

## Lesson 2: Who's in Control?

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- **7<sup>th</sup> grade Texas History**

- **Duration:** 45 minutes

- **History TEKS:**

**(15) Government.** The student understands the structure and functions of government created by the Texas Constitution. The student is expected to:

**(A)** describe the structure and function of government at municipal, county and state levels.

**(C)** describe the structure, funding, and governance of Texas public education, including local property taxes, bond issues, and state and federal funding supported by the state and federal taxpayers.

**(23) Social Studies Skills.** The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

**(A)** Use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of a solution.

- **ELA TEKS:**

**(10) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Procedural Texts.** Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

**(C)** use different organizational patterns as guides for summarizing and forming an overview of different kinds of expository text.

- **Learning Objective(s):**

- Students will select target issues, based on their questionnaire responses, and form teams
- Students will be able to identify and describe the structure and function of local government in Texas.
- Students will be able to identify a problem in their local community and identify where the problem should be addressed.

- **Materials:**

- "Who's in Control?" Reading Handout on Structure of School Districts, Local and State government chart (1 for each student)
- Butcher Paper (1 for each group titled **Political, Social, and Economic Issues**)
- Markers
- Seating Chart prepared from Questionnaire
- Project Instructions (1 per student)

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### Lesson Procedure:

1. Share with the students the tallied results from the questionnaires the students completed in Lesson 1.
2. List the following criteria for selecting their focal issues: can be tackled in the semester, is very specific, we can gather data about this, there is a lot of interest, this matters to people in our school/community
3. Based on the number of students in the class, have the students vote on the top *n* number of issues, based on how well they meet the criteria.
4. Help students form groups based on their stated interests.
5. For introductory activity have students work in their groups to analyze the structure of district, local and state governments by completing the "Who's in Charge?" reading. While students read they will create graphic representations or organizational charts for each level of government in their own notebooks.
6. Monitor groups during this introductory activity and provide feedback as needed. Set a timer for 10 minutes for this activity.
7. After 10 minutes, go over charts of government, as a class. Have groups share their responses with the entire class and answer questions as they arise.

8. Next divide the scenario cards from lesson plan #1/day one equally among the groups. From the cards provided, the groups will choose one issue to analyze.
9. The students will break down the issue on their butcher paper, listing all of the possible causes of the problem.
10. Once complete, students will identify which level of government would handle their assigned issue and indicate it on their butcher paper. (Allow 10 minutes for this activity)
11. Student posters should be posted around the room.
12. Assign each group a different colored marker. As the groups visit each poster they will determine if they agree with the groups' assessment of the issue. They will either put a check mark next to the poster if they agree or put an "x" on the poster if they feel something is missing or wrong. (10 minutes)
13. Once the students have completed their poster assessments, ask them to return to their groups. Hold a class discussion allowing groups to share reasons for their checks and "X".
14. After all groups have defended their decisions and their questions are cleared up, pass out the project instructions.
15. Explain the purpose of the project and the expectations of the groups.

**Assessment:**

1. Allow groups the remainder of the period to break down what they feel is the cause of their problem and to determine which level of government they will need to begin with to implement a solution.
2. For homework: Have students research how their school district is organized.

**Modifications:**

1. Students can plan on Google Docs v. Chart Paper. Have student groups share their Google Doc with the teacher to monitor progress.
2. Invite community leaders, school district employees, or School Board to come visit class to discuss the structure and function of the local government.
3. Provide students with a chart of the structure of your local government and school district.

**Civic Participation Group Project Instructions**  
*"We do make a difference- one way or the other"*  
- Stephen Covey

Congratulations! Today you begin a project in which you can make a positive difference in your school or community. Your challenge is to use your problem-solving skills to identify a situation, research the cause, identify possible solutions and decide what it will take to make a difference. You will work with a team of people with similar interests as you throughout the process.

Here is your checklist for success:

\_\_\_\_ Step 1: Assign each person in your group a role. Caution!!! You are all in this together as a team. These roles are to help organize the team. You will all be responsible for making decisions, doing the research and presenting the information together.

1. Project Manager: Maintain a progress report and keep group members on task. Inform teacher if someone has not completed their tasks for any reason.
2. Graphic Artists- Design tri-fold board layout. Determine the flow and materials needed for presentation.
3. Technology specialists- Determine when and how you will use technology in the presentation and create the technology piece for the presentation.
4. Editor- Proofread all research. Check for proper citations, correct spelling, and grammar. Make corrections as needed.

\_\_\_\_ Step 2: Determine what form of data you want to collect. Suggested forms:

1. Survey: May create one on paper or electronically through [www.SurveyMonkey.com](http://www.SurveyMonkey.com) or [www.PollEverywhere.com](http://www.PollEverywhere.com)
2. Interview: May be done in person or electronically through a phone conversation or Skype.
3. Observations: Set up a time and location to observe the problem in action to take data first hand.
4. Statistics: Research the problem over time and locate other researcher's data concerning the issue or create your own using Excel programs.

\_\_\_\_ Step 3: Collect data. This process will not happen without teamwork. Divide up the work. Create the surveys, interview questions and observation look-for's ahead of time. Discuss with your teacher other options that were not listed above if you have more ideas. This process will take more than one day- plan ahead!

\_\_\_\_ Step 4: Analyze data. Use the knowledge gained in class to take a close look at your data. Summarize the conclusions from the data and prepare the materials to be used on the final presentation. The data should guide you into the next phase- Finding a Solution.

\_\_\_\_ Step 5: Finding a Solution. Create a list of possible solutions. As a team determine the pros and cons of each suggestion. Complete the Implementing a Solution handout to determine timeframe, costs and personnel to ensure the solution is plausible.

\_\_\_\_ Step 6: Prepare for Presentation. Everyone plays a vital role in the presentation. All parts should come together and follow the requirements in rubric. Work as a team to prepare and complete the display and practice your 10 minute presentations.

\_\_\_\_ Step 7: Present to community judges at the Civics Fair

\_\_\_\_ Step 8: Reflection. Complete self-reflection on project and your role in the community.

## Who's In Control?

**Directions:** Use the descriptions below to create charts for each type of government to understand the roles, responsibilities and hierarchy of each system.

**Structure of Government:** All government structures are established under rules in the Texas Constitution.

### **School Districts:**

School districts follow laws passed by the Texas Legislature and overseen by the State Board of Education and Texas Education Agency. At the local level, each school district is required to have a 7 member Board of Trustees to make local policy. The board is elected by members of the school district either at-large or within specific districts. Reporting directly to the school board is the district's superintendent. Each school district in the state varies in the structure beyond that. The larger school districts will have an Assistant Superintendent and a Director of Finance. Below them you might find directors of Curriculum, Transportation, Maintenance, Special Education, Technology, Athletics and Nutrition, just to name a few. Below each director will be principals who report to the superintendent and curriculum directors. The principals oversee all faculty and support staff.

### **Municipal Government:**

All cities under 5000 in population are General Law cities. That means they have more restrictions in how much they can do on their own. They are limited by the state constitution and have little power to tax. Cities above 5000 in population can become Home Rule cities. This will give them more control, more power to tax and make their own laws. City elections are nonpartisan and can be elected through a single-member district or at-large. The main services cities oversee are fire and police protection, street maintenance and construction, water and sewage services, garbage pickup, parks and recreation, and in some cases, libraries, airports, hospitals and museums. Cities acquire their money to provide these services through property tax, sales tax, and city fees for services.

### **There are four types of city government:**

1. **Strong-Mayor Form:** The mayor is both the chief executive and the legislative leader. The mayor appoints leaders, prepares city budget, sets council agendas, propose policy, has the power to veto and has no term limit. Houston is the only city to use this form in Texas.
2. **Weak Mayor-Council Form:** The mayor is part of a council that performs all the executive duties together. The mayor still presides over meetings but rarely can veto and usually has a term limit. The job is generally part-time which saves the city money. This can be found mostly in towns with a population under 5000.
3. **Commission Form:** Voters elect a city council called a board of commissioners. The commissioners perform all legislative and executive duties. Each commissioner is in charge of one department. The mayor title is rotated each year to another commissioner. This form of government was created in Galveston after the 1900 Hurricane, but is not currently used in any Texas City.
4. **Council-Manager Form:** Voters elect a part-time mayor and part-time city council. The mayor presides over city council, having the power to break a tie vote and is the official representative of the city. The council makes policy, approves budget, sets city tax rate, passes local laws and oversees the mayor. A city-manager is hired to oversee the cities policies, projects and departments. This is the most popular form of local government in the state of Texas.

**County Government:**

County governments are in charge of keep public records such as births, marriages, and divorces. They also run elections and provide services to residents that are not part of a city. The county also has its own law enforcement organization. The main leaders make up the commissioner's court, which comprises an elected county judge and four county commissioners that represent precincts. The commissioner's court sets county tax rates, budget, and some laws but also has a team of elected officials they work with. These include county sheriff, treasurer, tax assessor, clerk, attorney, justices of the peace, and constables. There is no one uniform structure of government- it must be tailored to meet the needs of the county.

**Special Districts:**

These districts are designed to provide a specific function such as water districts or hospital districts. They are created as needed and are regulated by non-salaried board of trustees. They can have a wide area of coverage and are voted on by citizens of the area. They can borrow money, raise taxes and assess fees to residents.