

SOS GUIDANCE: TEMPORARY COMBINATION OF PRECINCTS

FOR JUNE 2, 2020, PRIMARY ELECTION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ISSUE

[CDC guidance](#) and the [President's guidelines](#) encourage social distancing, so voters are being asked to vote absentee by mail. Due to the normally low turnout of voters during primary elections coupled with the absentee-by-mail campaign, election day turnout is expected to be extremely low.

[CDC guidance](#) also suggests that people aged 65 years and older might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 and should stay home and avoid close contact. A majority Precinct Election Officials (PEOs) are older than 65, and several are declining to serve as PEOs for this primary election.

Therefore, County Auditors do not need, or will be unable, to stand up all their precinct polling places and might consider temporarily combining precincts.

IOWA CODE OR ADMINISTRATIVE RULE

Temporary combination of precincts is covered in [Iowa Code Section 49.11](#).

WHAT HAS NOT CHANGED

Temporary combination of precincts is allowed in primary and general elections. There is **no limit** on how many precincts may be combined into one, and you are **not required to do a mailing** to registered voters when temporarily combining precincts. The change of polling place **must be published** in the notice of election, and a notice indicating the location of the new polling place **must be posted** at the former polling place before polls open on election day.

Remember: You must report temporary precinct combinations to the SOS office at least 25 days prior to the primary election. This year that deadline is May 8.

WHAT HAS CHANGED

Instead of being able to prevent the County Auditor from combining precincts, **eligible electors may not submit a petition requesting that the precincts not be merged.** If the County Auditor chooses to temporarily combine precincts for this primary election, no one may halt the combination.

CONCLUSION

Temporary combination of precincts can help address the shortage of PEOs by cutting down on the number of polling places while still allowing election-day voters the ability to vote in the region of the county where they live. **Set a tentative deadline of Friday, April 3, to set polling places and determine which precincts will be voting where.**

Combined precincts are not vote centers and should not be referred to as such because vote centers are not allowed in primary and general elections. Vote centers create multiple locations within a county at which a voter may vote and would not encourage voters to participate in social distancing. Temporary combinations allow for better planning as you know how many registered voters reside in each precinct and how turnout has been historically.

Ballot styles and rotation must be considered when combining precincts and are addressed on the next page.



Ballot Styles

[Iowa Code 49.31\(2\)](#) specifies that the commissioner shall arrange the precincts of the county in order to proceed with rotation. This does not specify if this list is comprised of original “home” precincts or combined precincts. You need to decide this before you can determine ballot rotation.

The commissioner also must decide if the absentee precinct is to be reported by “home” precinct or as a stand-alone precinct in accordance with [Iowa Code 53.20](#). Again, it is not clear if the determination of “home” precinct is the list of original precincts or combined precincts. You need to decide this also before you can determine ballot rotation.

If you opt to report based on combined precincts, as long as a combined precinct is entirely within the same state senate and representative and county supervisor districts, you could have just one ballot style per party at that polling place. HOWEVER, if within the combined precinct there is more than one state senate or representative or county supervisor district, then you must have a ballot style per party to include each district at that polling place.

Ballot Rotation

Once you have determined your polling places, precinct combinations, and ballot styles, then you need to determine ballot rotation. Beginning on page 2-44 of [EAH Chapter 2, Pre-Election Day](#), you will find guidance on ballot rotation.

SOS encourages reporting by “home” precinct due to the possibility of a petition being filed to prevent a precinct combination after ballots have been produced and absentee voting has begun. **For the 2020 Primary Election this possibility has been waived under Secretary Pate’s emergency order**, but our recommendation still stands.

Reasons why you should consider building your ballots based on “home” precincts:

1. With polling place locations in a state of flux, ballots produced based on the original “home” precincts are better able to adapt to last minute changes. This includes potential programming changes and/or relocation of tabulators to precincts that are combined after ballots are printed.
2. Reporting by home precinct will provide voters and candidates with the type of results they have been able to receive in past years. Particularly in an instance of an inconclusive primary that goes to convention, candidates and members of the public will expect to have access to precinct level results.
3. For counties considering large scale, regional combinations, the decision to rotate based on the smaller number of precincts will change the rotation outlook for candidates in races with larger fields (i.e. Democratic U.S. Senate and Republican U.S. Rep. District 2, and 4). This means that some candidates may not be listed first on any ballot style.

How to Combine Precincts in I-Voters

It is imperative that your combined precincts and temporary polling places are set up correctly in I-Voters. The “Find My Polling Place” application on the SOS website uses data directly from I-Voters, so the information your voters receive from the app correlates directly with your set-up in I-Voters.

This training video shows how to combine precincts in I-Voters: <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/video/TempPoll.mp4>.

On the next page are step-by-step instructions for setting up temporary polling places in I-Voters.

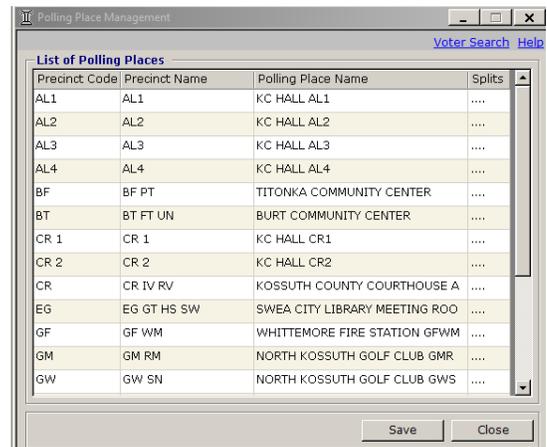


Temporary Polling Places in I-Voters

Once you have completed generating and renaming your ballot styles, for all election types click on **Polling Places** at the very top of the screen under the blue border and choose **Temporary Polling Places**.

1. Review the default polling place name assigned to the Precincts listed under the **Polling Place Name** column. If you need to change the location, click on the existing polling place listed and choose the correct one from the drop-down list and hit **Save**. If the correct polling place is not listed, you will need to add the polling place under **Districts & Precincts**.

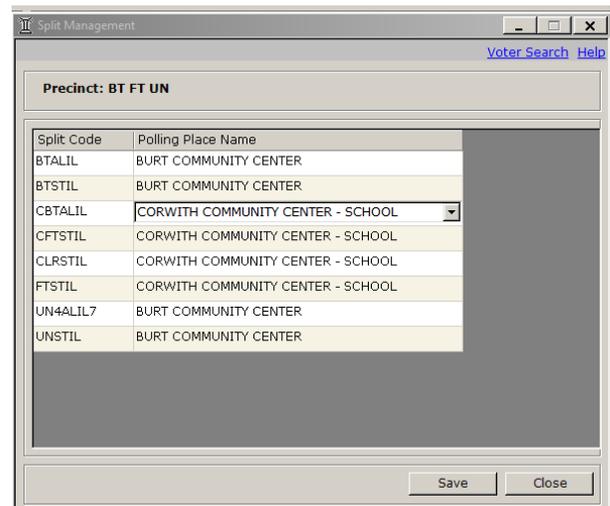
- Under **Districts & Precincts**, click on **Polling Places**.
- Click on **New**.
- Enter the **Code**, **Name**, check the **Polling Place** check box, and enter the address under **Residence** type. Complete the address details and click **Update** and hit **Save** on the Polling Place screen.



The screenshot shows the 'Polling Place Management' window with a table titled 'List of Polling Places'. The table has four columns: Precinct Code, Precinct Name, Polling Place Name, and Splits. The data is as follows:

Precinct Code	Precinct Name	Polling Place Name	Splits
AL1	AL1	KC HALL AL1	....
AL2	AL2	KC HALL AL2	....
AL3	AL3	KC HALL AL3	....
AL4	AL4	KC HALL AL4	....
BF	BF PT	TITONKA COMMUNITY CENTER	....
BT	BT FT UN	BURT COMMUNITY CENTER	....
CR 1	CR 1	KC HALL CR1	....
CR 2	CR 2	KC HALL CR2	....
CR	CR IV RV	KOSSUTH COUNTY COURTHOUSE A	....
EG	EG GT HS SW	SWEA CITY LIBRARY MEETING ROO	....
GF	GF WM	WHITTEMORE FIRE STATION GFWM	....
GM	GM RM	NORTH KOSSUTH GOLF CLUB GMR	....
GW	GW SN	NORTH KOSSUTH GOLF CLUB GWS	....

2. If the polling places are different within the same precinct, you will need to select the adjacent box under the **Splits** column by clicking on the "...." to allow you to assign the polling places at the split level. Follow the same process as above but choose the correct polling place for each of the listed splits and then hit **Save**.
3. Only choose **Save** on the first Polling Place screen once all the polling places have been verified/updated for all listed precincts/splits.



The screenshot shows the 'Split Management' window for precinct 'BT FT UN'. It displays a table with two columns: Split Code and Polling Place Name. The data is as follows:

Split Code	Polling Place Name
BTALIL	BURT COMMUNITY CENTER
BTSTIL	BURT COMMUNITY CENTER
CBTALIL	CORWITH COMMUNITY CENTER - SCHOOL
CFTSTIL	CORWITH COMMUNITY CENTER - SCHOOL
CLRSTIL	CORWITH COMMUNITY CENTER - SCHOOL
FTSTIL	CORWITH COMMUNITY CENTER - SCHOOL
UN44LIL7	BURT COMMUNITY CENTER
UNSTIL	BURT COMMUNITY CENTER

Important Note: Once you have started working on temporary polling places, you cannot change the type of election under **Election Details**.