

PEOPLE LOVE IT: Experience with Early Voting in Selected U.S. Counties

A Report by Common Cause/NY and Common Cause Election Protection Project

Written by

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Introduction

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, “In 32 states and the District of Columbia, any qualified voter may cast a ballot in person during a designated period prior to Election Day. No excuse or justification is required.” This procedure is known as “Early Voting.” As in other aspects of election administration, there are many versions of Early Voting across the country with different levels of utility and efficiency.

Early Voting is adopted in all of the states west of the Mississippi, except for Washington State and Oregon where all elections are conducted solely by mail. In the 2012 presidential election, more than 30 million voters cast their ballots before Election Day.

In the eastern part of the country, in contrast, there is no region where states have uniformly adopted Early Voting. In the mid-Atlantic region, Maryland has recently instituted Early Voting and Connecticut’s voters will decide in 2014 whether to authorize Early Voting through a constitutional amendment.

In New York, serious public consideration of Early Voting began as a result of Superstorm Sandy’s extreme disruption of the 2012 election in New York’s 8 most populous counties. In his State of the State address this past January, Governor Cuomo identified Early Voting as a reform priority.¹ Later that same month, the New York State Bar Association’s Special Committee on Voter Participation endorsed Early Voting in its report which was adopted by the State Bar Association’s Conference of Delegates.² A bill to institute Early Voting has passed the State Assembly, but failed to move forward in the State Senate. Election Administrators around the state are examining the issue.

In New York, as elsewhere, the concept of Early Voting is popular with the public. More than two-thirds of New Yorkers surveyed by Siena Research earlier this year support Early Voting.³ Yet we have found that misconceptions abound, with few voters and even some election administrators unfamiliar with the Early Voting experience in other states. We strongly believe that any state’s decision whether to adopt Early Voting should be made on the basis of facts and not ideology. Our strong support for Early Voting is based on the experience of Common Cause voters and staff in states that have Early Voting. Common Cause/NY and Common Cause nationally is dedicated to assisting the public and states in learning about best practices in election administration, so that the public, election administrators and legislators can work together to continue to improve their state’s voting administration to insure efficient, secure, transparent, reliable, and accessible elections for all Americans.

This report is not a survey, comparison or discussion of Early Voting in all 36 states that provide their citizens with some means of voting in advance of election day. Rather, our goal in preparing this report was to examine selected counties across the country whose experience with Early Voting provides what we hope will be helpful and relevant information for those considering whether to adopt Early Voting in New York and other Atlantic region states.

Methodology

Early Voting, as is the case with all aspects of election law and administration in the United States, is handled differently in each state that allows it, and, in some states, differently in each county within the state. We began with a review of the laws pertaining to Early and Absentee Voting in all 50 states to identify the various ways in which Early Voting is conducted across the country, as well as a limited review of the academic literature pertaining to Early Voting. The first part of this report is devoted to a discussion of the results of that review.

We then reviewed the laws pertaining to Early Voting in states in which Common Cause has a presence to identify those states whose election administration had some aspect we subjectively deemed relevant to New York's election administration. Based on our analysis of the laws pertaining to Early Voting and our discussions with colleagues, we selected 6 states for examination: Florida, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, North Carolina and Ohio.

Our next step was to query Common Cause staff, consultants and activists in those states to identify counties with particularly strong election administrations. Our purpose was to learn from the practical experience of other states in order to make recommendations to devise an Early Voting system that serves the voters, while remaining manageable for its administrators.

The counties profiled were selected based on the recommendations of state-level elections administrators, local nonprofit organizations, as well as recommendations from Common Cause staff. The counties are: Orange County, FL; Cook County, IL; Montgomery County, MD; Bernalillo County, NM; and Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC. These counties have efficient Early Voting systems that have met with exceptional success. Also, all of these counties are urban or are among the most populous counties in their states, which means that their Early Voting systems must be robust, efficient, and cost-effective to serve such large populations. Additionally, all use a combination of DRE, Optical Scan, and Paper ballot systems, as New York does, which means that their experiences managing and securing ballots will be more relevant and useful to NY legislators. Additionally, though some of these states, like Florida and North Carolina, have more established Early Voting systems, others, like Maryland and New Mexico, have established these systems more recently. This report, then, contains advice from those who have been through the trial-and-error process, and those who are currently experiencing the transition into Early Voting.

We looked specifically at five aspects of early in-person voting systems, seeking answers to the following questions:

1. System: What has the experience been with implementing Early Voting in the states we surveyed? Can their experiences provide guidance regarding what should be required by statute, and what should be left up to counties and municipalities to decide? How much flexibility should be built into Early Voting systems?

2. **Dates and Times:** Can the experience of other states help determine a preferred length of time to offer Early Voting or identify appropriate hours to reach the most voters? Can we discern a pattern identifying the days or times of day that elections administrators experience the heaviest voter traffic?
3. **Voting Locations:** Is there a clearly preferable system for determining how many voting locations a county should have? What has experience been with systems that determine Early Voting locations according to population? Geography? Demographics? Further, what locations are most useful? Elections offices? Government buildings like libraries and schools, or unconventional locations like grocery stores or shopping malls?
4. **Ballot Security:** What practices have been put in place to secure ballots during the Early Voting period and prevent voter fraud? What technology has been used to aid in these efforts?
5. **Budgeting:** How have states and counties budgeted for Early Voting? Who is responsible for bearing the costs of Early Voting? How does it affect election day costs? Are there any savings associated with Early Voting?

With these questions in mind, Common Cause interviewed state and county-level elections officials that have first hand experience with administering Early Voting (both early in-person and in-person absentee systems). The second section of this report details the Early Voting experiences of those counties and the advice of their administrators.

The final section of the report summarizes Common Cause/NY's recommendations for states looking to implement Early Voting, based on the experiential knowledge of county and state elections administrators who have already been through that process.

I. EARLY VOTING OVERVIEW

Defining Early Voting

Broadly speaking, Early Voting refers to mechanisms that allow voters to cast a ballot before election day. States, journalists, and academics use the term loosely to refer to many different voting practices, so it is, therefore, useful to outline a working terminology for discussing Early Voting systems.

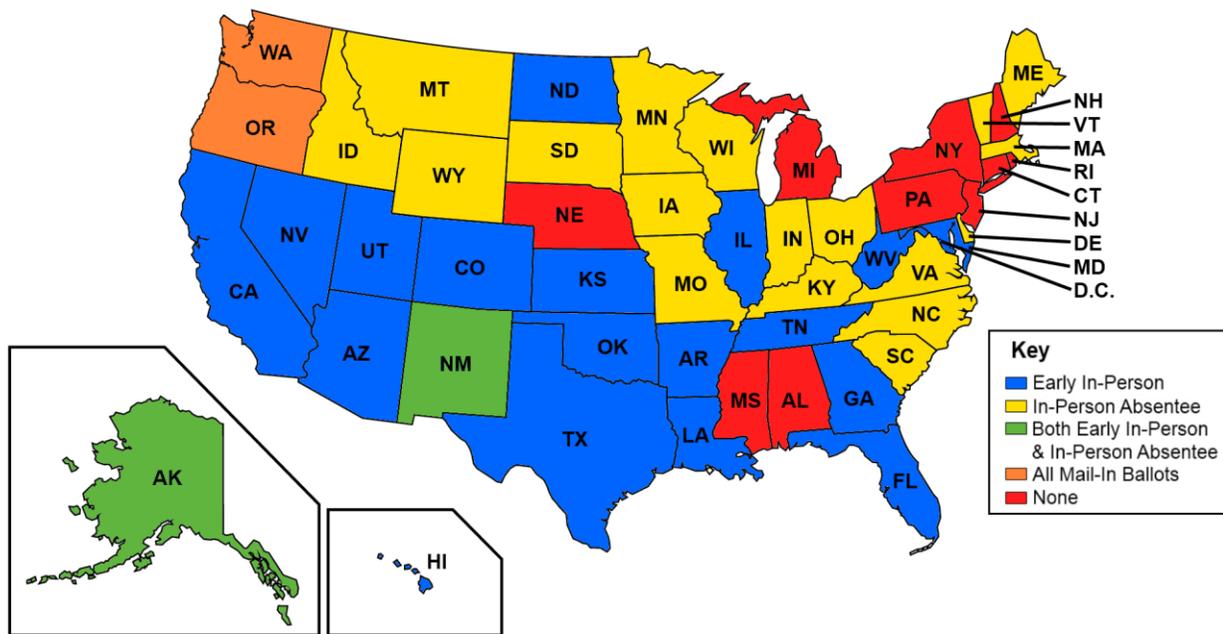
Today, the term “Early Voting” is used separately from mail-in systems. Following this trend, this report does not consider mail-in absentee ballot systems a type of “Early Voting.”

Additionally, Washington and Oregon, which have both adopted all-mail voting systems, are treated as special cases. Though both states allow voters to hand-deliver their ballots to elections officials in a way that could be construed as “Early Voting,” the overall system in these states is so different that its data provides little that is applicable for the implementation of Early Voting in other states.

The two broad categories of Early Voting that remain are *in-person absentee* and *early in-person*. This report examines the latter. Accordingly, we use early in-person to refer to systems that do not use the word “absentee” to describe its Early Voting system. Though this differentiation seems only semantic, it does reflect the shared characteristics of these systems: that they do not require voters to fill out voting applications before casting their ballots, do not require an excuse for Early Voting, *and* use the same technology and process for Early Voting as they do on election day. The first distinction is especially important because, in some states, “any voter who chooses to vote absentee is perforce allowing a multitude of factors to intrude on the likelihood that his or her ballot will count.”⁴ Because an absentee ballot is verified after the vote has been cast, a ballot could be invalidated for a number of reasons, such as mismatching signatures. With Early Voting a voter’s eligibility to vote is verified before the ballot is cast, obviating this potential problem.

By these definitions, 38 states across the nation have implemented either in-person absentee systems (19 states) or early-in person systems (18 states and D.C.), not including Alaska, which offers both options. Two states (Oregon and Washington) have switched to all mail-in balloting, and the remaining 10 states (AL, CT, MA, MS, NE, NJ, NH, NY, PA, and RI) have no in-person voting options other than allowing voters to deliver their applied-for absentee-by-mail ballots straight to their county office.

The in-person absentee category covers a diverse array of Early Voting systems. Some of these states have extra barriers for absentee voters. Massachusetts, for example, allows in-person absentee voting, but requires registered voters to make individual arrangements to vote early with election officials 2-3 weeks before the election. Also, many in-person absentee systems (DE, KY, MA, MN, MO, MT, SC, VA) require voters to have a valid excuse in order to vote early.



Map of Early Voting Systems across the U.S. (May 2013)

At the same time, some Early Voting systems blur the line between in-person absentee and early in-person voting. Some, like North Carolina and Wisconsin, have “one-stop absentee” systems where a voter can apply for an absentee ballot and cast it in-person during the same visit. This seems very similar to early in-person voting, except that voters do not use the same ballots or voting equipment that they would use on election day. Another mixed case is Kentucky’s system, which it calls “absentee voting” even though it allows citizens to cast their votes directly into the same voting machines used on election day. However, Kentucky is regarded as an in-person absentee system because it requires its voters to have an excuse in order to vote early.

Some states also allow for a great deal of flexibility in their statutes or constitutions when it comes to Early Voting. Many allow their counties to independently determine important aspects of election administration such as the type of election equipment, security, and budgeting, so that there is constant revision and innovation of Early Voting procedures at the county level that is difficult to track from a state or national perspective.

The great diversity in in-person absentee reflects the lack of national consensus on what Early Voting looks like and how to talk about it. However, this gives New York and other late arrivers the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other states to fashion the most effective and efficient Early Voting systems.

Specifically, this report considers the following characteristics of Early Voting systems: the length and hours of the Early Voting period, methods for determining the number and location of

Early Voting sites, methods for ensuring ballot security and preventing voter fraud, and preferred budgeting practices.

The New York Bill

New York is falling behind when it comes to modernization of its elections laws and administration. It is one of only 10 states that have yet to implement some form of Early Voting option. New York's voter turnout is one of the lowest in the nation, while New York City's turnout is the lowest among major metropolitan centers.⁵ 2012 Election Day coverage featured long lines winding outside of the state's polling centers and election administrators' frantic efforts to expand voting opportunities in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. An Emergency Executive Order allowed New Yorkers to cast provisional ballots at any location convenient to them, but the last minute adoption of the provision created a monstrous workload for elections administrators in affected areas.

In the past legislative session, Early Voting legislation that might address these concerns, among others, by making voting more convenient for voters across the state was introduced. The bill, sponsored by New York State Assembly Speaker, Sheldon Silver, passed the State Assembly but languished in the State Senate. While no public hearings were conducted by either house on Early Voting or the specific bill, the issue of Early Voting was discussed by various County Boards of Election.

The bill (A689 same as S01461) attempts to raise turnout and to alleviate several challenges for administration of in-person voting on Election Day and ease the burden on election day polling sites. The bill states that, "All New Yorkers, regardless of work schedules or personal and professional commitments should have the ability to vote in each and every election," which the bill aims to achieve by increasing accessibility, convenience, and ease.

Specifically, the bill calls for Early Voting from 14 days before a general election and 7 days before a primary election, right up to Election Day. It requires specific hours (8:00 am – 7:00 pm) each day, including weekends. In terms of Early Voting locations, the legislation requires each county to set up at least five Early Voting polling places that are "geographically located to provide all voters in each county an equal opportunity to cast a ballot." It specifies that election day protocol must be observed during the Early Voting period, and that ballots be handled in the same way that election day ballots are. It also allows counties the flexibility to use ballot scanner technology and voting machines, and requires up-to-date poll books to prevent voter fraud. The bill also includes other provisions, such as mailing voters information about Early Voting options in advance.

While New York State's suggested Early Voting length is near standard (15 days before election day is the most common start date), and though it allows flexibility with election technology and location selection, we believe that less restrictive provisions are preferable. The case studies that

follow in the second section of this report provide insight into the relative strengths and weaknesses of this Early Voting bill and where it might be improved.

The Big Question: Does Early Voting affect voter turnout?

Much of academic research has focused solely on the question of how Early Voting practices affect voter turnout.⁶ For the most part, however, studies have found that Early Voting has only a marginal impact on total voter turnout.

Barry Burden's frequently cited report on Wisconsin's 2008 general election finds that though Early Voting sites were heavily used (more than 30% of votes were cast before election day), total turnout actually decreased by 3% in Wisconsin as a whole.⁷ However, Burden's report stands alone in reporting a decrease in turnout. Most of his colleagues find that Early Voting either has no impact on turnout, or that turnout modestly increases.

The percent of voters that take advantage of Early Voting in its first years is highly correlated with campaign efforts.⁸ Campaigns can increase voters' awareness that new Early Voting systems are in place, and can, in major part, mitigate the potential effects of Early Voting reductions.⁹ Some note that the boost in turnout that campaigns effect is "short-lived," but this may be because campaigns have not yet found an efficient way to factor Early Voting into their strategy year to year.¹⁰

But regardless of campaign strategy, the impact of Early Voting rules on turnout is also highly dependent on how long the system has been in place. Since voting is habit-forming,¹¹ a more established system will experience an increase in turnout over time. Many counties experience yearly increases in Early Voting traffic for a number of election cycles. Others note, however, that these increases tend to level off after the system is more established.¹²

As a result, when state legislators have made moves to cut back on Early Voting, they have had a negative impact on the efficacy of Early Voting and turnout. In the 2012 General Election, a number of states shortened their in-person absentee and early in-person voting periods. Significantly, Florida's move to decrease their Early Voting period from 14 to 8 days had a significant impact on certain demographics, especially black voters and Democrats.¹³ This was precisely what concerned the Obama 2012 campaign when elections administrators in Ohio attempted to prevent non-military voters from voting on the weekend before election day. The Obama campaign stated that this was a form of voter suppression. Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the administrators' effort to curtail Early Voter on that week-end, and 105,000 voters cast their votes in those three days alone.¹⁴

However, even when Early Voting does increase turnout, it is by a small margin. Though many Republicans were reportedly concerned that Early Voting would advantage the Democratic Party, a Gallup poll released one week before the 2012 General Election actually found that a slightly higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats had taken advantage of Early Voting

(19% Republicans versus 15% Democrats). This is likely due to their finding that senior citizens, who are generally more conservative, were more likely to vote early than their younger counterparts.¹⁵

That being said, election administrators should welcome any opportunity to make voting more convenient. Voting should not be subject to an onerous cost-benefit analysis; on election day, voters should not be required to give up shifts at work or set aside time in the middle of the day to sit in line for hours in front of polls. Voting is not a privilege, it is a right, and it is the responsibility of lawmakers and administrators to lessen the burden for citizens to take part in their democracy.

Devising Smart Early Voting Systems

But the benefits of Early Voting go beyond increases in turnout. In the last presidential election, New York voters faced Hurricane Sandy just days before the election, which left destruction in its wake. It destroyed some precincts in downstate counties including Long Island and Westchester, as well as throughout New York City, and required a flurry of provisional ballots and special measures to ensure that voters could still have the opportunity to cast ballots. There is no doubt that the flexibility of an Early Voting system would have lessened the impact of the hurricane on elections.

Additionally, long lines at precincts on election day 2012 caused outrage, and Early Voting would decrease those lines. Early Voting has the potential to decrease the election day burden on administrators and voters alike.

But there are certainly some Early Voting protocols that work better than others, and some states and counties have devised smart and effective Early Voting programs that could inform New York's own voting system. Review of the academic literature helps understand some of the dimensions of Early Voting that this report examines: the system, dates and times, voting locations, ballot security, and budgeting.

Many academic reports relay the nervousness elections administrators feel on implementing Early Voting regarding ballot and equipment security, costs, staffing, etc., but these same reports do little to help evaluate the validity of these concerns.¹⁶ Many simply point to these fears and take them at face value, rather than evaluating the ways existing Early Voting systems have addressed these issues. Of course, elections administrators have a right to be nervous in the face of change, but that does not mean that the benefits of the change itself should be discounted.

Some reports have addressed the effect differing days and times have on Early Voting success. A Government Accountability Office report¹⁷ surveyed 17 jurisdictions across 9 states and D.C., and found that 13/17 jurisdictions were concerned about the planning Early Voting would require, especially when it came to finding staff and ensuring the security of voting equipment over the weekend. Indeed, Herron and Smith's report on Florida found that traffic at polls

increases over the weekend, and especially on the last weekend during the Early Voting period. In the 2012 election, for example, so many voters turned up on the last Saturday before election day that three counties had to stay open until early Sunday morning to accommodate all of the voters in line. The report notes that black voters were overrepresented in the Saturday rush when compared to the registered number of black voters in these counties. But knowing this sort of information would allow counties to allocate their resources wisely. Those concerned jurisdictions can examine where their staff are needed the most, and assign them to weekend shifts.

There also should be room for flexibility in Early Voting systems. After Hurricane Sandy in October 2012, Watauga County in North Carolina attempted to vote to extend Early Voting hours. Though this motion was not ultimately adopted, it reflects that Early Voting systems have the flexibility to respond to emergency situations.¹⁸ One of the Florida counties in Herron and Smith's report was also able to extend its hours after a bomb threat shut the polling place down for several hours on Saturday, November 3. Spreading voting over a couple of weeks, rather than dealing with all voters at once on election day, allows elections officials time to work out problems like these, and also decreases the chaos of election day in general.¹⁹

Other reports analyze the way that the choice of Early Voting locations can increase or decrease early turnout. For example, one study²⁰ found that Early Voting can have a "mobilizing effect" in the following situations:

- If voters stumble upon Early Voting locations in non-traditional sites (grocery stores, libraries, shopping malls, etc.)
- If voters run across others who voted early and are reminded to vote themselves
- If voters encounter news coverage of Early Voting
- If voters are subject to candidate or party campaigns encouraging Early Voting

Making Early Voting present in the daily life of a potential voter seems to increase the likelihood that a person will take advantage of Early Voting opportunities. Elections administrators have the power to increase the likelihood of the first scenario: that voters will run into Early Voting locations during their usual routines. Indeed, other reports have found that placing voting centers in "nontraditional locations" or "socially familiar sites" increases early turnout.²¹ The same report also finds that those nearest to their Early Voting site were 13% more likely to vote than those farther away from voting locations. Distance also has a greater impact in rural counties than in urban counties, and in locations where residents have long commutes to work, the Early Voting rate drops 22%. Taking this into consideration, it may be more useful to put more Early Voting sites in office and industry-heavy parts of counties rather than in residential areas, so that commuters can factor voting into their workday.

Statistics and data about Early Voting security and budgeting are much harder to find. Though there are many people discussing the possibility of voter fraud with respect to Early Voting, counties and states have not published reports about incidents of voter fraud or about how they secure Early Voting locations overnight. Voting technology seems to both greatly ease the Early Voting process and greatly increase rampant fears about its misuse or malfunctioning.

There is similar concern about budgeting for Early Voting. Information about how counties fund Early Voting is not typically made public, though concerns about costs and staffing are also common. This report will shed some light on how elections administrators in successful counties secure voting locations overnight, and how counties find savings in implementing Early Voting, but hopefully future academic studies will address these gaps in data and knowledge.

II.
CASE STUDIES

FLORIDA

Source

Telephone interviews with:

- Carolyn Thompson, a Florida Voter Protection Advocate at the Advancement Project
- Bill Cowles, Supervisor of Elections, Orange County

State Overview

Florida has a no fault early in-person system that underwent significant changes in the recent past. Originally, the Early Voting system provided for two weeks of Early Voting, but this was cut to just 8 days in time for the 2012 general election, which Carolyn Thompson at the Advancement Project called a “painful” experience. Reports show that turnout—and especially the turnout of black voters and Democrats—decreased as a result of this change.²² Legislative efforts are under way to allow counties more flexibility in determining their Early Voting policies in terms of days, hours, and locations.

Florida has some unique state-level measures that increase the system’s effectiveness. For example, the state puts information about wait times online, so that voters can go to the Early Voting centers that have the shortest wait times. This is highly convenient for voters, and allows them to better structure their days around voting.

Florida State Early Voting Requirements

System	Early In-Person, No Fault
Dates	E-10 to E-3 ¹
Times	Centers must be open for 8-12 hours per day, including Saturday and Sunday.
Locations	Early voters can cast ballots in the main or branch office of the Supervisor of Elections, though the Supervisor may also designate any city hall or public library as an Early Voting site. All locations must be geographically convenient to voters so that “all voters in the county [...] have an equal opportunity to vote.” Early voters can use any voting location in the county.
Voting Technology	Optical Scan, DRE, Ballot-On-Demand statewide
Ballots and Security	Early voters use the same type of voting equipment as election day voters. Voters must present ID and fill out an “Early Voting voter certificate” in which they swear and affirm that they will not commit voter fraud, and that they will bear the consequences if they do.
Budgeting	Managed on the county level

¹ I.e., “election day minus 10 days to election day minus 3 days,” or that Early Voting runs from ten days before election day to the third day before election day. During a November election, this would mean that voters could cast early ballot two Saturdays before the Tuesday election, until the Saturday before the Tuesday election. In this report, we use the “E-#” format as shorthand.

Orange County, FL: Demographic Facts²³

- Geography: Central Florida, includes Orlando and a dozen other municipalities.
- Population: 1,157,372
- Urban/Rural: 90% urban and 10% rural
- Race: 46.0% White, 26.9% Hispanic or Latino, 19.5% Black or African American, 4.9% Asian
- Major Industries: Tourism (Arts, Entertainment, Lodging, and Food Services account for 18% of industry)
- Administration: Elected County Supervisor of Elections supported by professional staff



Orange County, FL: Experience with Early Voting

At the time we spoke to Bill Cowles, the Supervisor of Elections in Orange County, Florida was in the middle of legislative sessions where Early Voting policies were up for debate. Though Cowles had changes that he would recommend for Early Voting in Florida, for the most part, he said that the system just made sense for his county. According to Cowles, the number one reason Early Voting is appropriate for Orange County is that tourism employs many of the county's residents and shapes daily life. Because most residents of Orange County do not have a typical workday, the traditional election day vote is simply inconvenient, and Early Voting gives voters "the flexibility to vote within their own convenience."

Orange County's experience is illuminating when it comes to the impact of Florida's recent legislative changes in Early Voting policy. When Florida decreased the Early Voting period from 14 days to 8 days, Orange County made up for the shortage by offering the maximum number of Early Voting hours possible—but the increasing the number of *hours* in the day that Early Voting polling places were open did not compensate for the fewer number of *days* of Early Voting. These statutory changes actually allowed for the same overall number of hours, but restricted the overall Early Voting period. Orange County offered the maximum possible hours, 12 hours on each of the 8 days, but Cowles reports that this didn't make up for the 6 lost days. He explains, "It was the same number of hours, but we didn't get as many people through the process. People were frustrated." Planning for an election cycle is not unlike opening a business, he says, because you must plan for a soft opening and build to a big weekend. Cowles explains, "When you start on Saturday, which is normally a big turnout day, you get a weak opening."

Squeezing two weeks of voters into eight days also put a lot of pressure on poll workers, who had to work 12 hour days, not including setting up and closing down the polls or accommodating for voters who are still waiting in line when the polls closed for the day. Cowles explains, "I'm

not sure if we'd have workers that could survive 16 hour days for 8 days." But while this time might not be sufficient for Orange County, Cowles recognizes that 8 days might be enough for smaller, rural counties. Proposed legislation would require 8 days, but allow bigger counties to opt for running Early Voting from 15 days before election day to the Sunday before. In Orange County, Cowles says, they'll definitely go back to a 14-day schedule.

According to Bill Cowles, the most important thing for an Early Voting system is that it be flexible. "Not every county is the same," he says, "The elections office [of a county] knows their community better and would know how to pick good locations and times."

In particular, Cowles would like to have more flexibility in picking Early Voting locations. Currently, Florida only allows supervisors to set up voting sites in their main or branch offices, public libraries, and city halls. Some libraries and city halls are located in shopping centers and other places that are highly convenient for voters—but not every county has an office in such locations. Also, some of these locations, like libraries, do not have enough available free space to accommodate Early Voting. Cowles says that these restrictive limits are directly responsible for Florida's long lines in the 2012 general election. If he had more flexibility, he feels he would be able to use his community knowledge to pick the best possible voting locations, use his resources in the most effective way possible, and further strengthen Orange County's Early Voting system.

When talking about the system Orange County already has in place, Bill Cowles' thoughts are consistent with administrators in other states. He explains that Early Voting decreases the chaos of election day. In Orange County's experience, Early Voting ends up being budget neutral over time because it ultimately reduces election day costs (fewer polling places, staff, telephone lines, etc.). Savings are also realized by using the statewide Ballot-On-Demand system. Ballot-On-Demand is a system that prints the appropriate ballot for voters when they appear at the election site. This is much more effective than the "pick-and-pull" system where counties print all of the ballots from every precinct ahead of time, and pull out the appropriate ballot for each voter when they arrive at the Early Voting center. Ballot-On-Demand drastically reduces printing costs and reduces the amount of prep work for in-person absentee or Early Voting staff, while increasing convenience for voters. Since two parts of the ballot are the same statewide, Cowles and his staff print those ahead of time, and only print the precinct-specific ballots on site, saving both time and money. Cowles also uses electronic poll books, which saves time in compiling election day poll books, and also strengthens Early Voting security against fraud—though, as he believes, "Voter fraud has become a campaign tool more than a real situation."

ILLINOIS

Source

Telephone interviews with:

- Gail Weisberg, Manager of Early Voting
- Gail Siegel, Communications and Policy Director

State Overview

Illinois has a no fault, early in-person system that was first implemented in 2006, and has evolved over time, driven in part by the demands of voters for the system. Illinois has both permanent and temporary Early Voting locations that are subject to different rules concerning location, hours, and ID requirements. The advent of Early Voting has also allowed for grace period registration.ⁱⁱ

Illinois State Early Voting Requirements²⁴

System	Early In-Person, No Fault
Dates	E-15 to E-3
Times	Permanent locations are open from 8:30 am-4:30 pm OR 9:00 am-5:00 pm weekdays, and 9:00 am-12:00 pm on weekends and holidays. Permanent Early Voting locations must be open 8 hours on any holiday during the Early Voting period and 14 hours during the final weekend before the general election. The hours and days for temporary Early Voting locations are subject to the election authority's discretion.
Locations	Each election authority in a county where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population > 250,000 = at least 1 location within each of the three largest municipalities, and if any such municipality is >80,00, then at least two locations in that municipality • Population > 100,000 = at least 2 locations Also allows for temporary Early Voting locations at the discretion of the election authorities. Locations must be accessible in accordance with ADA and HAVA.
Voting Technology	Optical Scan, DRE, Networked Voter Database

ⁱⁱ Illinois law allows voters who miss the traditional voter registration cut-off of 28 days prior to the election to register in person at the office of their election authority during a grace period of the 27th to the 3rd day prior to the election.

<p>Ballots and Security</p>	<p>Clerks are required to verify the signature of all early voters. Photo ID is required to vote early. Anyone who is voting early who also received an absentee ballot can surrender the absentee ballot and vote early. Clerks must maintain and submit to the state a list of all voters who voted early. The names on the list will then be delivered to the appropriate precinct before the opening of polls on election day.</p> <p>Voting sites must also comply with all applicable voting machine security provisions. All early vote ballots must be counted at the election authority's central ballot counting facility, and cannot be counted until after the polls are closed on election day.</p>
<p>Budgeting</p>	<p>Managed on the county level</p>

Cook County, IL: Facts²⁵

- Geography: Northeastern Illinois, includes Chicago and 30 townships
- Population: 5,294,664, the 2nd most populated county in the U.S., and contains 43.3% of Illinois' residents
- Urban/Suburban: approx. 54% urban
- Race: 43.9% White, 24.4% Black or African American, 24.0% Hispanic or Latino, 6.1% Asian
- Election Administration: Elected County Clerk



Cook County, IL: Experience with Early Voting

Gail Weisberg, Manager of Early Voting, Cook County, and Gail Siegel, Communications and Policy Director, Cook County, were eager to endorse the benefits of Early Voting. Early Voting has increased in popularity since its introduction. In Cook County, all voters received a postcard prior to the November 2012 election notifying the voter of the closest early vote location and encouraging them to take advantage of the Early Voting option. “We encourage Early Voting. It provides so much access for voters. We all think those benefits outweigh any of the issues and costs of setting it up,” said Gail Weisberg.

When Illinois first established Early Voting, the state brought in an election demography expert who looked at their maps and population distribution and came up with a suggested plan for the location of Early Voting centers. Cook County includes the City of Chicago and 120 other villages and towns, and is served by 43 Early Voting sites. They tried to distribute the locations in sync with the population's needs and voting habits. Most of the Early Voting locations are in local municipal halls, libraries, and other public buildings. The permanent Early Voting locations are generally in county offices. There has not been a need to make too many changes in locations, though a few sites were moved because the original location became too small as Early Voting popularity grew.

In order to effectively implement Early Voting, Cook County developed software that would allow it to serve every voter in the County at every Early Voting location. This includes a voter database that can be accessed remotely, so that election staff can check a voter's registration, deploy the correct ballot style, and be sure that voters are not trying to vote twice in a single election. This software also enabled Early Voting judges to retrieve voter signatures on file to enable the signature verification required by statute. In smaller counties, there was concern that this remote checking of signatures would not be possible and there would not be resources to develop the capability as in Cook County, which is why the legislature added a photo ID requirement for Early Voting. They would advise any state undertaking Early Voting for the first time to be certain the technology to check in voters will be successful.

It was also important for Cook County to create some uniformity in voting equipment. When Early Voting was first implemented, the early vote locations in downtown Chicago used touch screens, while the suburban areas of Cook County did not. This meant that not all voters could vote in every Early Voting center. Now Cook County has touch screens at all locations, and any voter in Cook County can now vote at any location in the County. The machines are capable of generating any required ballot style.

In determining locations and hours, Cook County's experience is similar to that in other states. Elections administrators noted that the popularity of Early Voting is dependent on the convenience of Early Voting locations. It is also their experience that early vote increases in popularity the closer it comes to election day. They have seen wait times expand during Early Voting from 20 minutes in the first days to an hour or more closer to election day. However, this has meant that lines on election day are shorter. As Gail Siegel says, "There are real benefits. I don't disagree that there is expense and work, but we have been able to reduce the number of precincts and consolidate them. Election day lines are shorter, and we need fewer election judges. It's not free, but people love it. It allows them access."

MARYLAND

Source

Telephone interviews with:

- Ross Goldstein, State Deputy Administrator of Elections*
- Margaret Jurgensen, Election Director in Montgomery County
- Alison McGlaklin, Deputy Election Director in Montgomery County
- Chris Resesits, Operations Manager in Montgomery County

State Overview

Maryland has an early in-person voting system. Maryland’s first Early Voting bill was passed in 2006, but after a legal challenge, it was determined that in order to implement Early Voting, the state would have to vote to amend the state’s constitution. Voters approved the amendment during the 2008 general election, and Early Voting was finally implemented in time for the 2010 general election. The laws guiding Early Voting in Maryland are relatively inflexible compared to other states. It sets the days and hours for the Early Voting period, and determines how many locations a county should have according to its population.

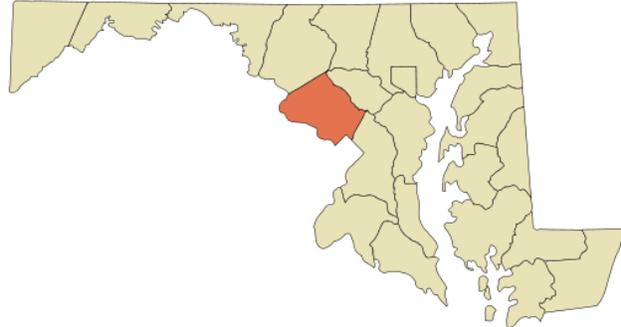
MARYLAND STATE REQUIREMENTS

System	Early In-Person, No Fault
Dates	E-10 to E-5, but not on Sunday (E9)
Times	10:00 am-8:00 pm each day
Locations	<p>Early voters can vote at any voting center in their county. The number of voting centers is determined by the registered voter population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population < 150,000 = 1 voting centers • 150,000 < Population < 300,000 = 3 voting centers • Population > 300,000 = 5 voting centers
Voting Technology	Touch screen voting equipment (transitioning to Optical Scan by 2016), Electronic poll books statewide (ESNS, Express Poll)
Ballots and Security	<p>Early voters check in before voting, and vote on the same touch screen voting system used on election day. Maryland uses electronic ballots, and all voting equipment and election supplies are secured at the Early Voting center, in accordance with a plan filed by the local board of elections. After the last day of Early Voting, they are secured at the local board of elections.</p> <p>In response to concerns about voter fraud, the governor at the time of the implementation pledged money for the state to get electronic poll books.</p>
Budgeting	The cost is shared by the state and the county. In general, the county pays for election costs, but the state pays for institutional changes, like improving voting technology.

*Participated in Early Voting Panel in New York City on May 20; video online at <http://bit.ly/1d2Pop7>

Montgomery County, MD: Facts²⁶

- Geography: Bordering Washington, D.C. on the west
- Population: 971,777
- Urban/Rural: largely suburban
- Race: 49.3% White, 17.0% Hispanic or Latino, 16.6% Black or African American, 13.9% Asian
- Election Administration: County Board of Elections made up of five regular members and two substitute members appointed by the governor from candidates recommended by the appropriate county political leaders with three regular members and one substitute member of the majority party, and two regular members and one substitute member of the principal minority party, supported by a single appointed professional Election Director and a single appointed Counsel and a staff specifically barred from political activity.
- Other: 91.1% of residents age 25+ have a Bachelor's degree or higher and 56.8% of residents age 25+ have a Bachelor's degree or higher



Montgomery County, MD: Experience with Early Voting

The election administrators in Montgomery were more than eager to discuss their experiences with Early Voting. Because it is located next to Washington, D.C., and is the most populous county in Maryland, Early Voting is a substantial operation in Montgomery County.

The most restrictive aspect of Maryland's laws are its requirements delineating the number of voting locations in very populous counties, where any county with more than 300,000 registered voters must have exactly five voting centers. This means that county with 1,000,000 voters must have the same amount of voting centers as one with 300,001 voters. This makes it difficult for larger counties like Montgomery County to tailor their early Voting program to the specific needs of their county. This might account for Ross Goldstein's observation that despite arguments that Early Voting was a type of "unfunded mandate," once it was implemented, "the counties were the ones asking for more locations." Restricting the ability of counties to prepare for early voter traffic creates long lines at polls. Maryland's legislators addressed this problem earlier this year, passing a new statute allowing for increased number of sites depending on the size of the jurisdiction and extended the length to one full week, including a week-end, with the possibility of adding second week-end hours depending on study.

It takes quite a bit of planning—almost a year—to set up these Early Voting locations, the Montgomery County administrators note. Administrators are sensitive to regulations that set the criteria for Early Voting locations, including access to public transportation and the availability of utilities. At least 80% of the population must be within 15 minutes of Early Voting sites, according to the state law, so that they can be maximally accessible. Goldstein also noted, however, that resident population may not be the most important things to consider. He has found that the most useful sites are on major roads, are accessible, have sufficient space for voting machines, and space for parking. Maryland does allow for flexibility in the types of locations administrators can pick. Locations can be in public or private buildings, and the state elections board approves the locations six months ahead of time.

Another key part of Early Voting planning for Montgomery County involves training staff to handle the large amount of work on long, 10 am-8 pm days. The state requires that counties hire regular election judges for the Early Voting period, but Montgomery County chose to use these elections judges to compliment the specially hired temp staff. These judges work from 6:30 or 7:00 am until 9:00 or 10:00 pm, overseeing the set up and shut down of the Early Voting sites each day. Montgomery County hires two elections judges per location—one Republican and one Democrat—to “provide political coverage.”

Montgomery takes great care to make sure their staff is very well trained. Temps undergo at least 8 hours of training going over the instruction manual, management of election forms, and equipment training, and also have at least 2 hours of on-site training before the election. Judges train for additional hours, including 9 hours of classroom instruction. Because many have already been trained to handle voting at precincts on election day, elections administrators can “cherry pick” the best of their judges to work through the Early Voting period. Additionally, the training staff is also available on-site during the Early Voting period to help manage any problems that might arise. Montgomery “supports a high level” of staffing, which increases costs, but also increases the efficiency, security, and professionalism of Early Voting.

Also, Montgomery County and Maryland State are fully digitized, and have been using electronic poll books and DRE since 2002. In particular, the electronic poll books make Early Voting more secure. The state’s poll books are all networked together to prevent voters from voting twice in one election. Maryland ends its Early Voting period on the Thursday before the election, and uses the next four days to update all of the early voter information into finalized poll books for election day, which are delivered to polling places on Monday.

Finally, Maryland’s Early Voting cycle was impacted by Hurricane Sandy in October 2012, just before the general election. These elections administrators recall that their Early Voting period started the Saturday right before Hurricane Sandy, and they were surprised to see very heavy traffic throughout the day, with lines almost two blocks long. When Margaret Jurgensen asked voters why they all decided to vote that day specifically, she said that 90% of voters responded that they came early because of Hurricane Sandy. “They were afraid of power outages that would

affect Election Day and wanted to get voting out of the way before the storm,” Jurgensen explained. In fact, when Sandy forced them to cancel Early Voting on the following Monday, the County then had to expand hours to allow for Early Voting for an extra day. This process was “very hard,” which was not helped by the 90-minute line on that extra day.

However, although Jurgensen emphasized the hard work these changes required, it is remarkable that the Early Voting system was flexible enough to adapt to the Hurricane. Should the hurricane have fallen on Election Day without any type of Early Voting system to accommodate these sorts of unexpected emergencies, thousands of voters would have been disenfranchised. The long lines are not ideal, but they are a testament to the fact that Early Voting makes it easier for administrators to adapt elections to emergencies, and that voters are eager to take advantage of Early Voting during these types of situations.

NEW MEXICO

Source

Telephone interviews with:

- Maggie Toulouse Oliver, County Clerk*

State Overview

New Mexico offers both in-person absentee voting and early in-person voting. New Mexico’s statutes have rules setting specific dates, hours, and locations for each voting option. The Early Voting provisions also set a minimum number of Early Voting locations depending on population, and require numerous checks and records of Early Voting to provide for ballot security.

New Mexico State Early Voting/In-Person Absentee Requirements²⁷

System	Early In-Person AND In-Person Absentee, No Fault
Dates	Early In-Person: E-17 to E-3 In-Person Absentee: E-28 to E-4
Times	Early In-Person: Must be offered 12:00 pm-8:00 pm on Tuesday-Friday and 10:00 am-6:00 pm on Saturday. Additional hours at the discretion of county administration. In-Person Absentee: Must be offered during regular business hours (M-F, 8:00 am-5:00 pm) and 10:00 am-6:00 pm on Saturdays.
Locations	Early In-Person: Early in-person locations are established at “alternate sites.” Voters can vote in-person at any of these sites, and the number of sites is determined by total voting population: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population > 10,000 = at least 1 location • Population > 50,000 = at least 4 locations • Population > 250,000: at least 14 locations Provisions also allow for mobile alternate voting locations in rural counties. Voting centers must be in centralized locations, close to major intersections/public transportation, at least 2,000 sq. ft., and should be based on voter registration/turnout projections. They must also follow a Least Change Scenario, meaning that once an alternative site is established for one election, it should be available in future elections. Sites must be accessible in accordance with ADA and HAVA. In-Person Absentee: County Clerk’s offices
Voting Technology	Paper ballots, Optical Scan, Ballot-On-Demand, electronic pollbooks, and a county-specific app, “My Voter Information”

* Participated in Early Voting Panel in New York City on May 20; video online at <http://bit.ly/1d2Pop7>

Ballots and Security	<p>Early In-Person: Clerks must make sure that voters cannot vote twice. Voters must present the required voter identification upon arrival, and fill out an application to vote. The clerk then makes an appropriate mark on the signature roster or register noting that the voter has voted early.</p> <p>All voting locations must have a secure storage area for ballots and printing systems.</p> <p>All locations must have broadband internet connections.</p>
Budgeting	Managed on the county level

Bernalillo County, NM: Facts

- Geography: Central New Mexico, includes Albuquerque
- Population: 662,564 (~430,000 registered voters)
- Urban/Rural: 96% urban in the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area, with 4% rural areas in the East Mountains/S. Valley
- Race: 47.9% Hispanic or Latino, 41.5% White, 4.0% American Indian and Alaska Native, 2.5% Black or African American, 2.2% Asian
- Other: Includes two Native American tribes (To’hajilee and Isleta Pueblo)
- Election Administration: Elected County Clerk



Bernalillo County, NM: Experience with Early Voting

Maggie Toulouse Oliver, County Clerk of Bernalillo County, is eager to speak well of the Early Voting system in her county. Under her leadership, the county has made some innovations to increase the efficiency of the system and neutralize costs. She reports that Early Voting comprises 70% of the county’s overall turnout, serving 125,000 voters in the 2012 general election.

Bernalillo County uses the same ballot across all types of voting options—absentee by mail, in-person absentee, early in-person and election day voting. As was explained earlier, using different absentee ballots can mean that a voters’ ballot may be invalidated on Election Day when it is counted, disenfranchising voters without their knowledge, weeks after they cast their votes. Bernalillo also goes beyond the state’s minimum requirements to offer Early Voting Monday-Saturday from 8:00 am-8:00 pm and uses 17 sites (two more than is required).

Additionally, the state requires that any voter be allowed to vote at any precinct during the early in-person period. This increases the convenience factor for voters, who do not have to worry

about the “wrong church problem,” which disenfranchises voters simply because they go to an incorrect voting center. Bernalillo has also improved this process by publishing wait times during the Early Voting period online and on its “My Voter Information” app. Also, rather than printing all possible ballots at all precincts ahead of time—which can be quite expensive and wasteful—Bernalillo updated to a Ballot-On-Demand technology, which allows the staff at voting locations to print the ballot the voter needs when they arrive at the polls.

Bernalillo County has also modernized its voting system by digitizing its poll books. When early in-person voting was first implemented in 2010, voters were only allowed to vote at their own precinct, and printed rosters were used. Learning from the chaos of this experience, elections officials digitized their systems for the 2012 general election. This included setting up an electronic poll book system (AskED brand technology) that allows voters to check-in digitally when they arrive at the polls. This met with great success: it facilitated check-ins and data sharing during Early Voting, prevented voters from voting more than once during the Early Voting period or voting again on election day, and increased the convenience for voters. Oliver reports that she received a lot of positive feedback from voters on Bernalillo’s smooth check-in process and Ballot-On-Demand.

Having digital information collected during Early Voting also allows election staff to do substantial analysis and metrics to make the system as efficient as it can be. They can figure out which sites are most convenient for voters, which get the most traffic, what days or hours are the most utilized by voters, and much more. This aids the county in determining where their resources are best spent. Using these numbers, they can determine how many check-in and voting machines they require at voting sites, based not only on population density but on actual usage patterns. They can also pick locations that are the most convenient for voters. For example, the statutes for Early Voting require counties to pick Early Voting locations based on geographic convenience, and using data from previous elections, Oliver’s staff now includes nearby public transportation as a key element for determining how convenient an Early Voting site is. They have also begun renting space in non-traditional locations, such as strip malls and commercial spaces, where voters are likely to go during the day anyway. As many studies report,²⁸ using nontraditional locations not only increases convenience for voters, but if a voter runs into Early Voting centers throughout their day, they are more likely to take advantage of the opportunity to vote early.

Bernalillo County experienced other advantages with Early Voting. Oliver notes that Early Voting decreases the chaos of election day. During the longer period of early in-person voting, staff “can deal with problems more quickly” than they would have been able to on election day, improving the quality of elections as a whole. Spreading voters out over twenty days also cuts down on wait times at polls on election day.

Oliver also notes that early in-person voting in Bernalillo County is budget neutral. Costs (such as leasing Early Voting locations, paying and training staff, etc.) are neutralized by the Ballot-

On-Demand system, which saves the county about \$1 million in printing costs. As she reports, early in-person voting is “revenue neutral once they invest in voting machines.” She also explains that the county has had no problem with security. Bernalillo County transfers ballots out of the scanner to a locked location. Once the county is finished with early in-person voting, staff closes the voting machines and replaces them for election day.

NORTH CAROLINA

Source

Telephone interviews with:

- Spoke to Michael Dickerson, Director of Elections in Mecklenburg County*

State Overview

Until a change in law passed in July, North Carolina had a “One-Stop Absentee” early option, where voters could walk-in to register during the Early Voting period (same-day registration) and cast an absentee ballot at the same time. It was first implemented in 2002, and has “evolved” over the years. We consider this in-person absentee voting, because the voter’s eligibility to register and vote is determined after the voters casts a vote, meaning that his or her vote can be retrieved and canceled.

North Carolina State Early Voting Requirements²⁹

System	In-Person Absentee (“One-Stop Absentee”), No Fault
Dates	Formerly E-19 to E-3
Times	Hours of operation vary by county, but One-Stop Absentee had to be available on Saturday.
Locations	The state requires at least one in-person absentee site at the county Board of Elections office, or an alternative site. County board of elections can designate additional sites if they choose. All sites must be in locations that are paid for in part by public funds (libraries, schools, etc.).
Voting Technology	Varies by county
Ballots and Security	All absentee voters must be recorded in a pollbook, which is delivered to precincts in time for election day, though absentee votes are only tabulated after 5:00 pm on election day. Counties using optical scan devices can scan the ballots ahead of time without printing the results, to maintain the secrecy of the vote. In order to establish One-Stop Absentee voting, a county must have a system where all ballots are retrievable, in case an individual’s absentee ballot application is disapproved.
Budgeting	Not mentioned in statutes—managed on the county level

Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC: Facts³⁰



* Participated in Early Voting Panel in New York City on May 20; video online at <http://bit.ly/1d2Pop7>

- Geography: Northern North Carolina, includes the City of Charlotte and 6 other municipalities
- Population: 919,628, the state's most populated and most densely populated county
- Race: 50.6% White, 30.2% Black or African American, 12.2% Hispanic or Latino, 4.6% Asian
- Election Administration: Three person County Board of Elections appointed by the State Board of Elections from names submitted by each political party, with a professional Director of Elections hired by the Board to administer elections.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC: Experience with Early Voting

Michael Dickerson, Director of Elections in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, truly believes in the Early Voting system, after witnessing its 10 years of growth in North Carolina. As he says, "It's the only way to vote!" In his county, Dickerson has worked to expand Early Voting in a way that gives greater opportunities to voters, but is also practical and efficient.

Dickerson and his staff set up 21 Early Voting locations during the 2012 general election. In accordance with state regulations, they presented sites to the county elections board, which votes on them. As Dickerson says, "We try to provide them with sites that are convenient to all voters." They consider a variety of different factors, from parking availability to demographics, to use their local knowledge to pick the most accessible locations. In particular, Dickerson points out that it is good to pick sites located near office or working centers, so citizens can vote during their lunch breaks. North Carolina requires that Early Voting locations be in buildings and offices that are paid for in part by public funds, and Dickerson and his staff work within these parameters to locate sites near "natural congregation points [...] where you know you have a captive audience," such as shopping malls, libraries, senior centers, etc.

Experience with Early Voting also allows Dickerson and his staff to organize their Early Voting system around consistent trends, to put their resources where they are most needed and save money. Because they noticed that early voters generally head to the polls around lunch time and after work, with a drop off after 7:00 pm, Mecklenburg county offers voting hours from 11:00 am-7:00 pm. Also, the flexibility built into North Carolina's statute allowed Mecklenburg County to devise smart elections strategies for different elections. This means that Dickerson can expand Early Voting for bigger elections and decrease it for smaller elections, according to demand. Building this sort of flexibility in statutes is important, Dickerson believes, because it allows the people who know the counties best to determine how elections should proceed.

Making these sites accessible is the most important thing to Charlotte-Mecklenburg County. As Dickerson explains, "The goal is not to vote more Ds or more Rs. The goal is to get more people to vote." And, in fact, their smart tactics are making a year-to-year difference. As elections staffers learn more about implementing Early Voting, and as the system has gotten more established, Early Voting turnout has ballooned. Early Voting started out small, with about 20-

30,000 voters. The next year, it more than doubled to 60,000 voters, and now around 250,000 people take advantage of Early Voting in this county. Dickerson reports that 64% of voters voted early in the 2012 general election. Next year, before the change in the law, he hoped to reach 75% voting early.

Spreading voter turnout over the two and a half week Early Voting period made election day much less chaotic and much more manageable in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. For one, it greatly reduced line and wait time on election day. “You didn’t see my name in the paper this year!” Dickerson jokes, referring to the many articles about long lines during the 2012 election. His county finds that it is not difficult to implement Early Voting. In particular, Dickerson points out that they already have more than enough regular elections staffers and voting equipment on hand to cover the Early Voting period. Dickerson typically hires and trains a large pool of staff for election day, and this is the same pool he draws from to staff Early Voting. He has found that his staff is more than ready to jump in and cover his Early Voting needs. For voting machines, again, election day machinery more than covers Early Voting needs.

Of course, some of this does require work and thoughtful action on the part of elections officials. But, Dickerson believes all of this is worth it: “I’m not in this to make it easier for Michael Dickerson. I’m in this to make it easier for the voters of Mecklenburg County. And they love Early Voting.”

Mecklenburg County also takes significant steps to prevent voter fraud and assure the safety of voting equipment throughout the Early Voting period. North Carolina’s system is not early in-person, but in-person absentee, which means that there are certain special requirements for counties, including, for example, that all ballots are retrievable (so that, if an absentee voter is deemed ineligible after the fact, his or her vote can be retracted). Since the voted ballots are absentee ballots, the county cannot tabulate the votes until the polls close on election day. However, having a digitized system facilitates this process, the votes can be counted at the push of a button, and the data is processed so quickly that the early vote outcome is typically the first number elections officials report that night.

Electronic polls books and machines also help the elections staff with security. When voters first arrive, they check in through an electronic poll book process that is tied into a statewide system. This means that voters are flagged right away if they attempt to vote again at another Early Voting site. The elections staff then coordinates the poll books the weekend before election day. The county has an arrangement with a printing company to print the poll books overnight so that they are ready for election day. Dickerson would recommend this sort of business arrangements for states like New York that continue to use paper ballots. But though this certainly does the job, Dickerson says that having an electronic poll book system for election day would “allow me to do this at the snap of a finger.”

At night, the Early Voting locations are locked up “like a bank,” with additional security on top of what already exists in these government-funded buildings. Also, the electronic voting machines allow staff to record the total number of votes that were cast that day before they leave for the night. If the number changes overnight, they would know that there was a problem and would be able to correct it before votes are counted on election day.

Dickerson says that Early Voting certainly requires work to set up, but he believes it is completely worth it.

OHIO

Source

Telephone interviews with:

- David Gully, County Administrator, Warren County
- Brian Sleeth, Director of Elections, Warren County
- Kim Antrican, Deputy Director of Elections, Warren County

State Overview

Ohio has an in-person absentee system, and offers same day registration for the first five days of the in-person absentee period (which officials call a “golden week”). Ohio was one of the states in the middle of the early voting debate during the 2012 general election. Legislators attempted to restrict early voting to military personnel on the last weekend before Election Day, saying that they did not have the resources to support a fully-fledged early voting weekend. After a heated public debate led by President Obama’s campaign, Ohio’s Supreme Court denied the cuts to early voting, explaining that any elections measures “must be offered to all voters if it is offered to the military.”³¹

Ohio State Early Voting Requirements³²

System	In-Person Absentee, No Fault
Dates	E-35 to E-4
Times	<p>Voters can cast their ballots at an in-person absentee voting center from 8:00 pm-7:00 pm through the Thursday before election day (E-35 to E-5). The weekend leading up to election day is the only weekend where counties must offer early voting. The required hours are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday (E-4): 8:00 am-6:00 pm • Saturday (E-3): 8:00 am-2:00 pm • Sunday (E-2): 1:00 pm-5:00 pm • Monday (E-1): 8:00 am-2:00 pm <p>Though the Secretary of State established these extended hours during the 2012 election cycle, the hours in different Ohio counties still vary, as some counties offer extended hours, and others do not. A recent revision of election law does, however, require that voting locations stay open late to accommodate long lines of early voters during the in-person absentee period.</p>
Locations	Counties may make use of any location for early voting, including using publically-funded buildings, renting privately owned space, or building “removable buildings” for elections. Ohio recently passed a bill to ensure that voting locations are accessible to people with disabilities.
Voting Technology	Optical Scan, DRE, Paper ballots
Ballots and Security	While the ballots are the same as the ones used on election day, voters also must fill out a ballot envelope and an absentee ballot application.
Budgeting	Managed on the county level

Warren County, OH: Demographic Facts³³

- Geography: Southwestern Ohio
- Population: 212,693, a 34.29% increase from the 2000 census
- Urban/Suburban/Rural: 7.6% urban, 55% of land used for crops (rural)
- Race: 89.0% White, 3.9% Asian, 3.2% Black or African American, 2.3% Hispanic or Latino
- Election Administration: Four person Board of Elections with two persons from each principal party supported by Director and Deputy Director of Elections



Warren County, OH: Experience with Early Voting

Warren County officials David Gully, Kim Antrican, and Brian Sleeth gave two interviews for this report—the second just after a special election that had early voting fresh on their minds. Warren County and the state of Ohio have had two big experiences with early voting during the 2008 and 2012 general elections. No matter how you look at it, these officials say, it’s a lot of work. Ohio offers a “golden week” for elections just at the start of the early voting period, where voters can register and cast their vote at the same time. “It’s a lot for us to handle,” Antrican explains. “I understand why [the state offers this golden week], but it is still difficult to get it done. It’s a question of resources.” Early voting takes manpower, money, and time, but, as these officials explained, early voting gets smoother with each election: “The first time you do it, it’s a mess. But each time, it gets better.”

Warren County uses just one early voting center in the spacious Commissioners Chambers, which they keep open in accordance with the state’s requirements. They find that they get a very high volume of voters, especially during the last two weeks of voting. During the last two weeks of the 2012 general election, they served 1,000 voters each day. Having seen the volume of voters interested in voting early, they are dedicated to “give everyone who wants to vote a chance to vote.”

However, having run early voting many times now, they can certainly see ways to improve the system. They suggest that 35 days of early voting might be excessive, and that 14- 17 days of voting would be sufficient. Not only would this cut costs and decrease the burden on administrators, but it also would make sure that voters don’t cast a vote a month before the election, only to change their minds later. A shorter voting period would allow voters to hear more on the “campaign bombs” that typically come out closer to election day and “vote more wisely.” They referenced the fact that early voting is a significant challenge to normal campaign strategy, because an extended voting period “renders the bombs useless.”

They also recommend that states give their elections officials the option to take the weekend to prepare for election day. In Warren County, they have experienced early voting both with and without the last weekend. During the primary where early voting stopped on the Friday before election day, they had a comfortable amount of time to run their books and make up the supplemental lists, and print paper ballots. When asked about the typical last weekend rush that other counties experience, Gully explained that “early voting is pushed by the press” and that “however big they want to make [early voting] is how big it turns out.”

Because of all the media attention to early voting, Warren County’s voters were encouraged to vote early to avoid the long lines at polls. Ironically, this made early voting lines hours long, while election day voters only had to wait 15-20 minutes at most. However, officials found that early voters were generally happy to wait. “Voters will stand for three hours for absentee voting, but if it’s longer than 20 minutes on election day, you start to hear grumbling,” they explain. During the early voting period, these citizens “chose to come here and wait,” were generally “hyped up” about the election, and specifically “made time to do it.”

Voters are also more willing to wait during early voting because they “see that it moves fast” and generally appreciate the measure Warren County takes to ease the process. Warren County, like other counties in this report, uses Ballot-on-Demand to both cut costs and time. By using two printers on site at once, they are able to quickly print the ballot for each voter in line. They also speed up the process by having separate lines: one line for check-ins and absentee applications, and one for printing and distributing ballots to approved absentee voters. They also have a separate line for voters that are voting in the correct precinct, and sometimes open up another table for provisional ballots when the center is particularly busy. Another significant factor is just that their center in the Commissioners Chambers is spacious enough to support early voting. They have ample room for different lines and voting booths, something that other counties lack. Though they’ll be transitioning to a new location for future elections, this large space has so far served them well.

Another excellent effect of this divided process is that Warren County is able to verify voters for absentee ballots on the spot, before giving them their ballots, so that 99% of their applications, envelopes, and ballots are accurate. This means that voters do not have to worry that their votes will be invalidated after the fact, as they might in other in-person absentee states. Warren County’s system is so secure that 100% of their early ballots are counted, since all errors would be caught much earlier in the process. The county officials also explained that Ballot-On-Demand also betters the security of early voting, because they never have extra, empty ballots to worry about. Warren County begins scanning all absentee ballots (including ones cast in person) 10 days before the general election, as per statute guidelines, but do not tabulate the votes until election day. The scanners are kept secure at a different location.

Warren County has not done any specific research on their budgeting practices, but they did tell us that while there are some costs, there are also some savings. Generally, early voting costs

include mailings and staff. Just because they only use one location, they explain, does not mean that they hire fewer poll workers or election judges. However, having so many capable people in one place does come in handy in case of confusion or error—there are always a lot of people in the room that are able to tackle any problems. The biggest staffing cost, however, is hiring staff to open absentee envelopes and arrange them to be scanned, which is laborious. In terms of savings, Ballot-On-Demand also saves Warren County a significant amount of money, and cuts down on waste.

Despite the challenges of early voting, Warren County's officials do whatever they can to promote the system and make it run smoothly. During the 2012 election, Gully even made his voters pancakes to keep them happy while they waited in line. That sort of dedication is clearly paying off, because their count has met with great success. In the 2012 general election, the county had a 76% turnout, making it one of the highest voting counties in Ohio. "There's a lot of pressure on Election Day to go and vote, but you never know what's going to happen," Antrican explained. "What if your car breaks down? What if your kid gets sick?"

"The majority of people are happy with it," Sleeth explained. "People like the choice, even the ones that don't use it, because they know it's there if they wanted to."

Recommendations

Common Cause/NY has surveyed state elections officials, county officials, and elections experts from nonprofits and think tanks, all of whom have firsthand experience with Early Voting in their states. Each state has developed its own rules and has had to address different challenges to implement this voting option. However, they all unanimously lauded Early Voting as a credible and important voting system that betters democracy by making voting more convenient and readily available for the voter. These administrators have been through the process of implementing Early Voting, of finding out what works and does not work, and their experiences and innovations can now help states like New York examining this process themselves.

Common Cause endorses the adoption of early in-person voting, which does not require voters to apply to vote in advance, does not require them to have an excuse to vote early, and uses the same voting process as on election day. We make the following suggestions for establishing practical and effective Early Voting systems:

^a *Recommendation #1: Allow Early Voters to Cast Ballots Anywhere in the County*

Most of the early-in person systems we examined allow voters to vote at any precinct. This means that voters can truly pick the locations that are most convenient to them during the Early Voting period, and that they won't be disenfranchised simply because they cast a provisional ballot at an incorrect precinct.

^a *Recommendation #2: Use Ballot-On-Demand*

For states like New York that use paper ballots, Ballot-On-Demand is a good way to decrease the workload and save resources during the Early Voting period. If voters can cast ballots at any county voting center, Ballot-On-Demand ensures that this measure, which increases voter convenience, does not involve unreasonable costs and waste. Instead of having to estimate and print out enough copies of every precinct's ballot ahead of time for every Early Voting site, which would cost a lot of money and waste an enormous amount of ink and paper, Ballot-On-Demand allows poll workers to print a voter's precinct ballot when they arrive at the voting center. Some note that this could create lines at voting centers since voters would have to wait for their ballots to print, so Common Cause recommends that counties print out the standard, county-wide ballot ahead of time, and only print the precinct-specific ballot using the On-Demand system.

^a *Recommendation #3: Use Electronic Poll Books*

Common Cause suggests that modernizing the election process to include electronic poll books is a great step that states and counties can take to prevent voter fraud and reduce the labor associated with Early Voting. Electronic poll books allow poll workers to

check-in voters as they come in to vote and record that they have voted early. Because these poll books are networked together, this means that if a voter were to attempt to check-in to vote at another site, they would be flagged right away and would be prevented from voting again (or would vote a provisional ballot that would then be rejected). The New York bill, on the other hand, only requires that administrators record and collect the names of early voters at the end of the day, a system which is not as secure as this digitized one. Electronic poll books also make the transition from Early Voting to election day much easier. Instead of having to manually enter all of the Early Voting data into paper poll books for election day, this information can be collected and organized digitally in minutes. The other benefit of electronic poll books is that it provides very useful data. These electronic records would let them know quickly what locations, dates, and times got the most traffic, so that they can decide how to best allocate their resources the following year.

^a *Recommendation #4: Make Early Voting Location Wait Time Available Online*

In states with Early Voting, voters are typically allowed to cast their votes at any voting center in the county. In order to make this even more convenient for voters, Florida's state administrators have developed a system that publishes the wait time to vote at every voting center online, in real time. Similarly, Bernalillo County, New Mexico provides similar information regarding waiting times during Early Voting. This is a clever innovation, as it allows busy voters to decide whether they'd like to wait in line to vote, go to another voting center, or try again another day. Common Cause recommends this system to administrators in other states.

^a *Recommendation #5: Build Flexibility into State Statutes*

Because counties differ so dramatically in geography, demographics, and voting habits, Early Voting legislation should allow local elections administrators to tailor the Early Voting system to their particular county. In terms of date and time, for example, counties may notice trends in what days and times receive the heaviest traffic. In some locales, many voters in an office or industrial location may vote during lunch, while in other counties, voters may tend to cast their ballots before or after work. Elections administrators should be able to respond to these patterns and allocate their resources where they are most needed. States that mandate specific daily voting hours do not allow for this type of flexibility. Another example of this is voting on Sundays. In some counties, many voters, and especially minority voters, go to the polls together on Sundays after church as part of "souls to the polls." Some state statutes do not allow Early Voting on the weekends, or restrict weekend hours, which obviously impacts those voters who vote on Sundays. On the other hand, in a county where voters do not typically vote on

Sundays, requiring counties to hire poll workers and run an Early Voting facility over the weekends could be a waste of resources.

The current New York bill, which requires Early Voting sites to be open from 8:00 am-7:00 pm, will likely encounter these same problems. Common Cause recommends that state requirements allow counties more flexibility in determining how many hours they must offer on particular days. We recommend that states establish a minimum number of hours that Early Voting must be offered each day and on weekends. This way, counties can determine whether to offer additional hours, and can schedule their day according to voter trends. Also, states should consider the fact that general elections (and especially presidential elections) usually have a far greater turnout than state or local elections, and allow counties to set rules accordingly.

Additionally, states have very diverse ways of determining how many Early Voting locations each county should have. New York's proposed bill mandates that every county should have at least five centers. Not only does this mean that New York would have an unusually large number of Early Voting centers—310, to be exact—but it does not allow counties to have fewer locations. Rural counties with a lower population density might find having fewer locations would still serve their counties; urban counties may want to use fewer locations and place them in areas that are readily accessible using public transportation. Statutes regarding the number of locations should be far more flexible. If not, counties are either forced to waste money setting up unneeded locations, or disenfranchise voters because they can't set up enough. Common Cause/NY recommends a system like Maryland's or Illinois' that set a minimum number of location based on the population of a county, but allows administrators to add more if they so desire.

Recommendation #6: Allow Early Voting in nontraditional locations, and consider more than just population density when choosing Early Voting locations.

The elections administrators we interviewed explained that they would like to have more options as far as what locations can be used for Early Voting. Many states only allow for voting locations in board of elections offices or in publically-owned buildings like libraries and public schools. However, there is no guarantee that these locations would have enough space to accommodate Early Voting, or that they would be centrally-located. Allowing voting in non-governmental buildings would allow elections officials to pick locations that have enough space and parking, and can handle a steady flow of voters over the weeks of Early Voting. This would also let administrators pick nontraditional locations, such as shopping malls or grocery stores, where voters would be more likely to stumble upon voting, which could increase turnout and convenience.

Likewise, administrators have found that locating Early Voting centers near major intersections, at busy or commercial parts of town, or by office and industrial centers are more heavily used than those locations chosen solely because they are close to voters' homes. Additionally, states should consider allowing rural counties to set up mobile voting centers. This is a measure that allows centers to travel to the voters in rural counties with a low population density, where the commute to and from any polling place could be a considerable burden to Early Voting. Common Cause recommends that instead of requiring all Early Voting centers to be in governmental buildings, Early Voting legislation set up safety standards for Early Voting locations. This would give the election administrators the flexibility they need, while also keeping Early Voting secure.

CONCLUSION

While Early Voting, like any revision in voting procedure, requires careful consideration and presents administrators with practical challenges, we were struck by the unanimity of opinion on the value of Early Voting among elections administrators who have firsthand experience with it. All of the administrators whom we interviewed strongly recommend adoption of Early Voting, notwithstanding some of the practical challenges to setting it up. We hope that New York and other Atlantic region states will consider the experiences of the jurisdictions we have surveyed in evaluating and, we hope, ultimately shaping Early Voting systems for their own states.

Images

p. 14, Map of Orange County, FL: <http://www.floridacountiesmap.com/aalocs/orange.gif>

p. 17, Map of Cook County, IL: <https://www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/images/6/6f/Il-cook.png>

p. 20, Map of Montgomery County, MD: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bd/Montgomery_County_Maryland_Incorporated_and_Unincorporated_areas_Silver_Spring_Highlighted.svg/250px-Montgomery_County_Maryland_Incorporated_and_Unincorporated_areas_Silver_Spring_Highlighted.svg.png

p. 23, Map of Bernalillo County, NM: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/81/Bernalillo_County_New_Mexico_Incorporated_and_Unincorporated_areas_North_Valley_Highlighted.svg

p. 28: Map of Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC: http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/enactedlegislation/statutes/html/bysection/chapter_163/gs_163-82.6a.html

p. 32: Warren County, OH: https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/images/7/75/OH_warren.png

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