attend regularly, or does not maintain satisfactory progress, or fails to meet the required hours of participation, without a good cause reason, the participant must be assigned to job search services.

.23 Processing of Unapprovable SIP

.231 When the SIP is not approved as a WtW activity, the SIP is to be denied and the participant is to be processed as follows:

(a) If the participant is progressing satisfactorily, he/she must be allowed to finish the current quarter or semester, and transfer to an approvable SIP at the end of the term.

(b) If the participant is not progressing satisfactorily and/or fails/refuses to change to an approved SIP, he/she is to be assigned to Enhanced Job Club.

.232 A participant in a SIP not meeting SIP approval criteria must also sign the WTW 1 and WTW 2; however, the plan must specify that the:

(a) County has authorized continuation in the SIP only until the current semester or quarter ends and the participant agrees to transfer to a program that can be approved or he/she must participate in job search services; or

(b) County has authorized continuation in the SIP only until the end of the current semester or quarter and the participant understands that he/she must participate in job search services at the end of the semester/quarter.

Note: At the appraisal interview, or when the participant provide sufficient documentation to enable the GSW to approve or deny his/her SIP, the GN 6146, Self-Initiated Program Notice of Action (NOA), must be given or mailed to the participant.

.24 Alternative SIP Documentation

A program that is not on the GEARS vocational training inventory or the County-Approved SIP Listing may be approved as a SIP when the participant can provide documentation that the program will lead to employment. The GN 6093, Alternative Documentation that SIP Leads to Job Opportunities, provides examples of acceptable forms of documentation. The GN 6093 shall be given to the participant with an explanation of the process to demonstrate that a program not on the County list will lead to employment.

.241 Acceptable documentation may include the following:

(a) A signed statement from an employer(s) who will offer the participant a job in that occupation upon completion of the program;

(b) A list of at least three employers who have frequent openings in the occupation, at a skill level that can be achieved by the participant through the courses offered by the program; or

(c) A statement from a service provider or an Employment Development Department (EDD) office identifying the occupation as in demand in the local labor market or if the job title is listed in the EDD's California Occupational Employment Projections Listing, (http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/?pagedid=145)

.25 SIP Hourly and Concurrent Participation Requirements

A participant in a one-parent household is required to participate in a WtW activity(s) for 32 hours per week. A participant in a two-parent household is required to participate 35 hours per week; however, the parents may combine their work activity hours to meet the 35 hours weekly requirement.

Concurrent participation in work activities is required when the weekly hours of participation do not total at least 32 hours for a one-parent household and 35 hours for a two-parent household. Participants in a two-parent household may combine work activity hours to meet the 35 hours weekly participation requirement. SIP participation may be comprised of a combination of classroom time and course-related activities. Course-related activities are limited to laboratory, internship, supervised study time and work study hours that are directly linked to the participant's course of study.

When the participant's participation in his/her SIP does not meet the 32/35 hours weekly WtW participation requirement and it is determined that job search (see Chapter 700, Flex Job Search) is not a viable option, the participant is referred to assessment to determine the best concurrent work activity to fulfill the participation requirement, as described in Chapter 800, Section 812.8.

When assigning the GAIN participant to a concurrent activity such as a bridging activity the GSW should not close the SIP component unless the participant does not meet the SIP criteria.

.26 Time Limits

A participant who is in an approvable SIP can go to school full-time for the entire time on aid. However, he/she must continue to meet all SIP requirements.

.261 The WtW core activities, Section 912.62, requirements do not apply to SIP participation. SIP participants are not:

(a) Required to participate 20 hours per week in core activities; and

(b) Limited to 12 months of vocational education and training.

.27 Supportive Services

Participants must be informed of the availability of supportive services which include child care, transportation, ancillary and work-related expense, and Specialized Supportive Services, such as Domestic Violence, Mental Health and Substance Abuse, which he/she might need to participate in the WtW activity. Additionally, supportive services must be provided to the participant in an unapprovable SIP until he/she finishes the current quarter or semester.

.271 Participants enrolled in an approved SIP who incurred supportive services expenses prior to signing a WtW plan, may be eligible for reimbursement of ancillary, (see Section 1230), and/or retroactive transportation expenses, (see Section 1220) , if the expenses meet all of the following:

(a) The expense was incurred after the beginning date of aid.
(b) The expense was an unreimbursed out-of-pocket cost.
(c) The expense is determined eligible under CalWORKs regulations.
(d) The expense was necessary for the participation during the academic period or term (semester or quarter) in which the SIP was approved.

.272 The GSW may deny or reduce supportive services based on the participant's receipt of financial aid only when the participant voluntarily agrees to use financial aid to pay for items which would generally be paid for with CalWORKs funds.

.273 The WTW 8, Student Financial Aid Statement Welfare-to-Work Supportive Services form must be used for this purpose.

.28 Work Study

Work Study provides participants with paid work while pursing an educational program. To be eligible for a work study assignment, participants must be enrolled in a post-secondary program that participates in a work study program. Work Study assignments are available both off and on campus. The Work Study assignment may be with a private business, a non-profit agency or a public agency.

Eligibility for a Work Study assignment is ultimately left to the discretion of the school and is not a guaranteed activity.

Work Study is a concurrent activity that must be paired with a Self Initiated Program (SIP), a Vocational/Educational training (VOC), or a Job Skills Training (JST) activity.

The participant's Work Study project will terminate when:

.281 the school ends the Work Study assignment , or
.282 the participant is no longer in school, or
.283 the SIP,VOC or JST activity paired with the Work Study assignment ends and the participant will no longer be in school, or
.284 the participant is no longer in school.

If any of these occur, the participant shall be referred to the next appropriate activity.

Work Study counts as a core activity. For this reason, participants should be encouraged to participate in 20 hours of weekly work study hours when the student's schedule permits. Work Study hours are determined by the school and the student and are based on the Work Study award and the student's schedule.

All Work Study activity must be tracked on the GEARS system.

.285 Work Study in Public Agencies Program

The Work Study in Public Agencies (WSPA) program is a special project designed to provide CalWORKs participants with a work opportunity at a public agency that is in line with the participant's field

of study. WSPA is not available to other students unlike traditional work study.

Once the number of Work Study hours has been determined, the school shall assist the participant in selecting a work site and scheduling an interview.

After the interview, the participant shall meet with the GSW/CCM to sign the WTW plan and to open the Work Study component on GEARS.

After the GSW/CCM receives verification that Work Study employment has started, the employment is added on GEARS.

.29 Online Education

Online Education may be an approved component of a participant's approved educational WTW activity if all of the following criteria are met:

.291 The School and course/program are accredited by a reputable accrediting board such as WASC (:http://www.wascweb.org) or the appropriate regulatory board for out of state schools;

.292 Prior to submitting distance learning courses/programs for approval the participant must confirm via a PA 853-Affidavit that he/she has access to a computer and the internet;

.293 Enrollment and attendance can be verified in accordance with the Monthly Attendance Report policy. Verification of on-line courses can include a printout of the time spent on-line and;

.294 The course/program is included in the participant's WTW plan and leads to the participant satisfying SIP criteria.

If the course is available in both classroom and on-line formats, the participant must attend the classroom session, unless it conflicts with the participant's schedule and is otherwise appropriate. For example:

(a) The participant is a victim of Domestic Violence (DV) who lives in a DV shelter and/or is afraid to take classroom setting classes due to safety concerns;
(b) A participant has disability needs which may render the classroom course unavailable or inappropriate; or
(c) The classroom session conflicts with the participant's assigned activities (i.e., employment) or another live class the participant needs and it is scheduled at the same time.

Participants approved to attend on-line courses are eligible for supportive services see Chapter 1200.

.3 Welfare-to-Work Plan Changes

After signing the WtW plan, the participant has three working days to consider and ask for changes to the terms of the agreement. The three-day period begins on the working day after the participant signs the plan and ends at the close of business of the third working day. After the three-day period, the plan is considered final.

When a change is approved, the participant is to initial the agreed upon change. Changes to the plan are noted on a new WTW 2 indicating "Amendment and Amendment Number" and the GSW must reference the changes in the "comments" section of the initial WTW 2. For changes that are denied, the GSW is to annotate the "comments" section of the WTW 2 with the date of the request, reason for denial and statement that the participant's legal rights were explained.

.4 Receipt of GN 6005A

Upon receiving the GN 6005A, the GSW must review the form and compare the information with current information on file and on the GN 6004. If the information is conflicting, the GSW must contact the participant to clarify the information. Additionally, the GSW must take the following action when the GN 6005A indicates:

.41 A participant in an approved SIP is not making satisfactory progress. The reason for the lack of progress must be established to determine if the participant will be permitted to remain in the SIP. Unless the participant agreed to continue only to the end of the current term, the participant can be permitted to continue in the SIP, if his/her progress is satisfactory at the end of the quarter/semester; if not, the participant is to be assigned to Job Search services.

.42 A participant in an approved/denied SIP is not meeting the 32/35 hourly requirement per week; the participant must participate in a concurrent WtW activity.

.5 Progress/Monthly Participation Reporting

A SIP participant's progress must be tracked and documented at least quarterly, or at midpoint, if the duration of the program is less than three months. In addition, actual hours of attendance/participation must be tracked and verified on a monthly basis.

.51 GN6070, Progress Report for Education, Training, Post Employment Services and Work Experience Programs

.511 The GN 6070, Progress Report for Education, Training, Post-Employment Services and Work Experience Programs, is the required form of documentation of progress. The GN 6070 is automatically mailed to the participant at the appropriate reporting intervals. A separate GN 6070 is to be mailed for each provider to participants

required to participate in a SIP and a concurrent allowable WtW activity. Standards for satisfactory progress are defined by the provider.

.52 GN 6365, Monthly Attendance Report

.521 The GN 6365, Monthly Attendance Report, is used when verifying actual hours of participation for education and training activities. The GN 6365 is generated monthly via GEARS and mailed to the participant to verify actual hours of participation. All education and training WtW activities in which the participant is enrolled will be listed on the GN 6365.

.522 Community Colleges will not verify actual hours of participation, only enrollment status. Participants who are engaged in activities at a Community College are responsible for annotating attendance hours themselves.

.523 The GN 6365 is mailed to the participant 5 working days prior to the report month and is due on the 10th day of the month following the report month. For example, the report month is October 2008; the GN 6365 is mailed September 24, 2008 with a due date of November 10, 2008.

.524 When a new component is added on GEARS the GSW shall explain and provide a GN 6365 form to the participant to complete, sign and forward to the service provider for verification and signature for the enrolled month. The GSW is to encourage the participant to take the GN 6365 to the CalWORKs counselor or appropriate administrator for completion.

.525 A paper printout from a verified electronic attendance record is an acceptable alternate to the GN 6365. The record must include the participant's name; the name of the service provider; the number of hours and the name and phone number of the person verifying the hours.

.53 Provider Verification of Progress/Monthly Participation Tracking

When efforts to have the provider complete the GN 6070 or the GN 6365 are unsuccessful the participant may:

.531 GN 6070

(a) Obtain a letter from a counselor or each instructor which documents progress. When this form of documentation is used, the letter is to be submitted on the service provider's letterhead and must bear the provider's stamp/seal and the signature of the person who authored the letter, or

(b) Provide a current report card, or its equivalent, as proof of progress. If the participant does not have a report card or its equivalent and the school or facility provider is not available the participant may complete an affidavit or temporary self-certification until the progress report, report card or its equivalent can be produced. Supportive Services should not be delayed or stopped.

.532 GN 6365

(a) The GSW must contact the participant and/or service provider as appropriate, to obtain monthly verification of actual hours of participation. If written documentation is not available, verbal third-party verification is acceptable. The GSW must document the date, name, title and telephone number of person verifying actual hours of participation on the Maintain GAIN Participant Activity Comment (MGPA), screen.

(b) The GSW must ensure that a release of information is on file before contacting a service provider such as the ABCDM 228, Applicant's Authorization for Release of Information.

(c) Furthermore, the GSW must update the MMAH, Maintain Monthly Actual Hours, GEARS screen with the actual hours verified on the GN 6365, or via verbal third party verification.

.533 If the documentation provided by the participant is inconsistent, incomplete, inadequate or lacking authenticity, the participant must submit additional or collateral information/documentation to resolve the issue.

.54 Excused Absences

A limited number of excused absences may be counted toward actual hours of participation. Excused absences are only countable if participation had been scheduled for the day of the excused absence. The allowable excused absences include ten state holidays and ten additional excused absence days per year. In addition to the ten state holidays a participant is allowed no more than sixteen hours of excused absences in the month and a total of eighty hours in a year.

.541 The following state holidays are allowed as excused absences:

(a) New Year's Day,
(b) Martin Luther King, Jr., Day,
(c) Presidents' Day,
(d) Memorial Day,

(e) Independence Day,
(f) Labor Day,
(g) Veterans' Day,
(h) Thanksgiving,
(i) Day after Thanksgiving, and
(j) Christmas Day

.542 The following excused absences are in addition to the holidays allowed:

(a) Absences approved by the activity provider,
(b) Holidays observed by school administrators/providers,
(c) Medical appointments for the participant or children,
(d) Appointments with Eligibility or GAIN Services Worker,
(e) No Child Care,
(f) Transportation problems,
(g) School appointments,
(h) Job interviews,
(i) Illness for participant or children,
(j) Family issues such as death in family, domestic violence.

Example 1: If a participant is scheduled to attend a SIP activity for 32 hrs/wk, but misses school because of a school holiday (Memorial Day) the GSW will count the hours for the holiday as part of the total count for participation.

Example 2: If a participant is scheduled for 32 hrs/wk and misses two days of school because his/her child was sick, these hours would be counted in the total count for participation because the absences are excused absences.

.543 A participant is to provide written verification with the GN 6365 for all absences other than school holidays. Written verification can be a statement from the doctor, child care provider, service provider, or a written statement from the participant explaining their reason for being absent.

.544 If the participant's absence is not part of the ten additional excused reasons above, the GSW must inform the SIP participant of the consequences of failing to participate without a good cause (See Chapter 1300).

.545 The GSW is to document the MGPA screen with detailed documentation of the dates the participant missed and the written documentation that was provided by the participant such as a doctor's statement.

.55 Failure to Provide Progress/Monthly Participation Verification

In the event that SIP participants fail to provide the following:

(a) Timely progress reports,
(b) Timely monthly verification of actual hours of participation; and/or
(c) Documentation of progress and monthly actual hours of SIP participation without a good reason (See Chapter 1300).

The GSW must contact the participant to remind them of their responsibility to provide needed documentation. The participant should be reminded during the monthly participant contact telephone call of the importance of the documents. It is imperative that the participant is aware of the actions that can be taken against their case should he/she fail/refuse to provide a progress report without good cause.

If a participant fails to provide a monthly attendance report the GSW must contact the participant during the monthly participant contact telephone call to obtain the report. The participant should not be sanctioned nor should supportive services be delayed or stopped if a monthly attendance report is not turned in, on the contrary, the GSW must make every effort to assist the participant to provide the document or contact the service provider as necessary.

A participant may be excused from participation when he/she is granted an exemption. If an exempt participant fails to provide a Progress Report or Monthly Attendance Report they are not subject to a sanction. (See Chapter 400),

.6 Noncompliance

The purpose of the noncompliance process is to identify participation problems, determine the cause such as: (See Chapter 1300)

.61 a SIP participant's failure to progress, participate in a concurrent activity or attend his/her program;

.62 determining the cause of the problem;

.63 resolving the problem;

.64 seeking to restore the participant to compliance and/or participation as soon as possible; and/or,

.65 determining a potential need for an exemption or Specialized Supportive Services need.

Participation problems may be reported by the participant, service provider or Community College CalWORKs' campus staff either via the GN 6070, progress report, a telephone call or other written communication.

.7 Interruption of SIP

When participation in an approved SIP is interrupted due to a Good Cause reason (See Chapter 1300), participation in the same SIP may be resumed if the participant maintained good standing in the program while participating, and the program continues to meet the SIP approval criteria.

A participant may be excused from participation when he/she requests and is determined eligible for an exemption. (See Chapter 400)

.8 Completion/Termination of SIP

.81 When any of the following circumstances occur, the participant is to be referred to the next appropriate WtW activity:

.811 The SIP is completed.

.812 The participant stops participating or fails to meet participation requirements (attendance standards or satisfactory progress) without a good reason.

.813 The SIP was denied and/or the participant failed/refused to transfer to an approved SIP.

Whenever a participant stops participating in an activity, the activity is to be ended on GEARS and supportive services stopped until the issue is resolved. When the participant resumes participation, an evaluation of supportive services is required.

.9 Notification of Next GAIN Activity

The GN 60102-a, GAIN Services Worker Appointment Letter is created to make an appointment with the GAIN participant prior to completion of her/his Self-Initiated Program (SIP) or post-assessment activities.

.91 GEARS will automatically send the GN 60102-a, 30 calendar days prior to the component expected end date, making an appointment for the participant with the GAIN Services Worker (GSW) 15 days prior to the expected component end date. However, if necessary, the GSW may issue and send the GN 60102-a to the GAIN participant manually.

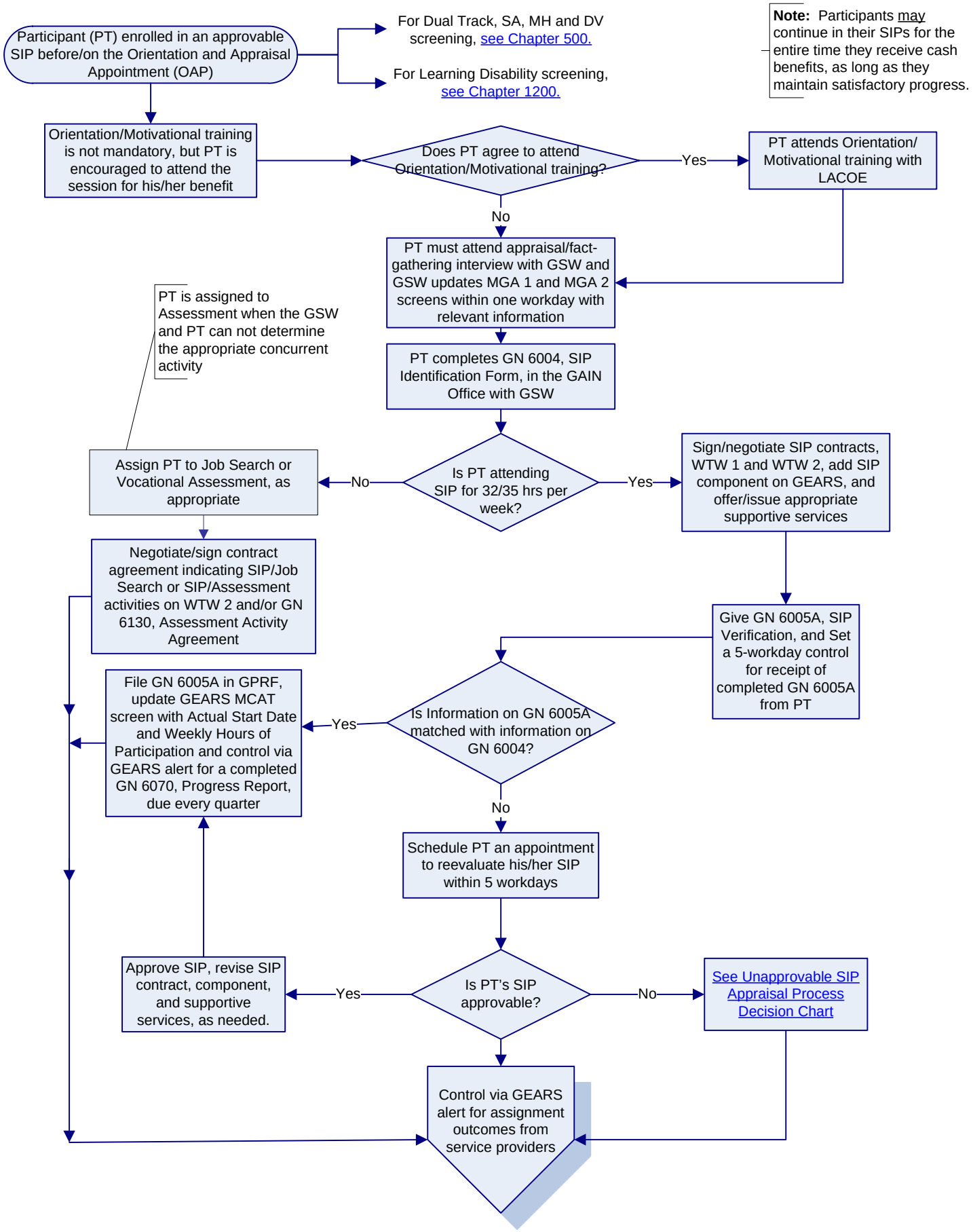
Note: Since the next GAIN activity assignment appointment will be made 15 days prior to the component expected end date, no compliance process needs to be initiated if the participant does not attend his/her appointment.

.92 If the participant does not attend his/her appointment, the GSW will send another GN 60102-a to the GAIN participant making a next GAIN activity assignment appointment with him/her on the first work day following the component expected end date.

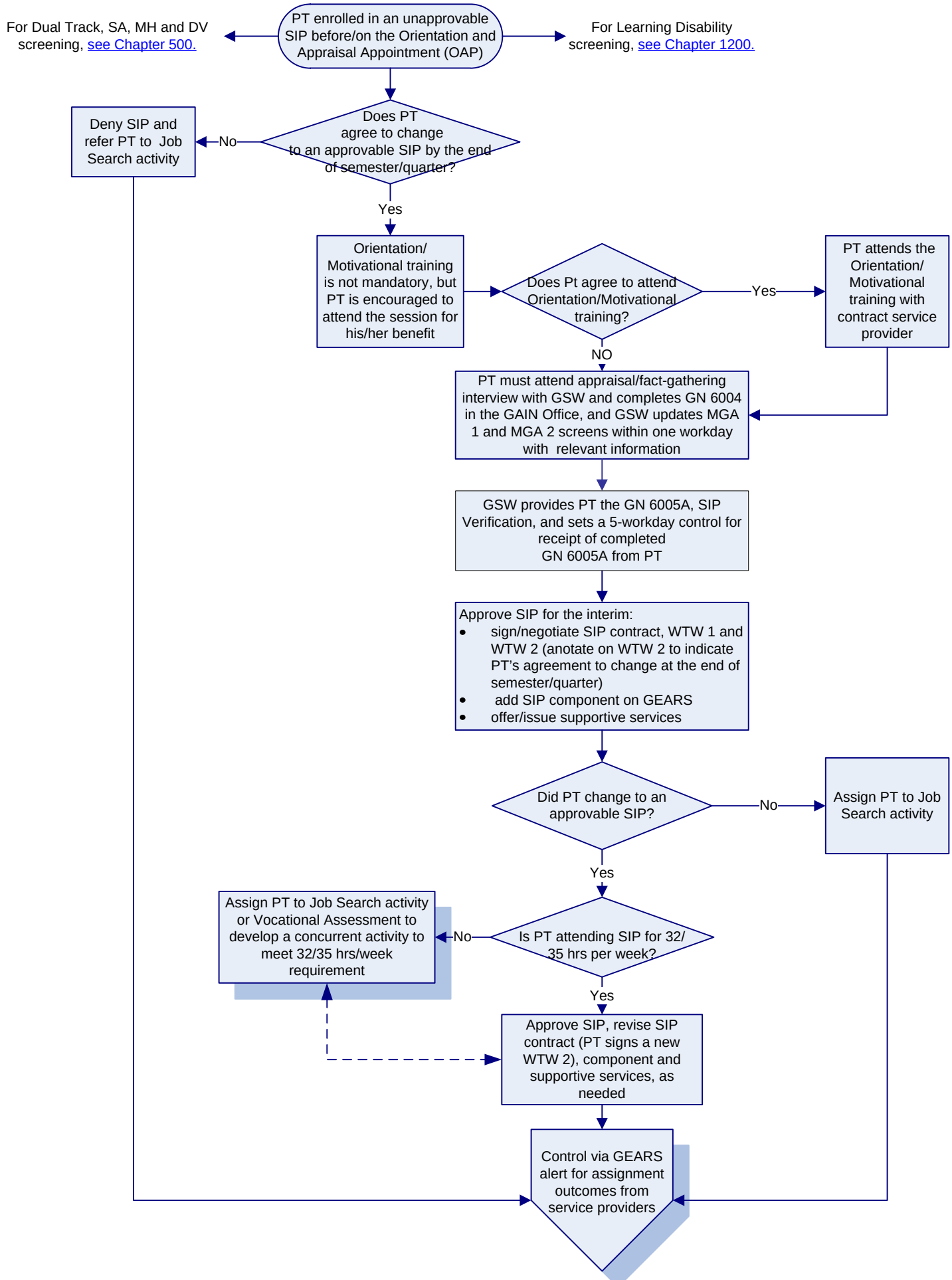
.93 If the participant does not attend the appointment that was scheduled by the GSW, and the GSW has not received and approved an extension request for the GAIN activity, then a compliance process may be initiated. However, the GSW will try to contact the GAIN participant before taking action and initiating the compliance process.

613 DECISION CHARTS

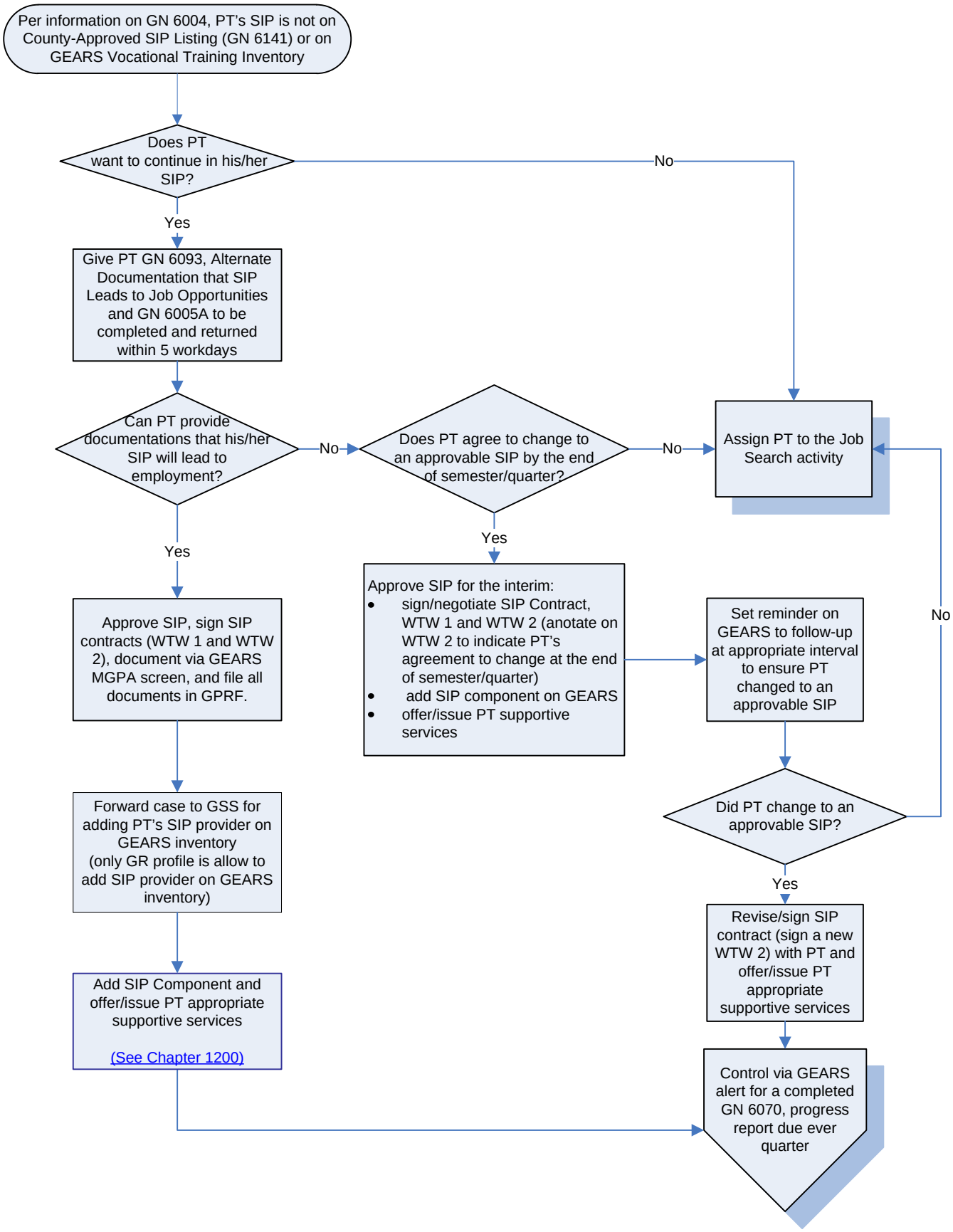
613.1 Approvable SIP Appraisal Decision Chart



613.2 Unapprovable SIP Appraisal Decision Chart

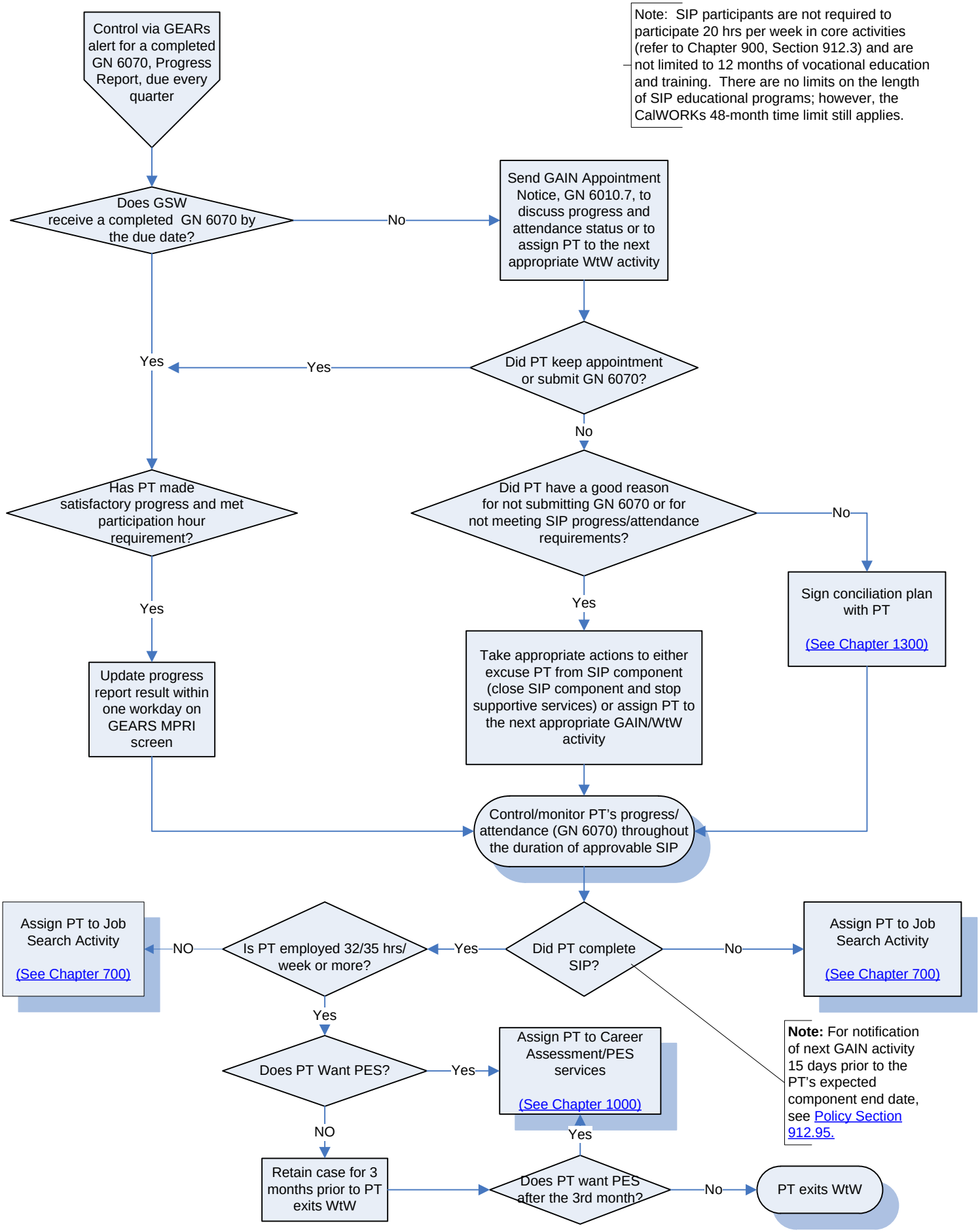


613.3 Alternate Documentation that SIP Leads to Job Opportunities Decision Chart

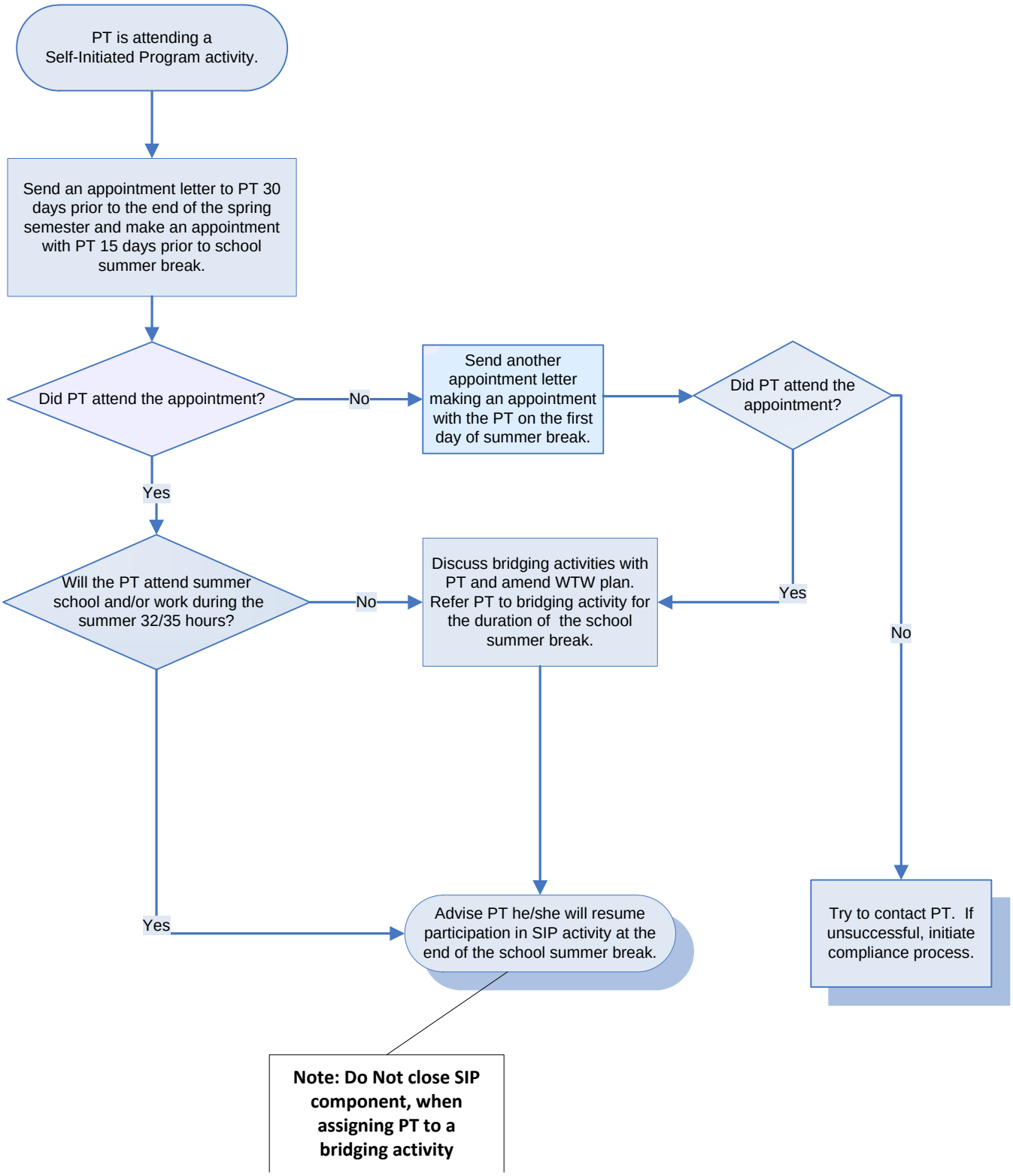


Note: SIP participants are not required to participate 20 hrs per week in core activities (refer to Chapter 900, Section 912.3) and are not limited to 12 months of vocational education and training. There are no limits on the length of SIP educational programs; however, the CalWORKs 48-month time limit still applies.

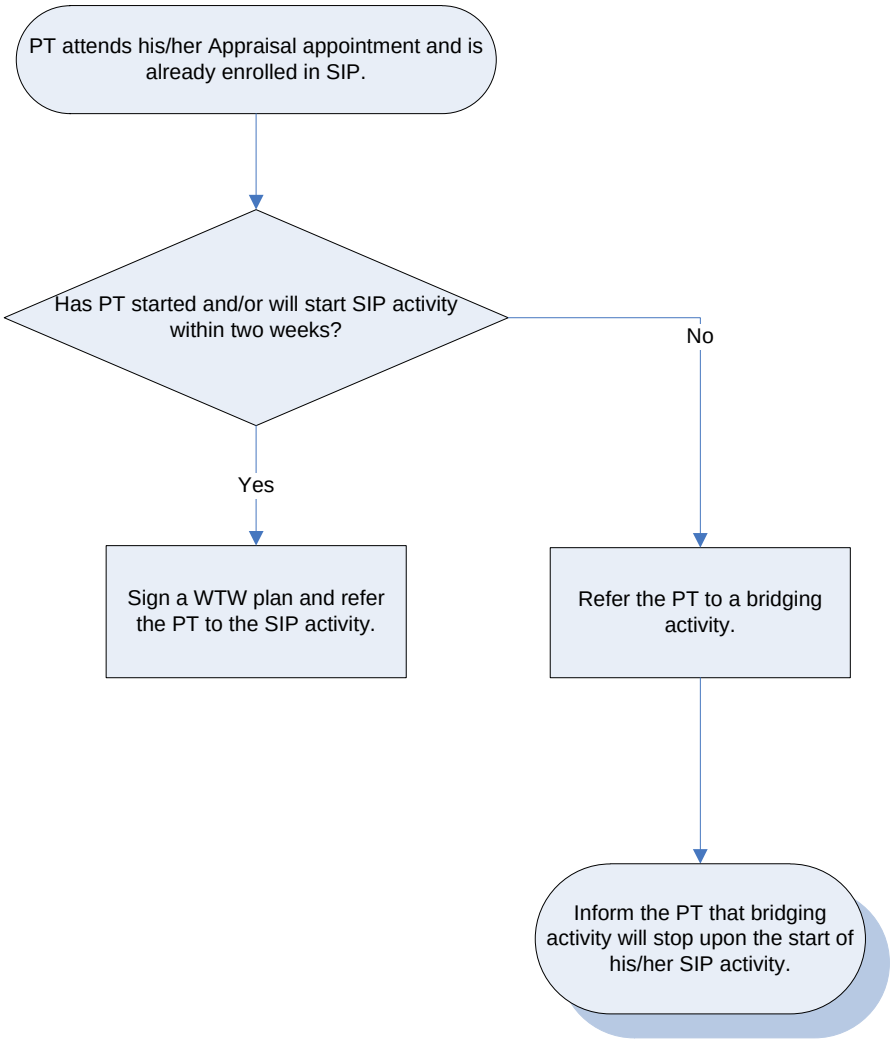
613.4 Progress and Participation Tracking Decision Chart



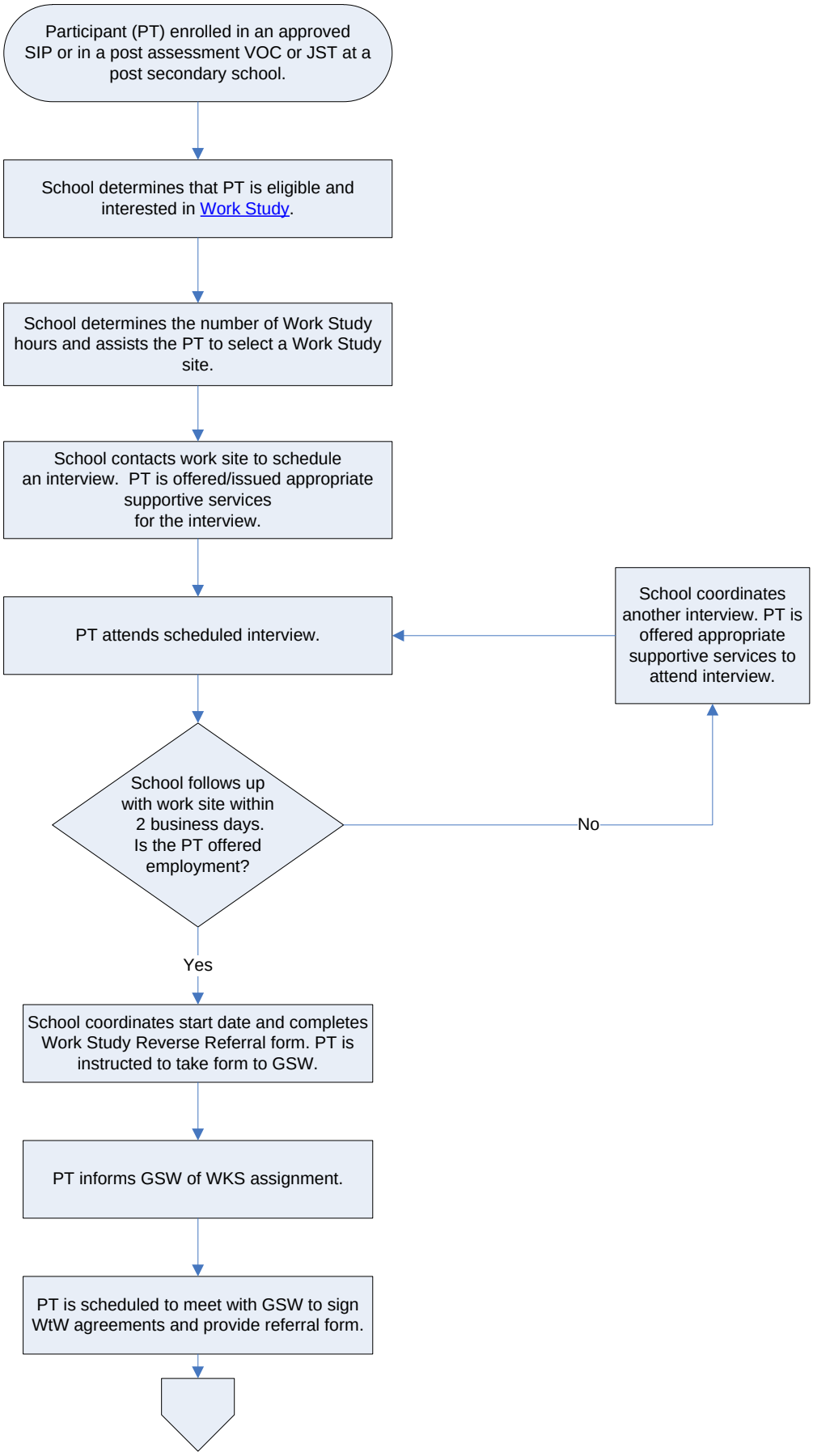
613.5 Referral to Bridging Activity During School Summer Break Decision Chart



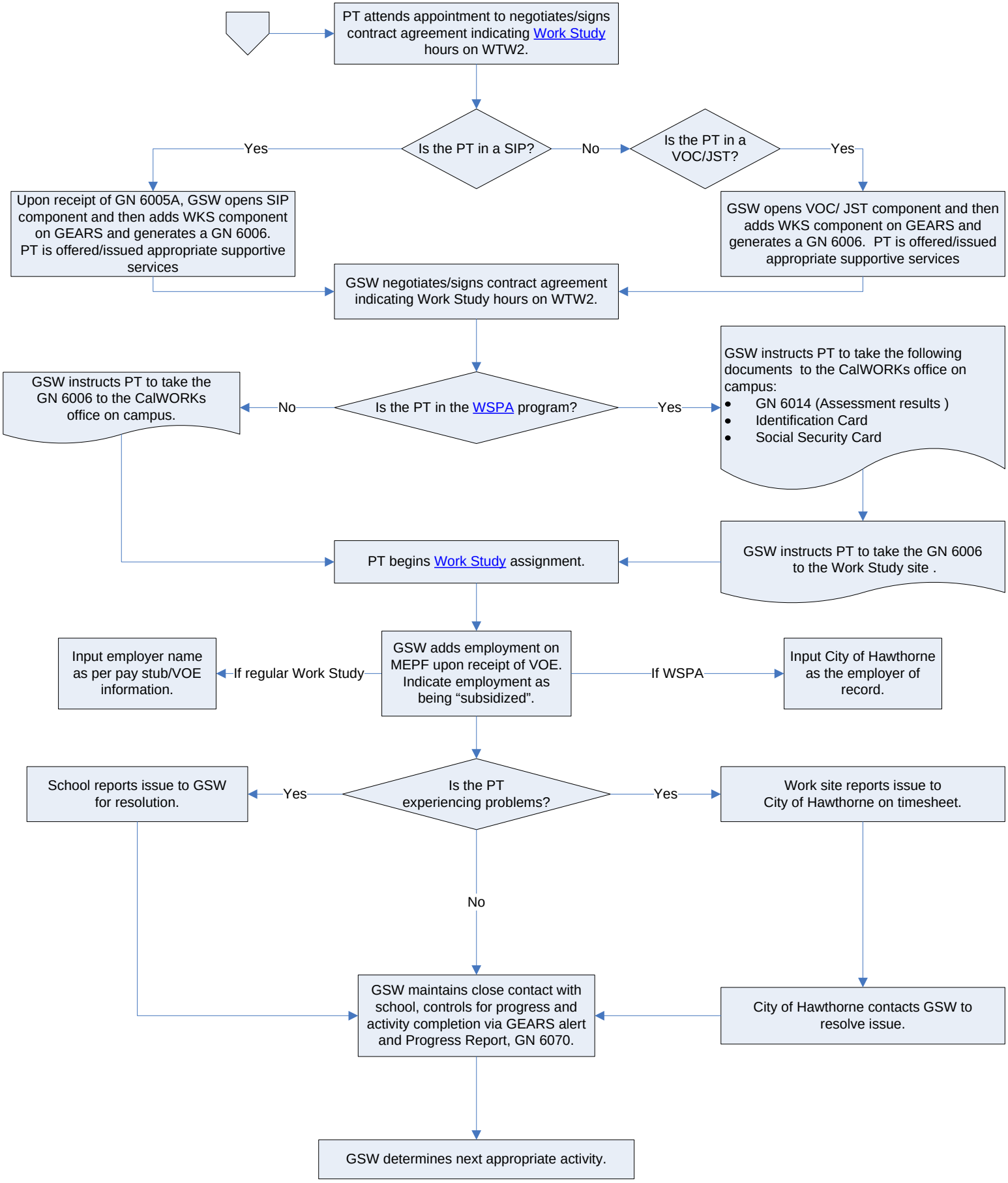
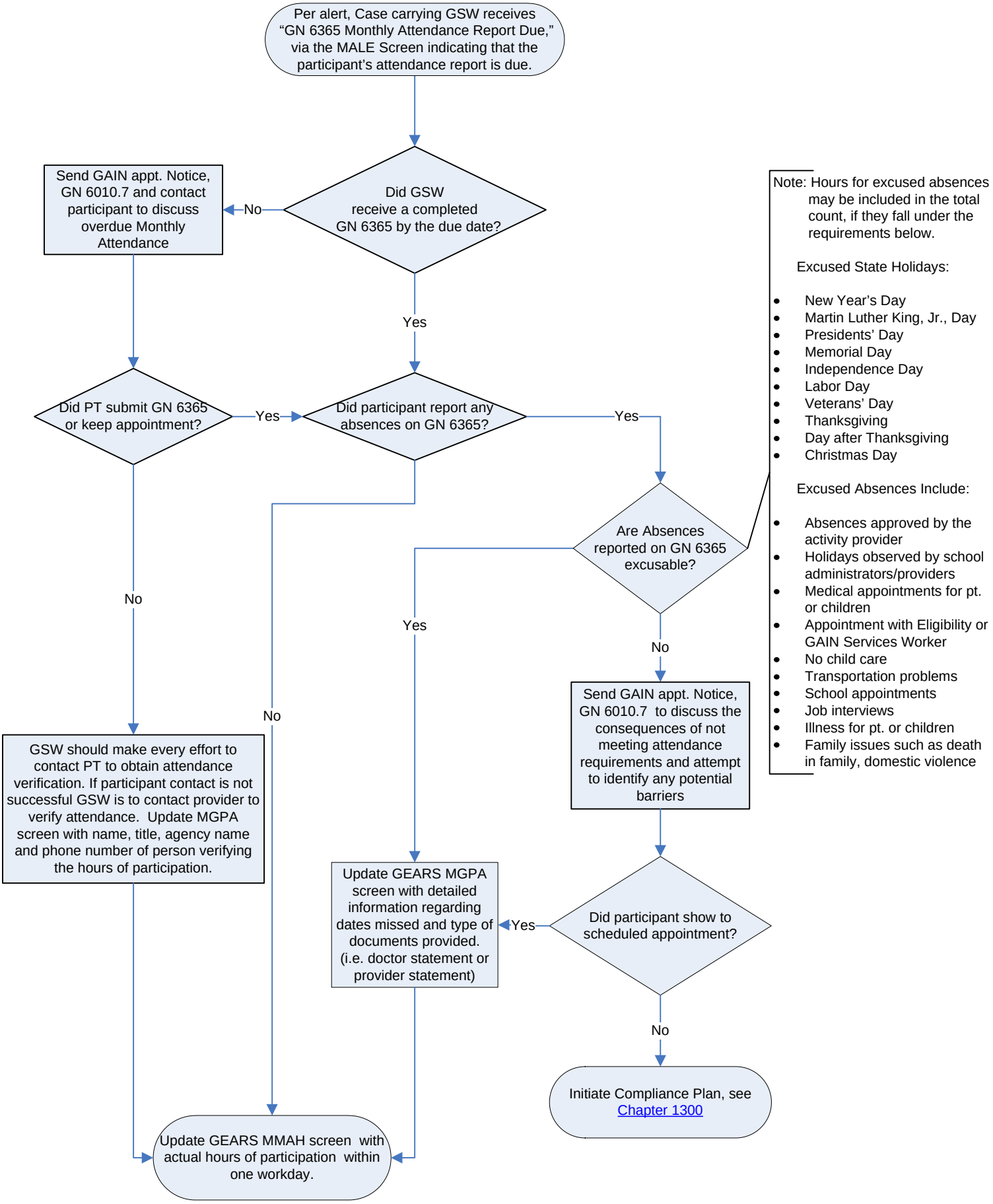
613.6 Referral to Bridging Activity Decision Chart



613.7 Work Study Decision Chart



613.7 Work Study Decision Chart (continued)



613.8 Monthly Attendance Report Decision Chart