***Who’s In Control?***

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***Directions: Use the descriptions below to fill in the blanks on the 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 Transportation, Maintenance, Curriculum, Special Education, Technology, Athletics and Nutrition, just to name a few. The principals who report to the superintendent and curriculum directors 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. **Commissioner 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.

**State Government:**

The state of Texas, like our national government, is divided into three branches; executive, legislative and judicial.

The Executive Branch-enforces the laws. The branch consists of the Governor who is the main leader and figure head for our state, although his power is more limited than most executives around our country. Following the governor is the Lieutenant Governor. The lieutenant governor is President of the Senate but is not actually a voting member of the Senate. The position is one of leadership and organization. Also included in the Executive Branch is the Attorney General. The Attorney General serves as the state’s attorney and represents Texas in the event of a national court case involving the state and legal issues within the state. The Secretary of State oversees elections and keeps government records and ensures state official documents of the state. The State Auditor Office works to maintain the integrity of the state of Texas and to make sure government funds are spent for their intended purpose.

Legislative Branch-makes the laws. The legislative branch is divided into two houses (bicameral): the senate and the House of Representatives which meet every other year. Texas has 31 senators that serve 4 year terms. The Lieutenant Governor serves as the leader of the senate. Since the Lieutenant Governor is part of the Executive and Legislative Branches the position is considered the most powerful leader in our state government. The Speaker of the House is the leader in charge of debates, assigning bills, appointing members to committees and signing all bills and joint resolutions in the House. The 150 Texas House members are elected by the people of Texas and serve 2 year terms.

Judicial Branch-Interprets the Laws. The highest courts in Texas are the Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeals. Cases don’t normally start in these courts they are appealed from lower courts to the highest level. Below these two courts are the fourteen appellate courts spread throughout our state in major cities. Cases generally begin in district, county or local courts depending on the type of case.

Departments: Our state also has many departments to oversee specific issues. Among those departments are agriculture, banking, criminal justice, health, housing and community affairs, public safety, and transportation just to name a few.

*Sources:* [*http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/*](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/)

**For Extra Credit:** Research what type of local government Keller has and find out the names of all of our city leaders. Write this on your chart.