

# IV. Seeing the Possibilities for Sharing Power in Our Local Government

## Activity 4

### WHAT?

Students will identify ways that power is divided and shared in several typical forms of local government found in Texas

### WHY?

- To develop an orderly way of categorizing issues and seeing interrelationships among ideas
- To analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions
- To use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages/disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution
- To use a decision-making process to identify a situation that requires a decision, gather information, identify options, predict consequences, and take action to implement a decision

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills addressed in this lesson:

#### *Government:*

- Understand the basic principles reflected in the Texas Constitution
- Understand the structure and functions of government created by the Texas Constitution

#### *Citizenship:*

- Understand the rights and responsibilities of Texas citizens
- Understand the importance of the expression of different points of view in a democratic society
- Understand the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society

#### *Culture:*

- Understand the concept of diversity within unity in Texas

#### *Social Studies Skills:*

- Apply critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology

#### *Communicate in written, oral, and visual form*

- Uses problem-solving and decision making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings

#### TAAS:

- Objective 1: Civic Values and Responsibilities
- Objective 3: Political Influences in U. S. History
- Objective 6: Sociological and Cultural Influences on U. S. History
- Objective 8: Critical-Thinking Skills



## HOW?

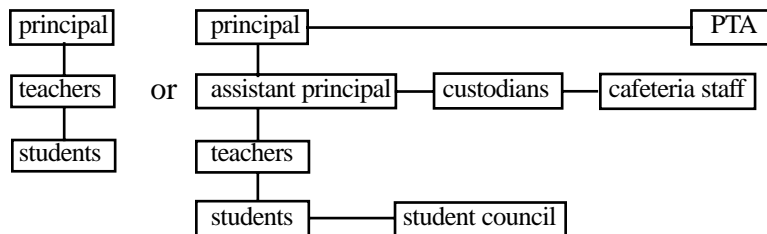
### Materials Needed:

- For each small group you will form in your class, and for yourself, make a packet of symbols from the attached sheet, overhead projector, felt board, or chalk board

Suggested Teaching Time: one class period

### Suggested Teaching Procedures:

- In advance of the lesson, prepare envelopes of symbols from the attached sheet, or if you prefer, have students cut out the symbols themselves at the start of the lesson. You will want to have your own set of symbols to manipulate on the overhead to show the possibilities of power distribution.
- To familiarize students with the use of symbols to show power and authority, have students use the symbols to show the distribution of power in their own school. They will want to include, at the very least, a principal, teachers, students, and perhaps will add the student council, assistant principals, custodians, PTA, or even school board and voters, depending on their knowledge. Their diagrams will probably look something like this:



- Encourage students to think of different ways to arrange the power diagram and the advantages and disadvantages of each, including costs, efficiencies, balancing of power, benefits of individuals' experience, etc. (What if the principal chose the student council? What if the PTA decided what the custodians should do? What if the assistant principal decided how the cafeteria staff should do its job? What if students decided grades?) Such a discussion could spiral out of control rather quickly, unless you are redirecting students to think about real advantages and real disadvantages- long and short term.
- Then, introduce in a very general way, the concept of power at the municipal level and the key players of citizens, registered voters, voters, mayors, councilmembers, city managers, department heads, and municipal employees. Arrange your symbols on the overhead in various ways to show possible distribution of power at the local level. (Or have students work in small groups and manipulate the symbols into various forms.)
- Have students reflect on the power that would be held by people in each arrangement, and the advantages and disadvantages of each arrangement from various citizens' perspectives. Your discussion would include showing power in various configurations, including the "real" ones from Texas cities, shown below.

For illustration and contrast, you may wish to show some configurations that are not democratic, so that students see the value of their town's distribution of local government power. For this, arrange the symbols to place voters at the bottom of the chart, being told what to do by town officials. Or you may wish to select one or two departments such as the police or fire departments to have authority over the mayor and council, and ultimately the voters. Have students reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of these distributions of power.

- After your discussion, introduce labels for the main forms of city government in Texas: strong mayor-council form (Plan A), weak mayor-council form (Plan C), and the council-manager form (Plan B).
  - Hand out the unlabeled sheet of diagrams and have students give each chart a title and label all positions on the chart. The labeling can be done individually and then student teams can compare their answers, the whole class can go over the correct answers in a teacher-directed lesson, or student teams can figure the chart out together.
  - Have students color the elected officials (mayors and councilmembers who are in the "hot seat" of elective accountability) RED and the town's employees (city departmental workers who are more removed from the "hot seat") BLUE. If your town has a mayor and councilmembers who are paid, you may wish to adopt another color scheme- perhaps red and blue stripes or a blend of red and blue.

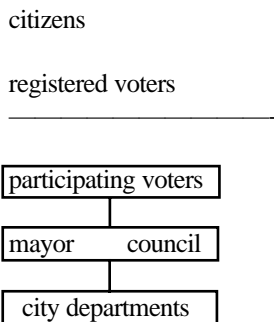
**Follow-Up Activities:** For the next several days following this lesson, you may wish to have your warm-up be a copy of the blank, unlabeled diagram on an overhead transparency. Have students review the names of each form of government and the officials who fill the various positions on the chart.

**Evaluation:** You may wish to grade the accuracy of student’s diagrams. This material is easily tested in writing.

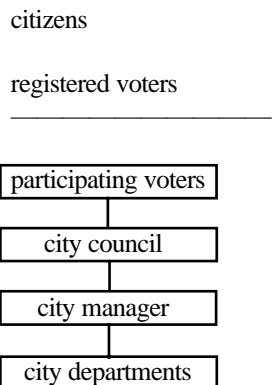
## Teacher Key:

### Forms of Texas Municipal Government

**Plan A**



**Plan B**



**Plan C**

