

# Lesson Plan: Federalism – United States, Alaska, and Local Governments

## Tool For Teaching Government Structure

### Enduring Understandings

State, local, tribal and federal governments each have a role in the exercise of authority and delivery of services in Alaska. Alaska has a long and complex relationship with the federal government which impacts Alaskan issues. The three branches of government; executive, legislative, and judicial, perform specific functions. There are many options for citizens to find out about government actions and to stay involved.

### Estimated Time:

One-two class periods to outline and discuss; this tool can be used as needed in any social studies course that makes reference to the American structure of government (federalism) and to tribal governments. It is helpful to have it posted in the classroom, and/or to quickly sketch it on the board during discussions as a way to illustrate government issues, government relations, and current events. Once introduced, this tool can be used frequently to illustrate many situations; with time, its application will be automatic for both teacher and students.

### Rationale:

Students often go through the motions of learning about the levels and branches of government, but are not able to apply these to historical or contemporary situations. They need to practice using this information by being presented with a range of situations. Students should be guided to build the accompanying charts and then use them to analyze and explain the actions/reactions between different governmental bodies. The study of Alaska's state, local, and tribal governments, as well as Alaska's long and complex relationship with the federal government, provides ways for students to interpret current Alaska issues. These charts help make the information accessible to students.

### Materials Needed:

Handout of blank charts (0,1,2,3,4) for each student  
Overhead, white board, or projection unit  
Overheads or Power Point slides of charts 0-4  
Poster of chart - blank  
Poster of chart - filled in

## Prior Reading/Learning:

From the website for Alaska History and Culture Studies Unit  
Governing Alaska  
Federal Powers  
New Era for Alaska  
Envisioning the Future  
Statehood for All (all readings)  
Unit - Modern Alaska: (all readings)

Note - There are many ways to use these charts. This lesson will suggest a way to introduce them, and then offer situations where they may be used throughout a study of Alaska History. Please note that the charts may be adapted for different ages/levels of students. For some students, this information may be new; for others, it may be a review of prior learning. Make adjustments as necessary.

## Lesson Plan:

Hand out the blank chart. (chart #0) Tell students that the class will work together to fill out the charts, but that the goal is for each student to form a visualization so that the charts will become unnecessary. Explain/review with students that the American structure of government is federalism - a system of separation of powers and checks and balances. Discuss the difference between "levels" and "branches", and explain that while branches can be presented in any order, levels must be presented from most to least powerful.

Explain the "jobs" of each branch of government (See chart 1). Then, discuss the levels, and help students to visualize the order by explaining that the federal government can create states, and that states create local governments. Discuss the local government forms in Alaska - compare to forms in the Lower 48.

Tribal governments - Explain to students that the circle on the chart is for tribal governments. Explain that tribal governments preceded the American government, and are not a creation of federalism. Tribal governments stand on their own in a "government to government" relationship with the federal government. (Denoted by the arrows from tribal governments to the federal level.) Further explanation may be made regarding the Indian Reorganization Act, and IRA and traditional governments. Help students understand the distinction by pointing out the circular shape, in contrast to the square blocks of the federalism chart. It is helpful to refer to this chart when explaining

federal-tribal relations and powers, and in assisting students to see that tribal governments will "walk/talk" like a local government (and in some cases have replaced the state-chartered local governments), but they are not the creation of a state. It is also helpful in showing students that issues/powers for AK tribal governments will be resolved in the federal courts.

Start to fill in each box with the "positions" - (See chart 2). Use language like "Who lives here?". Reinforce the "who" with a reminder of the jobs done by each branch, the "what".

Add details to the boxes by including: term of office, numbers of individuals in the positions (legislatures), how one gets the position (elected, appointed, or hired). (See chart 3).

Add names of individuals holding the positions . (See chart 4).

Practice using the chart: (These are just examples; there are opportunities that arise almost daily.

Ask students to name agencies within the executive branch boxes. For example, to reinforce the knowledge that the executive branch includes government workers, solicit names such as: state troopers, postal workers, city electrical dept. workers, USFS, USPS, BLM, AK Fish and Game biologists etc. Students can also be asked to name adults whom they know and to identify what "box" they live (work) in.

Ask students to name anyone they know serving in the legislative branch.

Ask students to suggest "what if" situations regarding the judicial branch.

Either guide them to the correct court of jurisdiction, or suggest ways to find out.

It is efficient to number the boxes on the chart from left to right, 1-9. This allows the teacher to make immediate reference to the chart during class discussions or for a quick review. Ex. Referring to a city council meeting, the teacher may ask, "What box will carry out the curfew law passed last night?" . Or "The decision to open ANWR rests with what box? Where will challenges to the opening of ANWR be resolved?" Or "Disagreements between tribal governments and Alaska state officials are resolved where?"

Have a supply of the blank charts in the classroom to use at any time. Sometimes only part of the chart is needed... just one branch or one level. The goal is for students to carry these charts in their heads for immediate recall and use. With practice, they will soon start making the connections themselves.

## Examples

Chart is a useful tool for these topics.

subsistence history/controversy

legislative sessions - passage of bills, development of budget

current events

criminal/civil cases

state elections

court cases such as the Venetie case, Mary John case

ANWR and/or NPRA oil development

local borough/city actions

capital projects appropriations and construction

ANCSA/ANILCA

Alaska Standards:

Culture: A, E

History: C, D

Government and Citizenship: B, C, E

Alaska History: AH. ICGP 4, AH. ICGP 7, AH. ICGP 4, AH. ICGP 8, AH. ICGP 10, AH. ICGP 8, AH. ICGP 10, AH. ICGP 12