

How Does Local Government Work?

Imagine that your school is located on a curve of a busy city street. When you walk beside the school, the cars whiz by really close to you. It's scary! You think, "What if a car comes up onto the sidewalk and hits me?"

On these two pages, you will read about some Grade 8 students at Lord Lansdowne Public School in Toronto who were in exactly this situation. They worried about the safety of students walking to their school. They decided to find out what they could do about it.

School Zone!

The speed limit on the street was 50 km/h. There was a warning sign telling drivers to slow down to 25 km/h at the curve near the school, but the students were sure that most drivers were driving much faster. How could they find out for sure?

The students decided to time the cars going around the curve on four different days. They found that the average speed was just over 50 km/h—25 km/h over the speed on the warning sign. Something had to be done!

- What is the concern here?
- What do you think the students could do next?



Slow Down!

The students knew that their **local government** was in charge of speed limits so they went to talk to their **councillor**. She told them they would need to convince the city planning and transportation committee to change the speed limit.

The students prepared a presentation. They took pictures of the school, sidewalk, and street. They made a graph showing the speed of the cars. Then they went to a committee meeting.

The committee members listened to the students, and then the head of the committee spoke. He was impressed with the presentation, but he did not agree that the speed limit needed to be lowered. He argued that the warning sign already told drivers to slow down.

Then the committee members discussed the situation. They decided that the speed limit near the school should be lowered to 40 km/h. They also thought that a **crash guard** should be built at the curve to protect pedestrians. The committee would take these recommendations to the **council** for approval.

? Inquiring Minds

Having a level of government that can respond to local needs is important in a democracy. In this chapter you will discover the way local government works and how members of the community can influence it.

1. In what ways is local government part of a democracy?
2. How can citizens participate in local government? How can people organize themselves to meet needs not met by government?

words matter!

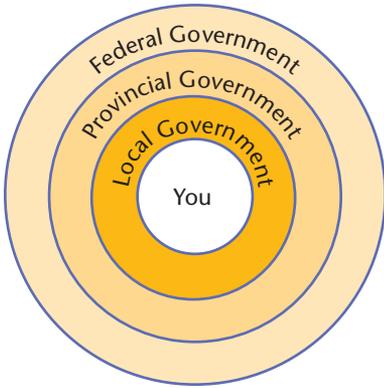
A **councillor** is a person elected to local government.

A **crash guard** is a barrier that is built between the sidewalk and street.

A **council** is a group of elected representatives who make decisions for a local area.



What do these signs mean?



Why Do We Have Local Government?

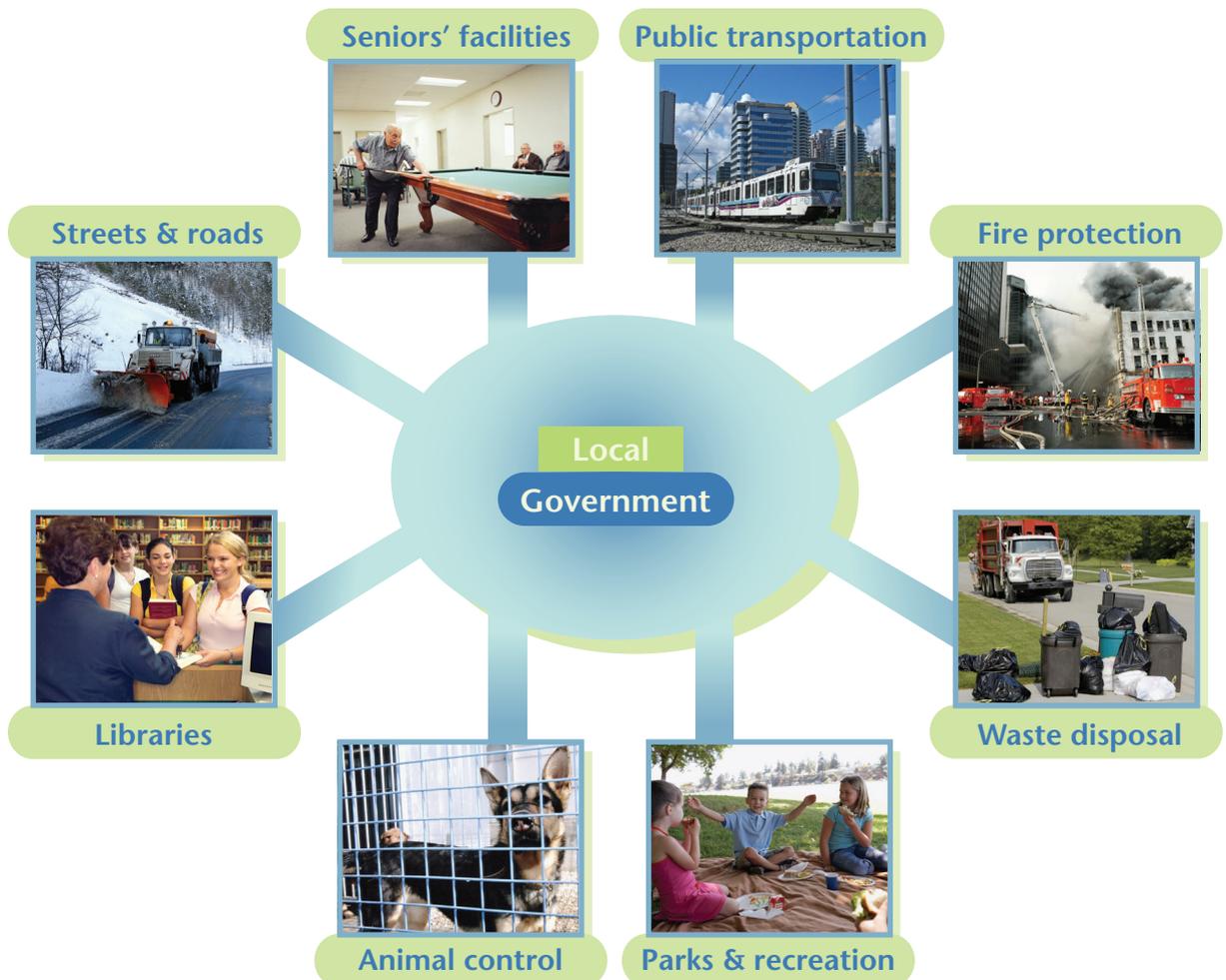
Imagine that you wake up one winter morning and see a deep blanket of snow outside. A snowplow, flashing its lights, drives by clearing the road. You wonder if your school bus is going to be late. You haven't even had breakfast yet, but your local government is already affecting your day.

Thinking It Through

How are local government services an example of equality in a democracy?

Local Government Provides Services

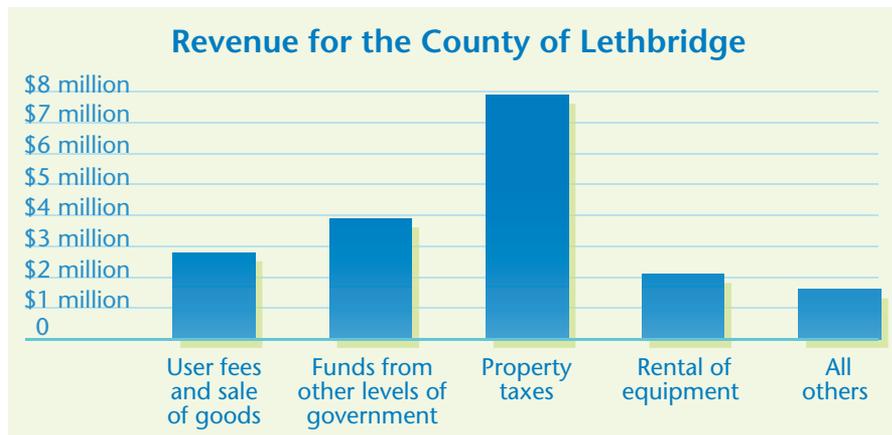
Whether you live in the countryside, a city, or a town you have needs that must be met. Local government was created to provide services to meet some of these needs. What needs are being met by each of the services shown below?



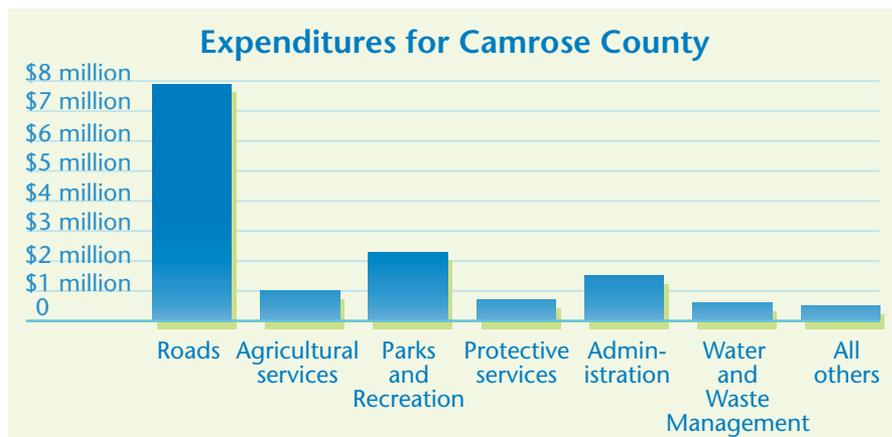
School boards, which you will be looking at later in this chapter, are part of local government. In some communities, the local government and the school board work together to provide services such as libraries, transportation, and recreation facilities.

Local Government Collects Taxes

Local governments spend large amounts of money providing services. Most of this money is raised through taxes collected from people who own property, such as houses, businesses, and land, in the community. The graph below shows government sources of **revenue**, or income.



The graph below shows what local government spends its money on. These are called its **expenditures**, or expenses.



In Chapter 1 you read about rights and responsibilities in a democracy. Most people feel it is their right to have local services provided. They are responsible for paying the taxes that make these services possible.

Skill Smart

A bar graph has thick lines or bars that represent an amount of something. You can compare the amounts by looking at the length of the bars.

- How can you tell how much money each bar represents?
- Approximately how much revenue does the County of Lethbridge collect in property taxes?
- What is the largest expenditure for the government of Camrose County?

Thinking It Through

What would you say to someone you heard complaining about paying local taxes?

Local Government Makes Laws

Bylaws are laws that are passed by a local government.

How do you know where it is legal to snowmobile in your community? How do you know whether your dog is allowed off-leash in a park? The local government makes rules called **bylaws**. Bylaws are rules that specify people's behaviour. These rules help keep people safe and help the community run smoothly.

Why do you think each of these bylaws was passed?



Bylaws can only be enforced in the area where they have been passed. In other words, every community has its own bylaws. People are responsible for knowing and obeying the bylaws. If they do not, justice usually requires that they pay a fine.

This article describes what happened in a rural community when a landowner refused to obey a bylaw.

Rocky View takes over noxious weed-infested land

For the first time ever, the Municipal District of Rocky View will take over a large parcel of agricultural land that has become infested with noxious, or harmful, weeds and will start a weed control action plan.

The owner of the land received several notices from Rocky View asking her to treat the weeds, but she failed to do so.

Weed control will start immediately and the owner will be billed for it.

Rocky View spends approximately \$250 000 every year on programs to fight weeds. Year-round educational meetings, workshops, and tours are held to educate the public on the problems caused by noxious weeds.

Thinking It Through

Do you think it was fair for the Rocky View council to take this action? Explain your thinking.

A **motion** is an idea or proposal discussed and voted on at a meeting.

New bylaws or changes to bylaws are usually introduced by a councillor at a council meeting. The councillor makes a **motion** that the bylaw be passed. As you saw in the opening story, a person or group from the community can make a presentation at a committee or council meeting about a bylaw.

A motion to make or change a bylaw has to be considered three times before it is voted on by members of the council. This gives people who oppose the motion three chances to speak out and argue against it. Supporters of the motion can answer these criticisms. Then the motion is put to a vote. If the majority of the councillors vote in favour, it will be passed and become a bylaw.



Some local governments have discussed creating a bylaw requiring helmets for tobogganing. How might such a law be enforced?

Local Government Gives People a Voice

Would it be possible for federal or provincial governments to provide local services, collect the taxes to pay for them, and make laws? The answer is: yes. So why then have we chosen to have a local level of government in Canada?

- We believe that people who live in a community are best able to understand the issues that affect their daily lives. The representatives that people elect to local government are in the best position to make decisions that are in the interests of the community.
- Local government is an important expression of our belief that democracy is the way we want to run our country. Local government provides us with many opportunities to participate. These include running for office, voting, taking part in town hall meetings, and making presentations to government.

Thinking It Through

1. Why is allowing members of the public to attend most local government committee and council meetings important in a democracy?
2. Is passing a bylaw an example of decision making by consensus or compromise? Explain.

Contributing to Community



What are your views on this issue?

Kumar was telling Ah Po, Aislin, and Griffin about a problem his family was having with a neighbourhood cat. It was going into Kumar's yard and fighting with his cat, Cloudy. Kumar's parents had to take Cloudy to the vet for stitches.

AISLIN: *Well, it doesn't seem fair to me that your neighbour's cat should be allowed to cause all these problems. Why don't your parents go to talk to its owner?*

KUMAR: *We don't know who owns the cat.*

GRIFFIN: *We always keep our cat inside. My dad says people shouldn't let their cats run wild. It's not safe for the cat. There are so many posters in my neighbourhood about lost cats. It's really sad for the owner when a cat gets lost or run over.*

KUMAR: *Our cat, Cloudy, always stays in our backyard.*

AH PO: *My cousin lives in Eckville. They have a bylaw that says all cats must be licensed. That way, if a cat is a problem the animal control officer can find the owner.*

AISLIN: *Maybe there should be a bylaw like that here.*

GRIFFIN: *I think that's a really good idea. Let's talk to our local councillor about it.*

They asked Mr. Kahn about inviting a local councillor to visit their class and talk about bylaws. In particular, they wanted to discuss the idea of a bylaw for licensing cats. When Councillor Cohen came to the class, the students told him their idea.

COUNCILLOR COHEN: *I think this is definitely worth the council's consideration. You'll need to provide as much information as possible about your proposed bylaw. When your presentation is ready, send me an e-mail and I'll arrange to have you put on the agenda for a committee meeting that I'll be attending.*



Who might the students also interview for credible information about cats?

The students got to work. They did research on cats in an urban community. In their presentation, they pointed out that cats that are allowed outdoors:

- often use gardens or even kids' sandboxes as a litter box
- hunt birds that people attract to their backyards with seed
- may freeze in extremely cold weather
- get under the hoods of cars to keep warm and then can be badly hurt when the car is started

The students made their presentation at a committee meeting asking that cat owners be required to license their pets. The committee members discussed the idea. Some of them felt that this bylaw would be difficult to enforce. Others argued that since there was a bylaw requiring dogs to be licensed, it made sense to license cats as well. In the end, the committee recommended that Councillor Cohen present a motion about licensing cats at the next council meeting.



What kind of visual aids do you think the students could include in their presentation to make it more persuasive to these committee members?

Over to You

1. What bylaws does your community have about pets and other animals? What happens when people disobey these bylaws? Why do you think these bylaws were enacted?
2. What bylaws can you suggest that would improve your neighbourhood?

words matter!

A **forum** is a meeting place where public discussions occur.

St. Albert Task Force on Vandalism and Youth Issues

Presents a community forum on

A Curfew Bylaw

Interested citizens are invited to join us on

*Tuesday, May 16, 2006
7:30 p.m.*

**Grandin Mall,
Former Bingo Hall**

Why are community forums important in a democracy? Do you think consensus would occur at a forum?

Are Curfew Bylaws a Good Idea?

Sometimes local governments provide citizens with the opportunity to have their say about bylaws at townhall meetings or community **forums**. Some bylaws receive very different reactions from people in a community.

One bylaw that causes strong feelings has to do with curfews. A curfew is a limit on what hours people can be outside their homes. Some municipal areas in Alberta have curfew bylaws stating that persons under 18 are not allowed to be in a public place between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m. unless they are with an adult. Here are some opinions about curfews.



My friends and I like to go to movies or to each other's homes. In Drumheller, the curfew law says we have to be home by 10:30. That's pretty early on a weekend!

Viewpoint 1



Teens are shown a fair amount of disrespect and distrust by people.

You shouldn't be allowed to say, "Teens are bad people so we're going to lock them up after 4 p.m."

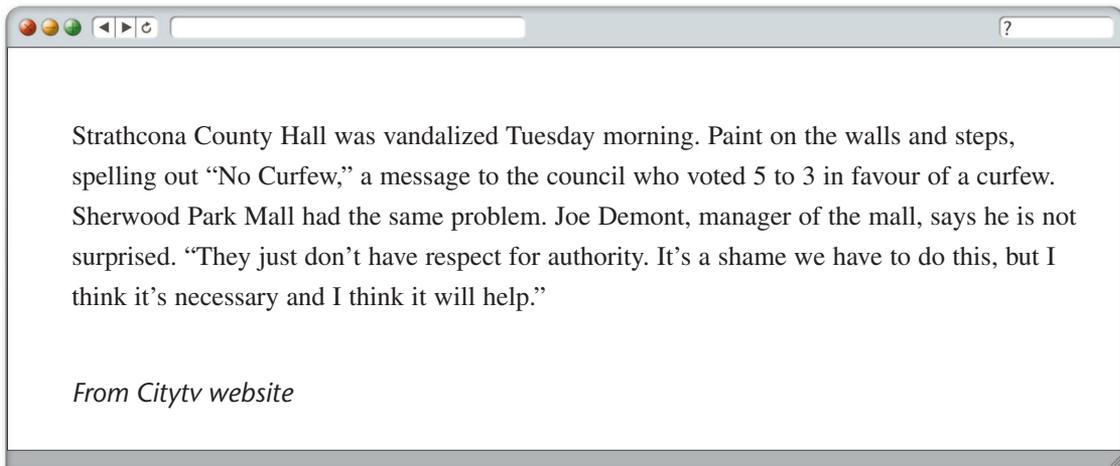
Stephen Jenuth, Alberta Civil Liberties Union

Viewpoint 3

I live in Fort Saskatchewan. This morning I went out to my car to go to work and noticed three cars on my street had been spray-painted. I think a (curfew) bylaw like this is a great idea. I am 22 now so the law doesn't really affect me, but when I was under the age of 18 I had a curfew set by my parents. Why do kids need to be wandering the streets at these late hours?

From Everything Alberta website

Viewpoint 2



Viewpoint 4



It’s not as if vandalism is not already a crime. Defacing public property, littering, defacing signs, theft, causing a disturbance, etc. are already against the law and there are provisions in place to deal with those offences. This bylaw will merely criminalize our children for being in a public place and subject their parents to fines.

Cathy Olesen, Strathcona Mayor

Viewpoint 5

Over to You

1. What arguments do people give to support their ideas about curfews?
2. Hold a classroom forum to discuss whether a curfew is an effective way to control troublesome behaviour. Prepare for the forum by making notes on your own ideas for or against curfews.
3. One Alberta high school student commented on the curfew: “There’s nothing wrong with ignoring an unjust law.” What can people do if they think a bylaw is unjust?

How Are Local Governments Organized?

A **municipal area** is a region that has its own local government.

A **municipal district** is a rural area that has its own local government.

Alberta is divided into **municipal areas** that have their own local governments. What is the name of the municipal area where you live? Can you name any of the elected representatives that serve in your local government?

- **Urban local governments** include cities, towns, and villages.
- **Rural local governments** include **municipal districts** and counties.
- **First Nations reserves** and **Métis settlements** also have local governments.

The chart below shows how most local governments in Alberta are organized. How are they similar? How do they differ?

Organization of Local Government

Local Government	Top Elected Official	Council
Urban	Mayor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually elected by voters 	Councillors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • between 7 and 15, depending on size of community; 7 for towns • elected by voters
Rural	Reeve <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a councillor elected as chief electoral officer by council 	Councillors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually 3 for villages • elected by voters
First Nations	Chief <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elected by voters in the First Nation community 	Council is selected by community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of councillors depends on size of First Nation
Métis	Chairperson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selected by council members 	Council of 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selected by community

Skill Smart

An international project called the World Mayor Project asks people to nominate outstanding mayors who make their city a great place to live. Work with a group to make a list of criteria that you think a leader of local government should have. You could include personal characteristics as well as skills.

How First Nations Govern Themselves

First Nations governments on reserves are called band councils. The head of the band council is a chief. A council helps the chief to govern the band. A band may elect its representatives according to rules set up in the *Indian Act* or according to the community's traditions. As you read in Chapter 4, this might mean using consensus. Some bands combine these two systems. Bylaws passed by a band council are called Band Council Resolutions.

Making Decisions for the Community

Mayors, reeves, and councillors are elected to their jobs by the citizens of the community. They take part in council meetings at which time decisions about programs, services, and bylaws are made. The mayor or reeve makes sure that council meetings are run according to the rules of the municipality.

During council meetings the mayor and councillors discuss issues and make decisions that affect the community. Councils usually organize committees that are responsible for services such as transportation, public works such as water and garbage services, and parks and recreation. Councillors take part in these committees. As you saw in the opening story of the chapter, members of the public often make presentations to council committees. The committees discuss issues and take their recommendations to council meetings.

Councillors also serve on **advisory committees** that advise the council on local issues. These might include a police commission, library board, or arts foundation. Members of the public can apply to sit on many advisory committees. This is another way that people can become involved in local government.

Thinking It Through

1. Explain how local government is an example of representative democracy.
2. Compare how leaders were chosen by the Iroquois with how leaders are chosen by First Nations local governments today.

words matter!

Advisory committees are groups of concerned citizens and members of government. They give advice to the council.

A local government has different **departments** that provide various kinds of services to the community.

Delivering Services to the Community

As well as representatives elected by the voters, there are many people who are hired to work for local government. The most important of them is the Town or City Manager. The Town or City Manager is appointed by the council to

- make sure that council decisions are carried out
- keep the council informed about how the municipality is operating

All the **departments** of the government report to the Town or City Manager.

Civil servants are people who are hired to run or work in the government departments. You can see these departments in the flow charts on the next page. There are many people hired by the departments to perform jobs like answering phones, keeping records, collecting garbage, teaching swimming lessons, driving buses, and repairing streets.



Local government buildings like these house the departments that provide services to the community. Why would a larger community such as Red Deer need more people to work at providing services than a smaller community like Okotoks?

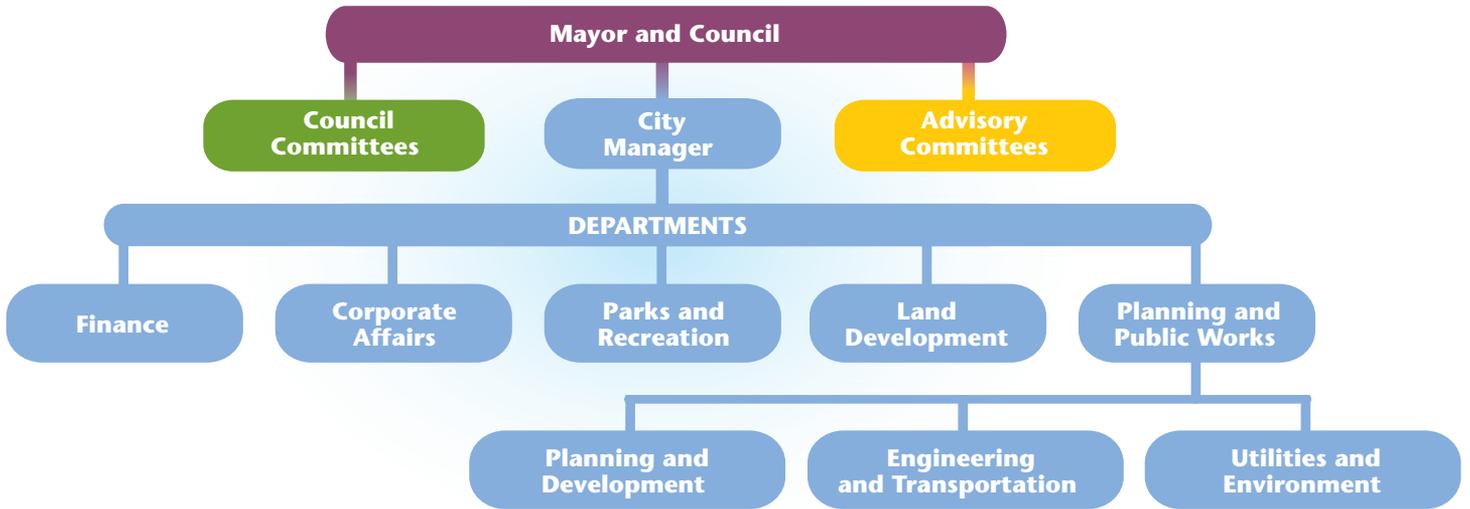


Thinking It Through

Why do you think members of the public are invited to sit on advisory committees?

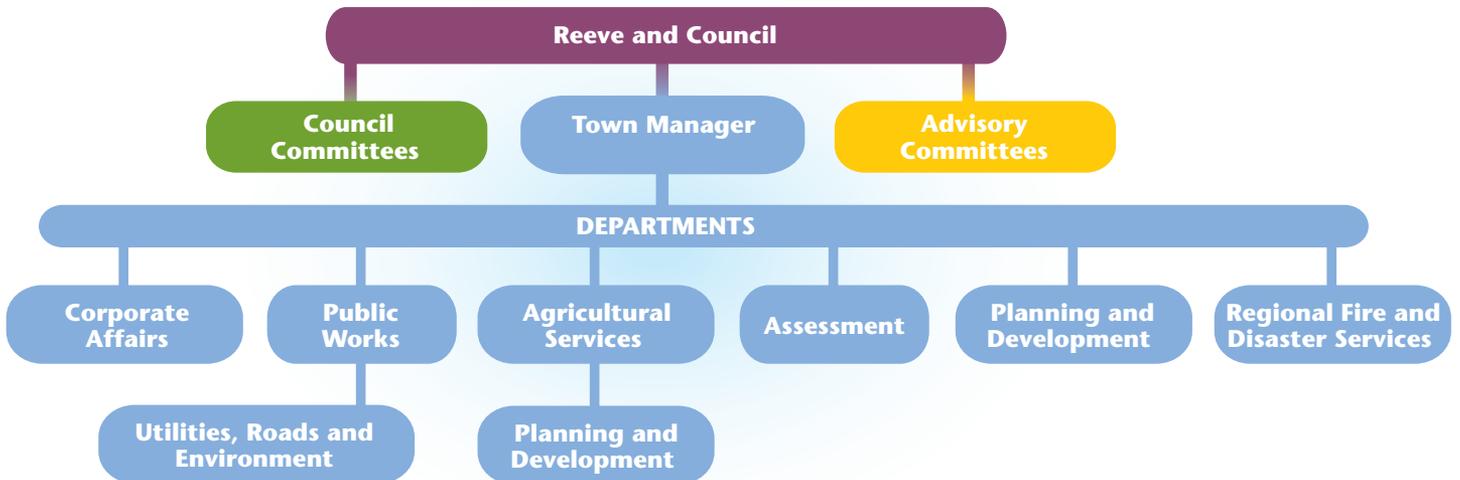
Here are two examples showing how local governments are structured.

City of Lloydminster: Urban Local Government



■ elected
 ■ hired
 ■ elected and hired
 ■ elected, hired, or volunteered

Saddle Hills County: Rural Local Government



Skill Smart

Create a flow chart to represent your own local government. Under the name of each department, explain what it does.

- How can you use communication and/or information technologies to do your research?
- What tools can you use to make your flow chart?

How Are Local Governments Elected?

words matter!

The **ballot** is a piece of paper used for voting that lists the names of the candidates.

To **nominate** means to identify a person as a possible candidate for an elected position.

Thinking It Through

In ancient Athens positions on the Council of 500 were chosen by lottery rather than by voting. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these two ways of choosing people for government? Consider equity, equality, and fairness in your thinking.

Every three years elections take place in which people vote for representatives to local government. Mr. Kahn's class invited a councillor to visit and explain the process.

RICHARD: *Who can run for local elections?*

COUNCILLOR: *Anyone who is a Canadian citizen and at least 18 years old can run. You also have to live in the municipal area in which you are running for at least six months before the election.*

ANGELITA: *If I met those qualifications, how would I get my name on the **ballot**?*

COUNCILLOR: *First you have to be **nominated**. This means you need to complete official papers, giving information about yourself and the names of the people who nominate you. You may have to pay a fee when you take your nomination papers to the municipal offices. And your name will be put on the ballot.*

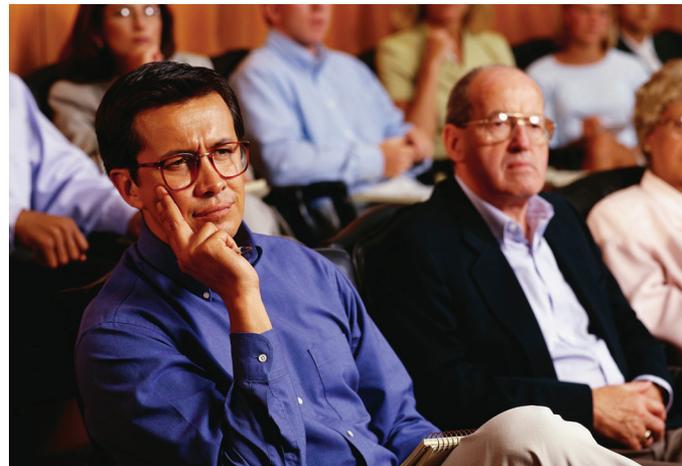
KUMAR: *Once you are nominated how do you get people to vote for you?*

COUNCILLOR: *You need to let the community know what your ideas are. A group of supporters called a "campaign committee" may help you do this. They prepare leaflets and signs about you and put them out in the community. You also go door to door talking to people about your ideas, and you take part in debates in the community where all the candidates get together to discuss important issues.*

AH PO: *What happens on election day?*

COUNCILLOR: *People go to the polling station to vote for the candidate of their choice. Whoever gets the most votes wins.*

You will be reading more about elections in the next chapter.



How do you think debates among the candidates help people decide who to vote for?

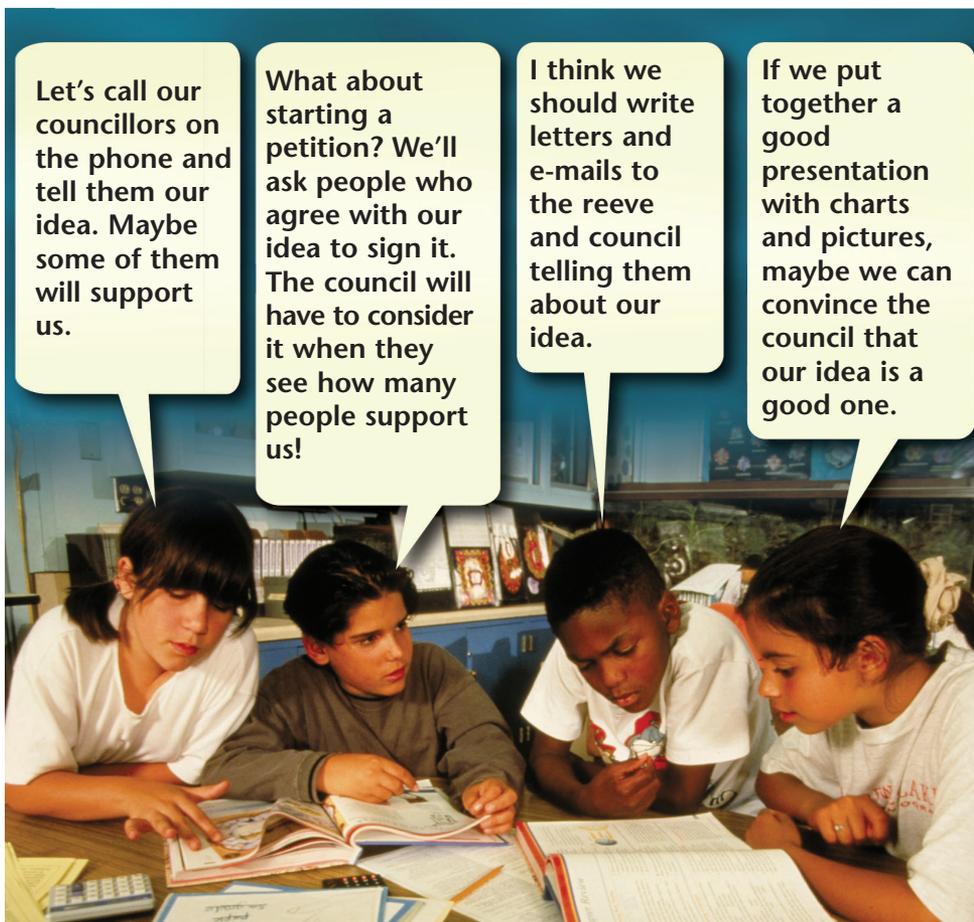
How Can You Participate at the Local Level?

For democracy to work, people need to participate. You aren't old enough to vote, but there are ways that you can voice your opinions and influence the decisions made by local government. At the beginning of this chapter, you saw how the students at Lord Lansdowne Public School approached the traffic problem at their school. This involved talking to various members of their local government.

The students below are talking about different ways they might approach local government about a concern they have.



How might expressing your views in this way bring about change in a community?



words matter!

A **petition** is a written request that contains the signatures of people who support its content.

Speaking Out

Youth must be given a "voice" and a role to play in the making of decisions that affect them.

Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth

Making a Presentation

Have you ever made a presentation in class and felt that it was really successful? What made it a success? If it didn't go well, what went wrong? To help you make effective presentations, remember the letters **POPP**—**P**repare, **O**rganize, **P**ractise, and **P**resent. Here's how it works:

Prepare—research your topic thoroughly.

- Make up inquiry questions and use them to guide your research.
- Plan a schedule for researching and creating your presentation and stick to it.
- Use reliable sources for your information.

Organize—make sure your presentation has an introduction, a body of information, and a conclusion.

- Use your introduction to get your audience interested and let them know what you are going to tell them.
- Make an organized outline of your main points.
- Consider how you might use visuals, such as charts, maps, and graphs, or multimedia such as a videotape, audiotape, a PowerPoint slideshow, or dramatization to present your information.
- Use your conclusion to give your audience a summary of your main idea.

Practise—know what you are going to say and practise, practise, practise!

- Practise your presentation in front of friends or family and ask for tips on how you might improve it.
- Check how much time you have for your presentation. Make sure you don't have too much or too little to say.
- Try to think of ways to keep your audience involved. Ask questions or challenge their thinking.

Present—try to make it a comfortable experience for yourself and your audience.

- Make eye contact with members of the audience.
- Speak clearly and not too quickly, using a conversational tone.



If you follow the POPP steps, you will have more confidence when you make your presentation. Body language is also important to a presentation. What body language tips can you think of for making a presentation successful?

Practise the Skill

Put yourself in the place of one of the people below. Think about how you might apply the POPP suggestions to prepare for the presentation he or she wants to make.

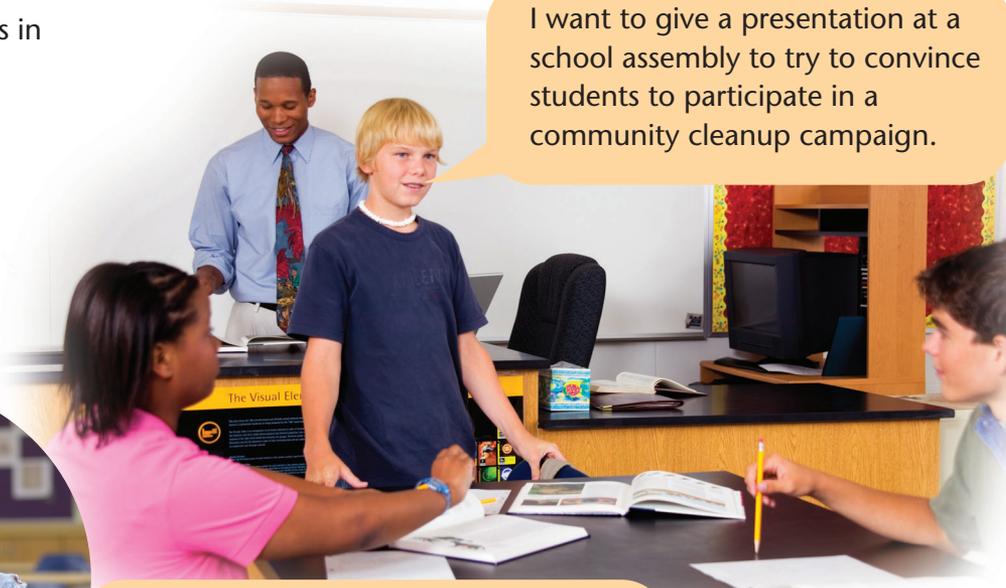
1. Think of at least three inquiry questions that you would use to guide your research for your presentation.
2. List some sources where you might get information to answer your questions. Consider how you might use e-mail to gather information
3. Ask your teacher how much time you have to prepare your presentation. Create a schedule for your work.
4. Describe how you would use visuals or multimedia elements in your presentation.



I think our community needs more trees. I want to give a presentation to the city parks committee about encouraging people to plant trees in their yards.



I'd like to collect food for a community food bank at a supermarket near my house. I plan to give a presentation to the manager about my idea.



I want to give a presentation at a school assembly to try to convince students to participate in a community cleanup campaign.

A photograph of a classroom scene. A boy in a dark blue t-shirt is standing and talking to a teacher in a light blue shirt and a girl in a pink shirt who is sitting at a desk. Another boy is sitting at the desk to the right, looking towards the boy standing. There are books and papers on the desk.

Getting Involved in Community



Hi Ho, Hi Ho, I'm Off to Shovel Snow! is the name of a program in Canmore, Alberta. Volunteers shovel snow for people who are elderly or have disabilities. Why is this an important way to contribute to the community?

At the beginning of this chapter you read about the many services that local government provides to meet people's needs. But when you look around your community, you may see people sleeping on the streets. You may read in the newspaper that some families do not have enough money for food. You think that it isn't fair that everyone in your community doesn't have housing and food. You wonder why your local government isn't meeting these needs.

In fact, local government doesn't always meet all the needs of the community. Part of the reason for this is money. Services cost a great deal, and local governments often don't collect enough taxes to pay for every service that is needed. This is when concerned people get involved and take action to help others in their communities. They do things such as

- start programs that collect and distribute food or clothing
- bring meals to elderly people in their homes
- organize cleanup campaigns where everyone is encouraged to help pick up litter in parks and other public spaces
- raise money to start youth or sports programs

One of the things that helps democracy work is that some people are willing to take on the responsibility for making their community a more fair and equitable place to live.

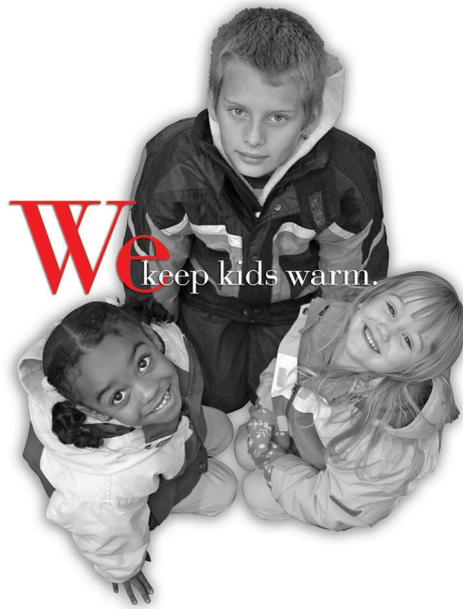
Small School Big Dreams

Brant-Argyle School is in the rural municipality of Argyle, Manitoba. There are only 50 students in the school, but they have big dreams. The student council decided to support one charitable cause every month for the entire school year. They began by re-establishing a Terry Fox Run to raise money for cancer research. When winter arrived, they advertised in the school and around town for a charity called Koats for Kids. The clothing they collected was dry cleaned and then given to the United Way for distribution. Another month the students focused on Random Acts of Kindness. They baked cookies and distributed them around the community, sang at seniors' homes, and shovelled snow for people.

Speaking Out

We hope that everyone learns that acts of kindness can produce a ripple effect that can be far reaching.

Kirstin Smith, teacher at Brant-Argyle School



Koats for Kids is a program that runs in many communities. What do you think motivates people to get involved in volunteering activities?

Helping People Without Homes

When Rob Hart, Frank Callele, and Clark Barr moved to Edmonton to attend the University of Alberta they were surprised by what they found. “All three of us are small-town boys from rural Alberta and Saskatchewan, so as kids I didn’t think we were ever exposed to homelessness,” Barr said. “So when you come to the city, it’s like, ‘Wow this actually exists in Alberta and in Canada.’ It was kind of an eye-opener for us.”

The boys decided to raise money for Edmonton’s Youth Emergency Shelter Society and make people aware of the problem of people without homes. They spent one week in the winter living on the streets. They used no money to buy food; they only ate what they could persuade people to give them. And they slept outside every night on a metal heating grate at the university with just a sleeping bag and a pillow.

People at the university and in the community sponsored the three students for the week by making donations for the shelter.



Clark Barr and Frank Callele bunk down on a warm grate. The U of A students plan to continue to be active in their community when they graduate. What jobs can you identify where people are paid to work with people in the community?

Thinking It Through

1. What do you think are the benefits of volunteering for the volunteers themselves and for the community?
2. Identify ways that people your age volunteer in your community.

Pat Nixon, Working for the Community

When Pat Nixon was 15 years old, he used to sit outside Calgary City Hall and beg for money from passersby. He could barely read and write and had no work skills. Pat had been living on the streets since he was 12. Eventually he landed in prison for breaking and entering and car theft. When he left prison, Pat was helped by local church members. "These guys are still the people I look at as the heroes of my life," Nixon says. "For me, they were the right people there at the right time. I believe this can happen for every one of these street folks."



Pat Nixon

Today Pat Nixon is the director of The Mustard Seed Street Ministry, a non-profit, humanitarian organization that cares for Calgary's street people. The Mustard Seed provides hot meals, free clothing, and warm shelter to hundreds of street people every day. Beyond meeting the basic needs of the less fortunate, The Mustard Seed also offers a wide range of services to provide the street people with the skills, confidence, and hope they need to find employment and lead healthy lives. Guests can finish their grade 12 education, pursue university courses, and receive medical care from a doctor or nurse. They can find stable work through employment partnerships, learn valuable computer skills, and regain their independence through supported housing programs.

Pat's community work has become known worldwide. He has received many honours. In 2001, he was named Calgary's Citizen of the Year; he became a member of the Order of Canada in 2005; and in 2007, he received the Alberta Order of Excellence.

Over to You

Find out about organizations in your community that work with street people and others who need help. What does each organization do?

What aspect of this organization do you think is the most important for street people? Explain.



Why Do We Have School Boards?

You have been looking at the ways that local governments are able to respond to local needs and how members of the community can get involved. School boards are another type of local government. They make sure that education is provided for people. What are some of the needs that schools meet?

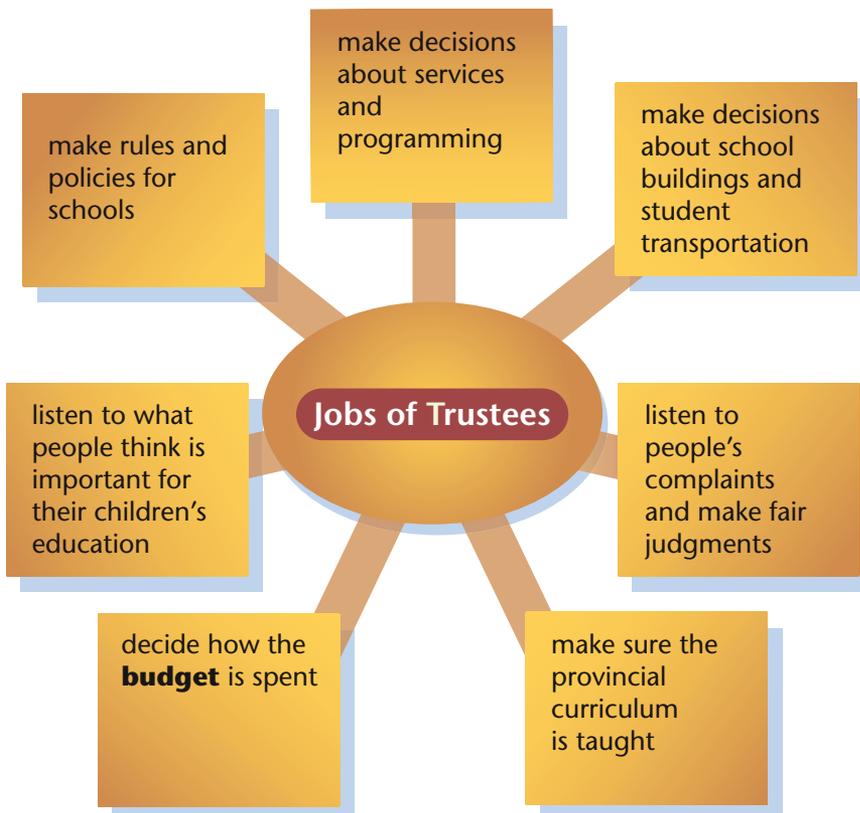
The school board makes decisions about educational services and programming in schools. School board members are familiar with the needs and values of the community they serve. As a result, they can make decisions about education that are appropriate for their community. The school board hires a **superintendent** who makes sure that these decisions are carried out.

A person who serves on a school board is called a **trustee**.

words matter!

A **superintendent** is responsible for running the schools in a jurisdiction. The position of superintendent is similar to that of the CAO in local government.

A **budget** is a list of items that shows how much money will be spent on each item.



Your input matters

It's the job of school boards to make sure local public education is of a high quality and meets local needs. But we can't do that well without you.

Call your local school board to find out how you can be better informed and more involved.

(School Board logo here)

Shaping our communities through vision and action



School board trustees are elected every three years at the same time as other members of local government. What reasons do you think someone might have for running for trustee of a school board?

There are about 60 school boards in Alberta and approximately 450 trustees. The city of Edmonton, for example, has three school boards that all work independently. The Edmonton Public School Board has 9 trustees, the Edmonton Francophone School Board has 7 trustees, and the Edmonton Catholic School Board has 7 trustees.

How does this poster encourage people to participate in their local school board?

Skill Smart

Find the name, address, and phone number of the school board district where your school is located. Make inquiries to find out the names of your school board's trustees.

A Choice of Schools

What kind of school do you go to? Alberta students have a choice of attending the following types of public schools.

Public schools University Elementary School in Calgary is a public school. It is open to all students. Most Alberta public schools are English language schools. However, they may also have French Immersion or bilingual programs in languages such as Chinese, Arabic, and Ukrainian.



University Elementary School

Separate schools Our Lady of Perpetual Help is a separate school in Sherwood Park. Separate schools have instruction in the Roman Catholic faith as well as a wide variety of language programs. Most separate schools are Catholic with exceptions such as schools in St. Albert and St. Paul.



Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Francophone schools École Voyageur is a Francophone school in Cold Lake. All Francophone schools are run by Francophone school boards unless they are private. Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* gives Francophone parents in Alberta the right to have their children educated in French.



École Voyageur

Charter schools Charter schools, like New Horizons Charter School in Sherwood Park, are not governed by the local school board. They have the same curriculum as public schools, but with a special focus, such as science, music, religion, or athletics.

First Nations schools The four Ermineskin Schools on the Ermineskin Cree Reserve are run by the Miyo Wahkohtowin Community Education Authority. Students at the Ermineskin schools are taught the Cree language along with other subjects.

Thinking It Through

1. "Decisions in a democracy are made for the majority while respecting the rights of the minority." How does the variety of schools in Alberta demonstrate the democratic principle of fairness?
2. Alberta's *School Act* allows a board to appoint a First Nations individual nominated by the First Nations community close to the school district. The First Nations board member has all the rights and responsibilities of any board member. Why do you think this section was included in the *School Act*?

More About . . .

Aboriginal Schools

In the past, all Aboriginal schools in Alberta were run by the federal government. By 2007, all but one—Le Goff School—were run by bands. The Calgary Board of Education runs Piitoayis Family School Program, which is attended by Aboriginal students. It offers Cree and Blackfoot language classes.

One day in the mid-1800s, Egerton Ryerson, the Superintendent of Education in Upper Canada, got an angry letter from a rich taxpayer complaining about the school tax. It said: "I do not wish to be compelled [forced] to educate all the brats in the neighbourhood." Ryerson wrote back: "To educate all the brats in the neighborhood is just the very object [goal] of the [school tax]." Like many progressive people of his time, Ryerson believed public education should be available to all children regardless of their families' ability to pay. His ideas influenced schooling in Alberta and the rest of Canada.

Public Education in Alberta

By the time Alberta became a province in 1905, public education was available in every community, and separate school education was available under certain circumstances. This system was made part of the constitution of Alberta, the *Alberta Act*, and schools came under the control of the provincial government. In fact, the first premier, Alexander Rutherford, was also the minister of education. At this time, most people lived in rural areas and many children did not attend school; they stayed home to work on the family farm. Over time, more and more children began to attend school regularly.

Public Education and Democratic Principles

Throughout this book you have been thinking about the democratic principles of justice, equity, freedoms, and representation.

How does public education fit in with these principles?

- Public education gives all children equal access to knowledge and skills.
- Every child is allowed to attend school regardless of factors such as gender, race, or religion.
- Schools provide programs that accommodate the special needs of some students, for example, English as a Second Language.
- Public education is paid for out of tax money that is collected from property owners in the society, whether or not they have children.





On October 4, 1997, over 20 000 teachers, students, and other members of the public gathered in Edmonton to protest cuts the government was planning to make to the education budget. One result of these cuts would be larger class sizes.

Educating People for Democracy

Egerton Ryerson believed public education was necessary for democracy. What does the quotation below tell you about Ryerson's ideas about public education?

On the importance of education generally we may remark, it is as necessary as the light—it should be as common as water, and as free as air...Education among the people is the best security of a good government and constitutional liberty... An educated people are always a loyal people to good government; and the first object of a wise government should be the education of the people....

How does public education prepare people to participate in democracy?

- It educates them about their responsibilities as citizens.
- It gives them the knowledge and skills to run for office.
- It trains them to think critically and make informed decisions about issues that affect their community.

Over to You

1. How does public education help make a society more fair? Why is this important in a democracy?
2. Look back at the definition of the "common good" on page 35. How do you think public education contributes to the common good of society?

Explore More!

1. Use a chart like the one below to record your ideas about how democratic principles are present in local government.

Justice	Equity	Freedoms	Representation

2. Suppose a local representative contacts your school and says, "The municipality is interested in building a skateboard park. One of the suggested locations is beside your school. I would like you to provide me with a set of recommendations about building the park in this location." Your task is to prepare a presentation for this official. You must consider:

- problems the park may cause
- benefits of the park
- accessibility
- need/demand for the facility
- impact of the park on the immediate neighbourhood

Use computer technology to help you organize your information and ideas to make your presentation.

3. Consider the community you live in. Is it a good place to live? Why or why not? Do research to find out what services local government provides and how volunteers are involved in meeting the needs of people in the community. Create a video, multimedia presentation, skit, or other type of presentation for newcomers that tells about the services in your community. You might include:
 - things that are good about your community
 - things that could be done to make it better
 - how people can get involved in making changes

Your Turn

Do research into bylaws in your community. Look for signs that tell you a bylaw is in effect, for example, not allowing sports in a certain area, forbidding people to loiter, and keeping people from making noise during the night. As a class, decide on what criteria you would use to determine whether bylaws are fair and equitable. Use a computer to write a letter or send an e-mail to the mayor of your municipality or the appropriate department head, suggesting why a particular bylaw should not be in force or how you think it should be changed.



Democracy In Action Journal

With a partner or group, discuss what values are most important in your classroom. Create a series of symbols in your journal that express these values.

Citizens need to stay informed about the issues in their community. In fact, being informed is an important form of participation.

Restate this quotation in your own words. What is your response to this idea? What can citizens do to keep themselves informed?

