

An Average Day in the Life of Jorge and Jessica, two middle school students

Look at an average day in our lives and see how local government made it all possible. Local government is everywhere, but don't worry, this is a good thing!

Jorge's Day	Jessica's Day
1. Turned on the faucet to brush my teeth- water is treated at the CITY'S waste water treatment plant	1. Fed the dogs- dog licenses issued by the CITY, we can only have three dogs because of a CITY ordinance
2. Flushed the toilet- sanitation is provided by CITIES and SPECIAL DISTRICTS	2. We stopped at a fast food restaurant for breakfast- licensed by the CITY, inspected by the COUNTY health department
3. Got dressed- clothes bought at a store built to CITY building codes	3. Mom dropped me off at the bus stop- her car is licensed by the COUNTY, the street by our house was built by the CITY
4. Ate breakfast- milk inspected by COUNTY health inspectors, cereal bought at the grocery store that pays a CITY business license	4. I caught the RTD to school- RTD is a SPECIAL DISTRICT
5. Watched cable T.V.- cable companies licensed by CITIES and COUNTIES	5. Went to school- SCHOOL DISTRICT provides my education
6. Rode my bike to school- bikes are licensed by the CITY	6. Played at a park after school- park was built by a SPECIAL DISTRICT
7. Went to school all day- SCHOOL DISTRICTS are local governments	7. My mom dragged me to the clinic for a flu shot- health services provided by the COUNTY
8. Played soccer after school- recreation programs provided by CITIES and SPECIAL DISTRICTS	8. We picked up grandma at the airport- airports are built by CITIES , COUNTIES , and SPECIAL DISTRICTS
9. Found a stray dog and called Animal Control- CITIES AND COUNTIES help lost animals	9. We stopped at Grandpa's grave- COUNTY coroner told us why he died; the cemetery was built by a SPECIAL DISTRICT
10. I stopped at the library to check out a book- libraries are provided by CITIES , COUNTIES , and SPECIAL DISTRICTS	10. For dinner we ate trout that Dad caught- the stream where he caught it is managed by the CITY
11. I went to a high school basketball game- sports event offered by the SCHOOL DISTRICT	11. We went to a play at the high school- the drama department, funded by the SCHOOL DISTRICT , offered the play.
12. I went home, turned out the light and fell into bed- electricity is a public utility that uses CITY right-of-way	

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Special districts are units of local government that are formed by citizens to meet a particular need. They are run by an **elected** board of directors, who **hires** employees to assist with daily operations. Services provided through special districts may include services like mosquito control, public parks, safety protection (traffic and safety controls), sanitation, water, fire protection, street improvements, T.V. relays and translators, cemeteries, hospitals, airports, and flood control.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

School districts are units of local government that provide education to children from kindergarten through high school. In some districts adult education and preschool programs are also offered. School districts are headed by an **elected** school board who **hires** a superintendent to supervise the daily operations of the district.

Overview of Local Government

The concept of local government is deeply rooted in our national heritage. Small communities were the beginnings of the United States. Throughout history Americans have maintained strong support for local self-government, while remaining largely uniformed about what local government is, how it is funded, and how it impacts their lives. Local governments can be more responsive to citizens than state and federal government, but the limitations are that local units need the cooperation of other entities to deal effectively with bigger issues such as transportation and pollution.

There are four main types of local government- **counties, municipalities (cities and town), special districts, and school districts.**

Counties are the largest units of local government, numbering about 8,000 nationwide. They provide many of the same services provided by cities.

Municipalities include cities, villages, and boroughs and they number about 19,000 in the United States. Often called city government, municipalities provide services such as police and fire protection, parks and recreation, streets and sewers, among others.

Most of the more than 15,000 **school districts** in the U.S. operate independently of city government. New York City and a few other communities in the Northeast operate their own public school systems.

The 33,000 **special districts** nationwide are organized to provide one or more services such as water and sanitation, mosquito control, transportation, parks and recreation, flood control, etc. Special districts have the authority to levy taxes and to spend public money.

Local governments serve three primary functions- **health and safety, welfare and housekeeping.** In the area of **health and safety**, local governments are responsible for police and fire protection, immunizations for contagious diseases, hospital services, local roads, garbage collection, and safe drinking water. Sanitation, housing, and air and water pollution are also under local jurisdiction.

In the area of **welfare**, education is the largest expense. However, libraries, museums, parks, recreational facilities and mass transit also fall under local control. In some communities public housing and economic development may also be a function of one of the local governments.

Housekeeping functions does not mean doing the laundry or sweeping the floors when it comes to government! Housekeeping functions include keeping records of births, deaths, marriages, and property transfers. Collecting taxes and administering elections are also local government responsibilities.

CITIES/TOWNS

A city is a unit of government that has certain rights and responsibilities to its citizens. Cities collect taxes, make contracts, provide services, and make laws or ordinances for the health, safety, and well-being of its residents.

The elected leaders of a city are the mayor and city council members. In some cities people elect the mayor. In other cities a council member is elected by his/her fellow city council members to be mayor. Only in large cities is the mayor a full-time job. The mayor and city council members make policy decisions about the way the city is run.

The people who carry out the policy decisions of the city council are not elected. They are hired employees of the city. The city council hires a city manager or city administrator to manage the daily operations of the city. He/she in turn appoints department heads who are responsible for activities within their departments. Public works, Finance, Planning and Building, Parks and Recreation, and Public Safety (fire and police) are examples of city departments.

The City must also have a City Attorney for handling legal issues, a Municipal Judge who presides over the court, and a City Clerk who handles records and documents of the city.

Cities depend heavily on sales tax revenue. That means the city collects a percent of every item or service purchased within its boundaries. Cities also receive revenue from fees such as water service to your home, and licenses such as dog or bike licenses. Other sources of revenue for municipalities are the motor fuel tax, vehicle registration fees, cigarette tax, lottery, police and fire pension funds, mineral lease, and funds from the state.

Cities in the United States can trace their beginnings back to the ancient Greece “city-states” where people lived in groups and created a governing body to settle disputes and provide services. In Florida, many cities grew up around forts such as Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers, and Fort Pierce.

Cities have the power to tax citizens to collect revenue or money to pay for services. Cities are responsible for providing police protection, water, sewers, streets, and in some cases airports, zoos, sports stadiums, and libraries. Cities must also have a judicial or court system for cases involving municipal laws.

Inhabitants (people who live in a certain area) who wish to become a city may file a petition for incorporation with the district court of the county where they live. Incorporation gives a city all the legal rights and responsibilities granted to cities by the Florida State Constitution.

Next, an election is held where voters decide on becoming a city. If passed, then the city elects a mayor and six or more council members. One of their first items of business is to pass a resolution or law allowing the city to collect property tax for the purpose of funding city services.

The Florida Revised Statutes grant certain powers to cities. Among them are the powers to sue and be sued, to enter contracts, to acquire land, to hold a common seal, to accept federal land for public use, and to levy taxes.

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Have you ever been to the zoo, taken the Space Coast Area Transit buses, or gone to a Manatees game at Space Coast Stadium? Then you have benefited from the services of a Special District. When was the last time you turned on the water in your house, or rode your bike on a major street in your town without falling into a pothole? It is likely that a Special District made that possible for you.

Special Districts are a unique form of local government because they are almost “invisible.” You don’t hear a lot about them, but there are 1,697 Special Districts in Florida.

Special Districts are governments whose boundaries cross over city and county lines. Special Districts are forms to provide one or more specific services to citizens. For example, in the state of Colorado there are metropolitan (city) park and recreation, fire, hospital, sanitation, water, and water and sanitation districts. However, Special Districts also provide services such as mosquito control, television relay, and museums.

Special Districts are funded (get their money from) property taxes. That means if you own property, every year you are taxed by the county. The amount of tax is based on how much your property is worth. A part of that tax goes to the Special Districts in the county.

Most Special Districts are run by a board of five elected members who meet regularly and who are paid a small amount of money each year for their efforts. Some larger Special Districts such as Urban Drainage have members who are appointed, either by a County Commissioner or by the Governor.

Voters decide on the formation of a special district, except for those set up by the Florida State Statutes. The process may be initiated through a citizens' petition or by the State Legislature. In either case, voters make the final decision on the creation of a special district.

The Florida Revised Statutes grants special districts the same powers as the other local governments. They are the power to sue and be sued, enter contracts, hold property, and collect taxes.

COUNTIES

A county is the one form of local government in Florida that is not created by citizens. The state Constitution created counties. There are 67 counties in Florida that perform some of the same functions as cities, but often they provide services that smaller cities cannot. Counties have court systems and jails, libraries and museums, health departments, airports, and animal control facilities. Counties also help to provide social services such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, social security, and food stamps- programs that are funded also by the state and federal government. Counties generally cover more territory than cities, and may in fact have several cities within their boundaries.

There are ten officers in county governments, nine of whom are elected. In counties of populations of 70,000 or less there are three elected *commissioners* who manage the affairs of the county. In counties larger than 70,000 five commissioners are elected. The county officers are elected for four-year terms.

Other elected positions include a *clerk*, who keeps records and documents of the county, a *sheriff* who is the head law enforcement offices, a *coroner* who determines the cause of death, a *treasurer* who receives and pays out all county money, an *assessor* who determines the value of property in the county, and a *surveyor* who measures county boundaries. In addition, a county *attorney* may be elected or appointed by the commissioners to handle legal issues.

Counties collect revenue from property and sales taxes, and fees. Property tax is money collected on the value of property within the county. The rate of tax or mill levy changes every year. The mill levy is the rate of tax paid by a property owner for every \$1,000 of assessed value of his/her property.

Counties are the one form of local government set up by the Florida Revised State Statutes. The boundaries of each county are specified in the Statutes.

Counties are granted certain powers by the Florida Revised Statutes. They include the power to sue and be sued, to buy and sell property, to make contracts, maintain mass transportation, and to establish special taxing districts.

SCHOOL BOARDS

School boards are set up by the Florida legislature as a body of elected officials who are responsible for making policy decisions for the school district in their jurisdiction. School boards have the authority to own property, sue and be sued, and to enter into contracts. School boards determine educational programs, adopt textbooks and discipline codes, create a yearly budget, and establish a school calendar, among other responsibilities.

There are no fewer than five and no more than seven board members from each district. Some members are elected within “director districts”- part of the overall district- while in other school districts members are elected “at large,”- ie: they do not need to live in a specific area of the district.

The board elects a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The president and vice president are elected for two-year terms.

The history of public education in the United States is deeply rooted in our heritage. The Puritans came from England to the New World with an appreciation of education. Initially children were schooled at home, but as towns grew so did the need for a town school. As early as 1642 the colony of Massachusetts appealed to the colonial legislature to enact a law requiring parents and schoolmasters educate children and teach them to read.

Town selectmen were responsible for enforcing the education laws as the details of education had become too burdensome and time consuming for individuals to administer directly.

In the 1700’s the practice of collecting taxes to pay for schools was well established. By the end of the century the “central town” distributed tax money to each parish, or district, that surrounded it so it could maintain its own school.

The Florida Revised Statutes grants both the power and the responsibility to school boards to provide free quality public education to citizens of Florida. Voters decide whether or not to form or reorganize school boards.

The Florida Revised Statutes grants school boards certain powers as a local government. These include the power to hold property, sue and be sued, and engage in contracts. School boards are granted the authority to collect a portion of property taxes from the counties in which they reside.