



Survey Results: County Election Administrator Perspectives on Combining School Elections with the Primary or General Election

January 2, 2023

Notes: This survey summary was prepared by Sheri Scurr working as a special project employee for OPI and is based on survey results gathered and reported by MACo. Counties were not asked whether they run the school elections as mail ballot elections now, but previous survey data indicates that most of county-run school elections are conducted by mail. Of the 56 counties surveyed, only 31 counties have responded so far.

Summary

How many counties run school elections?

Of the 31 responding counties:

- 6 run ALL school elections (see Table 1)
- 8 run ONE OR SOME school elections (See Table 2)
- 17 run NO school elections (See Table 3)

If the school elections were to be combined with the primary or general election, which would the county prefer?

Of the 31 responding counties:

- 11 would prefer with general
- 12 would prefer with primary
- 7 responded neither and did not offer a preference
- 1 did not indicate

Themes in comments

- Not enough staff for county to run school elections
- District boundary differences would require many different ballot styles and administration would be very complex, potentially more errors
- Would need to make statutory timelines more uniform
- If must change, no changes until after 2024 presidential election and phase-in any changes
- All elections on the same day could be good if staffing and timelines and boundary complexity issues were addressed
- A task force or liaison with county and school election administrators would help



TABLE 1			
Counties that currently administer ALL school elections			
County	# of school districts	Primary or General for combining with schools	Summary of provided comments/ideas
Broadwater	2	General	Supports combining after presidential in 2024, but suggests task force and pilot or mock calendar
Dawson	6	General	Supports combining after presidential in 2024, but budget issues (short on staff), concerned about numerous ballot faces due to many different district boundaries
Madison	6	Primary	Would reduce cost because only one election
Mineral	3	Primary	Need to increase budget, more staff, need training
Ravalli	7	Primary	Change terms of trustees so elected every two years instead of an annual election – phase in changes and have delayed effective date
Sweet Grass	5	General	No comments

TABLE 2			
Counties that currently administer ONE OR SOME school elections			
County	# of school districts	Primary or General for combining with schools	Summary of provided comments/ideas
Big Horn	5 (running 1)	Neither	Phased-in approach if must change
Fallon	2 (running 1, but won't do again)	General	Small counties do not need more elections!



TABLE 2			
Counties that currently administer ONE OR SOME school elections			
County	# of school districts	Primary or General for combining with schools	Summary of provided comments/ideas
Fergus	10 (running 1)	Primary	Require them to be mail ballot elections, increase wages of election administrators
Flathead	23 (running 1 for community college)	Neither	Hire a coordinator to be liaison between schools and county; need additional staff; need uniform documents, rules, and procedures; definitely no changes until after 2024 presidential
Jefferson	8 (running 7)	General (but prefer neither)	More ballot styles creates more opportunities for errors; need training and meetings with schools and county administrators, implement any changes after 2024 presidential
Lake	8 (running 7)	General	No comments
Park	6 (running 2)	Primary	All school elections run by counties should be by mail, need training , funding, any changes after 2024 presidential
Sheridan	3 (running 1)	Primary	No comments

TABLE 3			
Counties that currently administer NO school elections			
County	# of school districts	Primary or General for combining with schools	Summary of provided comments/ideas
Blaine	5 – county declined all requests	Primary	We don't have the staff; if county must run, require them to be mail ballot, not polling place; if must change, do phased-in approach
Carbon	7 – county declined all requests	General	Don't have staff; need funding, have all elections on same day; keep government out of process
Custer	6	No reply	No comments



TABLE 3
Counties that currently administer NO school elections

County	# of school districts	Primary or General for combining with schools	Summary of provided comments/ideas
Daniels	1 – no requests	Primary	“No amount of money will make me want to administer school elections” ... no matter what day unless solved issue of different boundaries
Glacier	3	Neither	Don’t want to administer school elections because of different boundaries, staff shortages, complexities
Golden Valley	2	Neither	If combined, how do you reconcile the MCA differences, throw out Title 20 (school election timelines)? This would be big burden on staff and funding
Granite	3	Neither	No comments
Hill	9 – county declined requests	Neither	No desire to run school elections, do not mandate changes, leave up to counties, concerns about additional costs and burdens on staff, complexity of boundary differences
Musselshell	3 – no requests	Primary	Election administrators should be paid more, if changes, do after 2024 presidential, line up all the MCA provisions with primary or general
Phillips	4 – no requests	Primary	More compensation for staff, implement after 2024 presidential if must change, and have a task force to work through issues
Pondera	5 – no requests	Primary	No comments
Prairie	1 – no requests	Neither	Provide funding if must change, do at general
Richland	8 – 21 splits – county declined requests	General but prefer neither	General if must change, but don’t have staff, difficult to find election judges, would cause great complexity and potential error in ballots, would need 49 different ballot styles with some only going to 5 voters, definitely don’t change until after 2024 presidential if at all
Roosevelt	7, with 1 split into 5 districts – no requests	General	This would be a nightmare.



TABLE 3 Counties that currently administer NO school elections			
County	# of school districts	Primary or General for combining with schools	Summary of provided comments/ideas
Rosebud	9	Primary	Don't have staff, don't want to run school elections at all anytime, districts and splits too complex
Teton	9 – no requests	General	School don't want mail ballot elections, so they don't even ask the county, we wouldn't do it, cant' think of any good incentives, number of different ballot styles would be overwhelming
Toole	3 – no requests	General	Schools don't want mail ballot elections, so they don't even ask the county because we would only do mail ballot, if must change, change timelines to same as federal elections, county would have to hire more staff

Counties that did not respond

Anaconda, Beaverhead, Butte-Silverbow, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Gallatin, Garfield, Judith Basin, Lewis & Clark, Liberty, Lincoln, McCone, Meagher, Missoula, Petroleum, Powder River, Powell, Sanders, Stillwater, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, and Yellowstone

ATTACHEMENT

Excel worksheet of original survey responses as forwarded by MACo.