When you vote in a class election, you participate in direct democracy. In some regions of the country that have small populations, direct democracy is still practiced at town meetings. When a town grows, elected representatives are needed to make the decisions.

### Town Government

Towns first developed as New England colonists built homes and churches. A town is a unit of local government, usually larger than a village and smaller than a city. The colonial town included both the homes, churches, and other buildings and surrounding farmlands.

The people who lived in early New England towns created the town meeting, a simple yet powerful form of local government. In a town meeting, all citizens meet regularly to discuss town issues. After all opinions regarding an issue have been voiced, the people at the meeting vote on that issue. This means that each person has a direct voice in the government.

#### Key Terms

- **town**: unit of local government, usually larger than a village and smaller than a city (p. 231)
- **town meeting**: public meeting at which townspeople meet regularly to discuss and vote on town issues (p. 231)
- **township**: small unit of local government (p. 232)
- **special district**: unit of government formed to meet many different needs (p. 233)

#### Taking Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Governments</th>
<th>Kind</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>to govern an area smaller than a city but larger than a village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>townships,</td>
<td>township: to perform a variety of local functions, special district: to meet an area’s specific need</td>
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<tr>
<td>special districts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>villages,</td>
<td>to provide services in a growing rural area</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>boroughs</td>
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</tbody>
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**Why It Matters**

Preview the headings in Section 2 with students. Ask students to name their type of local government. (Answers may vary for students who attend regional schools, but students should name a city, town, township, or village government.) Explain to students that local governments provide places such as town meetings where people can share their opinion about local issues or problems with others in their community. Discuss with students why it might be easier for citizens to become involved in local government than in other levels of government.

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**Teach the Main Idea**

1. **Teach** Ask students the Reading Focus questions to teach this section.
2. **Apply** Have students write the section’s three main heads on separate sheets of paper. As students read, ask them to record details about each type of government on the appropriate page.
3. **Review** Lead the class in a discussion about local government. Allow students to refer to their notes during the discussion.
4. **Practice/Homework** Have students create an encyclopedia entry about one form of local government.
Chapter 9

Town meetings often are held in conjunction with town elections. At the elections, townspeople typically elect from three to five officials to manage the town’s affairs between town meetings. The town meeting form of government can work well in areas that have small populations. Direct democracy is practical in such towns because it is easier for all the voters to gather in one central location at one time.

**Collaborative Learning**

**Hold a Town Meeting**

1. Assign students roles as town officials and townspeople.
2. Have students hold a mock town meeting, with officials giving reports and presenting new issues. Suggest that students find and research community issues in local newspapers. They can also present fictional issues.
3. Have students debate and vote on the community issues that have been raised by the “town officials.”

**Answers**

**Media Investigation** Government Web sites usually end with “.gov.”

**Reading Check** a small community
Special Districts
People living in a certain area may have a special need. In such cases these people may go directly to the state legislature and ask for a charter to set up a special district. A special district is a unit of government formed to meet many different needs, including fire protection, libraries, parks and recreation centers, public transportation, and sewage disposal. A special district may include several cities. For example, a hospital district might serve several cities. Each city would have to pay taxes for the services it receives. The state legislature usually sets up a commission to handle the details of establishing and operating the special district. The commission members may be elected or appointed.

School districts are considered special districts by some researchers. These districts are created by states to provide funds for local schools. There are more than 13,000 school districts in the United States. Each district has its own governing body called a board of education. An executive, usually called a superintendent of schools, manages the district’s day-to-day operations.

Village and Borough Governments
When rural communities grow to a population of 200 to 300, their residents often encounter problems that require them to work together. The residents may decide to establish a village or a borough and create their own local government.

A request to establish a village or borough must be approved by the state legislature. The legislature permits the village or borough to be a self-governing municipality. It then can collect taxes, set up fire and police departments, and provide other services that larger communities offer their residents.

A village or borough is often governed by a small council, or board of trustees. The voters also elect an executive or president of the board of trustees to carry out the laws.

If the population of a village or borough becomes large enough, the people may ask the state legislature to grant the community a city charter. When this happens its government would change accordingly.

Section 2 Assessment Answers
1. a. Define. Write a brief definition for each of the following terms: town and town meeting. b. Explain. Why did town meetings develop?
2. a. Define. Write a brief definition for each of the following terms: township and special district. b. Make Predictions. What might happen if a local government did not make use of special districts?
3. a. Recalling. What is the role of the state in the creation of villages and boroughs? b. Sequence. When do rural areas become villages or boroughs?
4. Comparing and Contrasting. Copy the graphic organizer. Use it and your notes to explain why townships and special districts develop and how each is organized.
5. Writing to Persuade. Write a letter from the perspective of a resident arguing why a rural area should or should not become a village.

Answers
Reading Check (left) They provide funds specifically for local schools. (right) As population grows, the need for community services and cooperation increases.