# IOWA YOUTH STRAW POLL




## 2026 GUIDE BOOKLET

Iowa Secretary of State's Office

# IOWA YOUTH STRAW POLL

Welcome and thank you for signing up for the **Iowa Youth Straw Poll (IYSP)** The IYSP is a statewide civic education initiative created by my office to give students the opportunity to experience the election process before they become eligible to vote. By researching candidates, discussing issues, casting ballots, and reviewing election results, students gain firsthand knowledge of how elections work and why every vote matters. These experiences help prepare students for the responsibilities they will one day carry as voters and engaged members of their communities.

The Iowa Youth Straw Poll is an important part of the **Elections 101** curriculum, a free civic education program developed by my office partnership with Iowa educators. Elections 101 was created to provide teachers with engaging, classroom-ready resources that help students understand Iowa's election process, the structure of state and federal government, and the role citizens play in our representative democracy. The curriculum encourages students to think critically, ask questions, evaluate information, and better understand the principles that guide free and fair elections.

Each year with a General Election, schools across Iowa participate in the Iowa Youth Straw Poll by incorporating election lessons into their classrooms and hosting their own student election. Students follow the campaign, learn about the candidates, review campaign issues, and cast ballots using procedures modeled after Iowa's election process. Once voting concludes, schools submit their results to the Iowa Secretary of State's Office, where they are combined with results from participating schools across the state. Together, those votes create the official Iowa Youth Straw Poll results, giving students the opportunity to be part of a statewide civic event alongside hundreds of their peers.

As Iowa's election commissioner, one of my most important responsibilities is encouraging future generations to participate in our democracy. Election administration extends beyond Election Day. Election administration is a year-round job, from implementing cyber and physical security measures, ongoing conversations with election security partners, and training of election officials. It also includes educating future voters about the process, protecting confidence in our elections, and encouraging civic participation across our state. The Iowa Youth Straw Poll reflects that commitment by providing students with meaningful experiences that build knowledge and confidence long before they cast their first official ballot.

Iowa holds a unique place in our nation's political process. During each presidential election cycle, candidates, campaigns, and members of the national media travel across our state to meet with Iowans and discuss the issues facing our country.

This guide has been developed to help you organize and conduct a successful Iowa Youth Straw Poll. Whether this is your first time participating or your school has taken part for many years, we hope these materials make planning simple and provide your students with a meaningful and memorable learning experience.

On behalf of the Iowa Secretary of State's Office, thank you for your partnership and for investing in Iowa's future. Your leadership helps ensure that today's students are prepared to become tomorrow's informed voters and engaged citizens.



# GUIDEBOOK AND ACTION KIT USAGE



In this guidebook you'll find:

- **Press Release Template**
  - Share your school's participation with local media, community partners, and families using the provided press release templates. Simply replace the highlighted placeholder text with your school's information before distributing.
- **Social Media Post Templates**
  - Use the sample social media posts in this guide to promote your school's participation in the Iowa Youth Straw Poll (IYSP). Feel free to customize the posts to fit your school and audience.
- **Action Kit Materials**
  - This section outlines the materials you'll receive after registering for the Iowa Youth Straw Poll and explains how each item can be used in your classroom.
- **Submission Guidelines**
  - Follow the submission instructions in this section to ensure your school's Iowa Youth Straw Poll results are reported accurately and on time. Be sure to review all deadlines and required information before submitting your results.
- **Post Event Newsletter Blurb Template**
  - Use the sample newsletter blurb to highlight your school's participation in the Iowa Youth Straw Poll. Simply replace the highlighted placeholder text with your school's information before distributing to your local community, local media, and parents.

***If you have any questions, contact programs@sos.iowa.gov.***



# REMINDERS

The statewide Iowa Youth Straw Poll will be held on **Tuesday, October 6, 2026**.

- If your school would like to participate before October 6, you may conduct your Straw Poll during the early voting period. The online results submission platform will open on **Monday, October 5, 2026, at 8:00 a.m.** and will remain open until **Wednesday, October 7, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.** Be sure to submit your school's results before the deadline.

Schools may conduct their Straw Poll using **paper ballots or an online voting form**, whichever works best for your students. Use the district-specific master ballot provided by the Iowa Youth Straw Poll to create copies or build your online ballot.

To help students prepare before voting, use the **candidate slideshow** available on the Iowa Youth Straw Poll website.

**Make the experience your own!** Many schools decorate hallways with candidate information, create ballot boxes and voting stations, or develop their own voting procedures to simulate Election Day.

Help us celebrate your participation! Share photos from your Straw Poll with our office for a chance to be featured on our social media channels and in the Civic Edge newsletter. Don't forget to use the hashtag **#BeAVoter** when posting on social media.

# ACTION KIT MATERIALS



Enclosed in your Action Kit you will find:

- **Master Ballots**
  - Official ballot templates used to prepare and distribute student ballots during the Iowa Youth Straw Poll.
- **Stickers**
  - Student participation stickers that can be distributed after voting to recognize involvement in the Iowa Youth Straw Poll.
- **Pendant Flags**
  - Decorative flags that can be displayed in the classroom or polling area to create an engaging election-day atmosphere.
- **Pens**
  - Writing utensils provided for students to complete their ballots during the voting process.




**PEN**

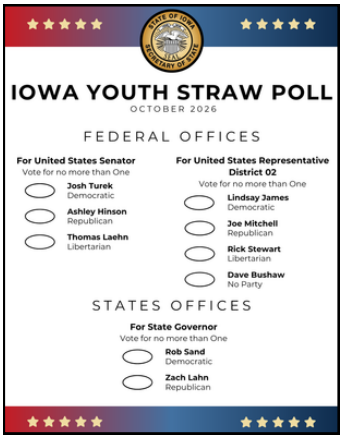
**PENDANT FLAG**







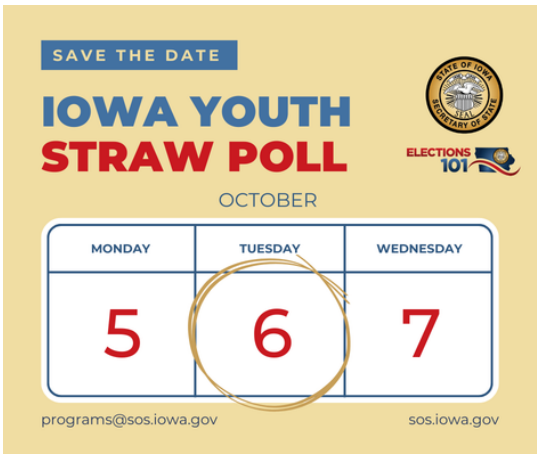
**STICKER**




**MASTER BALLOT**

# Social Media Post Templates



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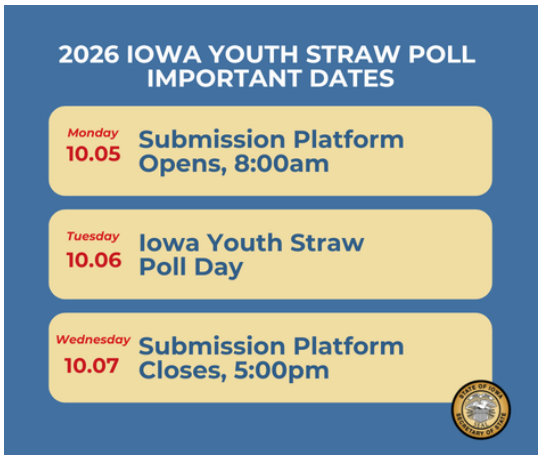


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# PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**[SCHOOL] Students Take Part in Iowa Youth Straw Poll**

[CITY, STATE – DATE] – [SCHOOL NAME] is proud to participate in the Iowa Youth Straw Poll, a statewide civic education initiative organized by the Iowa Secretary of State's Office.

Through this hands-on mock election, students gain firsthand experience with the voting process while learning about the responsibilities of civic participation.

More than [NUMBER] students at [SCHOOL NAME] are taking part in this year's straw poll, exploring how elections work and why informed participation matters in a democratic society.

"Experiences like the Iowa Youth Straw Poll help students see that civic engagement is not something that starts in adulthood. It starts now," said Paul Pate, Iowa Secretary of State. "We are excited to give our students an opportunity to learn about elections in a meaningful, interactive way and encourage them to become active participants in their communities."

"[Insert quote]," added [PRINCIPAL NAME], Principal of [SCHOOL NAME].

The Iowa Youth Straw Poll is designed to introduce young Iowans to the electoral process, spark conversations about civic responsibility, and help prepare the next generation of informed voters.

For more information about [SCHOOL NAME]'s participation in the Iowa Youth Straw Poll, please contact [CONTACT PERSON] at [PHONE NUMBER] or [EMAIL ADDRESS].

[CONTACT PERSON]
[TITLE]
[SCHOOL NAME]

***



# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

## Submitting Results:

1. Start by visiting **https://sos.iowa.gov** and clicking on the drop-down initiatives box.
    a. There you will see the Iowa Youth Straw Poll section.
2. Click “Participant Sign-In” and enter in your email and password, then click “Sign In”.
3. After signing in, click “Upload Election Results”.
4. You will be prompted to enter the total number of students who participated in the actual event. Next you will enter the correct number of votes for each candidate in each category.
    a. If there were any candidates or categories that received zero (0) votes, please enter the digit “0” in these boxes.
5. Double check that the information you have entered is correct. After clicking **“SUBMIT”** at the very bottom, you will NOT be able to change or re-submit your results.

***Have any questions? Please reach out to programs@sos.iowa.gov***

# POST EVENT NEWSLETTER BLURB



**[SCHOOL NAME] Students Cast Their Votes in the 2026 Iowa Youth Straw Poll**

A total of [NUMBER] students at [SCHOOL NAME] recently participated in the Iowa Youth Straw Poll, a statewide civic education program hosted by the Iowa Secretary of State's Office. Through this hands-on mock election, students experienced the voting process firsthand while learning about civic engagement, informed decision-making, and the importance of participating in our democracy.

Thank you to the Iowa Secretary of State's Office for providing the resources that made this experience possible. We are proud of our students for taking part in this meaningful opportunity and helping build the next generation of informed and engaged citizens.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



**Q:Will the results be shown?**
A:Yes. the Secrtary of State Office will be sharing results after the submission platform closes at 5:00 p.m. on October 7. Follow along on the Secretary of State social media pages for updates.

**Q: Does the Secretary of State Office provide candidate information?**
A: There is a PowerPoint with links to the different candidate's Ballotpedia. This PowerPoint is located on the main Iowa Youth Straw Poll page.

**Q: Where can I find the ballots?**
A: The ballots are located on the main page of the straw poll website towards the middle. **sos.iowa.gov**

**Q: Can the Secretary of State office have the straw poll turned into a google form?**
A: It is up to the teacher/administrator on how they ultimately choose to conduct their Straw Poll. However, to ensure the authenticity of the Straw Poll, it is helpful to use paper ballots, just as an election would. The important thing to remember is that you will be in track of reporting results for your school.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



**Q:Why are my local races not offered?**
A:There are hundreds of local races across the state, and it varies by local precinct. One school could even have multiple ballots. If you do want to include your local races, contact your local County Auditor and they can provide you with that information.

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## An Elections 101 Event

programs@sos.iowa.gov
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