Welcome to the Georgia Election Officials Certification Program for municipalities. This course, Election Operations, is one of the titles in the training requirements to achieve your certification.

The Georgia Election Officials Certification program courses are to be used as a guide for the administration of elections conducted by municipal election officials. Local election officials responsible for elections should find the information contained in this publication beneficial.

This course is not intended to be used as a substitute for the Georgia Constitution, relevant statutes, or applicable case law. Whenever there is a question regarding the interpretation of information contained in this handbook, or of a particular section of the Election Code, or any other statute, the user should contact competent legal counsel or the Office of the Secretary of State, Elections Division.

If we can assist you with additional information or clarification, do not hesitate to call the Elections Division at 404.656.2871.

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Election Terminology

**Election** – the formal decision making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office or decide a referendum.

4 Levels of Jurisdiction or Authority
1. Federal
2. State
3. County
4. Municipality

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**General Election** – an election recurring at stated internals fixed by law or by the respective municipal charters.

- Statewide General Elections are held on the 1st Tuesday after the 1st Monday in November in even numbered years.
- Alternate between Constitutional Offices (Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, etc.) and Presidential Elections
- Municipal General Elections are usually held on the 1st Tuesday after the 1st Monday in November odd numbered years.

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**Primary Election** - any election held for the purpose of electing party officers or nominating candidates for public offices to be voted for at an election.

**Special Election** - an election that arises from some exigency or special need outside the usual routine.
- The most common are to fill vacancies or to propose questions.
- They can be held in conjunction with General and Primary Elections or by themselves on the dates prescribed by law.
- Code section O.C.G.A. § 21-2-540 highlights the specific dates and other information on when to call a special election.
Nonpartisan Elections – an election in which party labels are not used

- Many judicial offices are nonpartisan
- All Municipal Elections are nonpartisan
- All Special Elections are technically nonpartisan
  - However, candidates may choose to declare a party in special elections for partisan offices
- The Nonpartisan General Election for nonpartisan state and county offices is held in conjunction with the General Primary

Runoff Elections

- No candidate shall be nominated for public office in any primary or special primary or elected to public office in any election or special election unless such candidate shall have received a majority of the votes cast to fill such nomination or public office.
- In instances where no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, a run-off primary, special primary runoff, run-off election, or special election runoff between the candidates receiving the two highest numbers of votes shall be held.
  - O.C.G.A. § 21-2-501(a)
  - No write-in candidates are allowed in runoff elections

Plurality – the receiving by one candidate alone of the highest number of votes cast.

- If the municipal charter or ordinances of a municipality provides that a candidate may be nominated or elected by a plurality of the votes cast to fill such nomination or public office, such provision shall prevail.
- Otherwise, no municipal candidate shall be nominated for public office in any primary or elected to public office in any election unless such candidate shall have received a majority of the votes cast to fill such nomination or public office.
  - O.C.G.A. § 21-2-501(b)
Precinct and Polling Place are often used as synonyms, but when we refer to them, they are actually two very different things:

- **Precinct** – a group of voters from a geographic area that vote at a common polling place.
- **Polling Place** – the physical location where voters cast their ballot.

Said another way:
- Precincts are groups of people.
- Polling Places are buildings.

**Vote Center** – a polling place where all voters from a county can cast their ballot, regardless of what precinct they live in.
- Advanced in-person voting locations operate like vote centers.
- With the current voting equipment in Georgia, vote centers can only be utilized during advanced in-person voting, not on election day.
  - Every voter must vote at their designated polling place within their precinct on election day.

**Voter Registration**

**County Registrar**

Registrar – a person who keeps a record; an official recorder.
- In the context of elections, this is the person who maintains the voter registration records for all voters within the county.
  - There are no municipal registrars.
  - They also conduct absentee voting in county elections.
  - The registrar will provide support for municipal absentee voting.
    - Provide an electors list.
    - Verify signatures on absentee ballot applications and returned absentee ballot envelopes.
Qualifications of Voters

To register to vote you must be:
• A citizen of the United States.
• A legal resident of Georgia and of the county in which you wish to vote.
• At least 17 1/2 years of age to register and 18 to vote.

You may NOT register to vote if you are currently:
• Serving any sentence imposed by the conviction of a felony.
• Judicially determined to be mentally incompetent.

Ways to Register

Georgia citizens have access to several convenient methods of registering to vote:
• Contact the local county board of registrars’ office or election office, public libraries, public assistance offices, recruitment offices, schools and other government offices for a mail-in registration form.
• Registration is offered when you renew or apply for your driver’s license at Department of Driver Services license posts.
• OLVR—Online Voter Registration is available on the Georgia SOS website for individuals who have a valid Georgia drivers license.
• SOS Website—Registration applications can be found on our website in fillable PDF form.

Note: Voter registration is a county function. Georgia counties issue precinct cards after reviewing and processing applications.

Voting

Election Day Voting

• County/Municipality opens polling places within precincts
• Voters must vote at their assigned polling location
• Polls are open from 7:00 am – 7:00 pm
• Half of Georgia Voters vote on Election Day
• You can use the GA Votes app or the My Voter Page to look up your polling location
Absentee Voting by Mail

• Any voter can request an absentee ballot up to 180 days before an election
• No reason is required to vote absentee by mail in Georgia
• Ballots start being mailed 49 days before an election for state, county and federal
• 22 days for municipal elections
• All ballots must be returned to the county registrar by the close of polls on election day
• 7:00 pm

Advanced In-Person Voting

• Every county in Georgia is required to offer advanced in-person voting during the three week period before an election.
• In-person voting is also available on the second Saturday prior to an election.
  • Required by federal law
  • Only for elections with federal and state level candidates
• One location is required, but many larger counties will open multiple vote centers.

Different Voting Methods in Georgia

All elections conducted by County Election Superintendents are conducted on the Statewide Voting System. However, not all municipal elections are conducted by county election officials. Municipalities conducting their own elections have a few choices when determining which voting method would work best for their jurisdiction.

A number of factors can influence a city’s choice when examining their options.
• Size of the municipal population
• Resources available for elections
  • Employees
  • Equipment
  • Finances
• Voter preference
• Historical practice
Municipalities have the freedom to choose which method of voting works best for them.

The different voting methods are listed below:

- **County Conducted Elections** – The county conducts the election according to the Intergovernmental Agreement on file
- **Contracting with the county to use the DRE machines without county involvement**
- **Paper ballots – Using the OS Unit (Optical Scan)**
- **Paper ballots – Counting the ballots by hand**
- **Shoup Machine**

Certification Needed for Each Voting Method

All county and municipal election superintendents shall become certified by completing a certification program approved by the Secretary of State by no later than December 31 of the year in which they are appointed.

It is the municipal superintendent or qualifying agents responsibility to obtain the necessary certification required.

- **County Conducted Election** – County does the election and the qualifying as outlined in the Intergovernmental Agreement
  - No certification required
- **County Conducted Election** – County does the election BUT the municipality qualifies as outlined in the Intergovernmental Agreement
  - Municipal Superintendent or Qualifying Agent will need to take MEOC Class number 5 (Qualifying class ONLY)
- **Municipality is using the county machines (DRE’s)** – Municipal superintendent will need to obtain full municipality certification (MEGC 1-10) AND attend the KSU classes on how to use the machines
Certification Needed for Each Voting Method

- Municipality is using paper ballots with the OS machine: Municipal superintendent will need to obtain full municipality certification (MEOC 1-10) AND take class 11
- Municipality is using paper ballots (counting by hand): Municipality superintendent will need to take the full municipal certification MEOC classes 1-10 AND take class 11
- Municipality is using the Shoup Machine: Municipality superintendent will need to take the full municipal certification MEOC classes 1-10 AND take class 11

You have completed the Election Operations course, you are now ready to take the Election Operations assessment. You can locate the test online by logging into Quizstar.4teachers at http://quizstar.4teachers.org/indexs.jsp

• If at any time while you are taking a quiz and need our assistance, please contact Holly Smith at 404-657-4247 or at hsmith@sos.ga.gov.