

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

SS.7.CG.3.8 Explain the structure, functions and processes of the executive branch of government.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Essential Teacher Content Background Information	2
Lesson Summary	6
Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace	8
Civics Content Vocabulary	10
Additional Resources, Answer Keys, and Sources	12

2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.7.C.3.8
 - Changed from, “Analyze the structure, functions, and processes of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.” to “Explain the structure, functions and processes of the executive branch of government.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
 - Changed from, “Analyze” to “Explain”
- Benchmark Clarification Changes
 - Changed from “Students will examine the processes of the legislative (e.g., how a bill becomes a law, appointment confirmation, committee selection), executive (e.g., executive order, veto, appointments), and judicial (e.g., judicial review, court order, writ of certiorari, summary judgment) branches of government.” to “Students will examine the processes of the executive branch (e.g., executive order, veto, appointments).”
 - Addition of “Students will compare and contrast executive authority at the local, state and national levels.”
 - Addition of “Students will explain the function of administrative agencies (e.g., advise, make regulations, enforce law and regulations).”
- Vocabulary Changes
 - Addition of “executive authority” and “administrative agencies”

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. Enforcing the Laws: The Chief Executive
2. Florida State & Local Government

1. Enforcing the Laws: The Chief Executive

The Founders' fear that public officials, especially executives acting alone, would abuse their power is reflected in the checks and balances system linked to the presidency. There is only one unchecked power given to the president. Many argue that this unchecked power is actually a check on the legislative and judicial branches.

A. The President of the United States

The table below shows how the president's powers are checked by Congress.

Presidential Power	Congressional Check	Consequences
Chief Executive	Congress enacted laws	The president may ask Congress to enact a law that it does not want to enact
Commander-in- Chief of the armed forces	Congress declares war Congress raises and supports armies and navies	Congress may choose to reduce or eliminate part or all of the armed forces
Nominates high level officials	Senate confirms nominations; nominees who are confirmed are then appointed to their positions.	The Senate may reject presidential nominations The Senate may stall the nominations process The president may withdraw a nomination that he suspects will not be confirmed by the Senate The nominee may withdraws his or her nomination if he or she suspects that the nomination will be rejected by the Senate
Negotiates treaties	Senate approves treaties for ratification	The Senate may reject a treaty that the president has negotiated
Vetoes congressional bills	Congress may override a president's veto with a 2/3 vote of each house of Congress.	The president may be compelled to enforce a law that he earlier rejected.

The president's one unchecked power is the power to pardon. A presidential pardon cannot be vetoed or overturned, and may be viewed as a check on the courts or the legislature in that the president is pardoning someone who has already been convicted by the courts or who might later be impeached by the legislature. Gerald Ford is well known for pardoning former President Richard Nixon once he resigned the presidency on August 8, 1974 after the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee

voted to recommend impeachment against Nixon on July 27, 1974. The presidential pardoning power does not extend to someone who has been impeached.

B. The President's Cabinet

The president's Cabinet was established in Article II, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, which states that: "The President of the United States....may require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments, upon any subject relating to the Duties of their respective Office" (Capitalization in the original). The Constitution does not provide for a specific number of, or duties for, Cabinet departments.

Each executive department head is titled "Secretary" with the exception of the Department of Justice, which is headed by the Attorney General. Department Secretaries must be confirmed by a majority vote in the Senate. Cabinet secretaries have no set terms of office although they normally resign should the president who nominated them leave office.

Below is a list of all current Cabinet departments in the order that they were created.

Department Name	Year Created	Notes
State	1789	Originally named Department of Foreign Affairs in July 1789, and renamed Department of State in September 1789.
Treasury	1789	A statue of Alexander Hamilton is placed outside the U.S. Treasury Department building to honor Mr. Hamilton as the first Secretary of the Treasury.
War	1791	Named the Department of the Army 1947 Named the Department of Defense 1949
Office of Attorney General	1789	Named the Department of Justice in 1870;
Interior	1849	Created in 1849 to deal with the internal development of the Nation and the the welfare of its people
Agriculture	1862	Provides leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and issues bases on public policy, the best available science, and effective management
Labor and Commerce	1903	Renamed the Department of Commerce when the Department of Labor was created in 1913
Labor	1913	Handles unemployment benefits, workplace safety, and wage standards. The Labor Department helps administer and enforce federal regulations to help keep employees safe, as well as ensure their rights.
Health, Education and Welfare	1953	In 1979, the Department of Education was created, at which point the Department of Health and Human Services was created in 1980 as a department separate from Education.
Housing and Urban Development	1965	Created in 1965 to administer federal housing and urban development laws.
Transportation	1966	Created in 1966 to ensure a fast, safe, efficient, accessible, and convenient transportation system to benefit the quality of life for the American people
Energy	1977	Established under the Carter administration to respond to the energy crisis

Education	1979	See Department of Health, Education and Welfare above; the U.S. Department of Education has the smallest budget of all Cabinet-level departments.
Veterans Affairs	1988	The Department of Veterans Affairs was first formed as the Veterans Administration in 1930 and elevated to Cabinet-level status in 1988.
Homeland Security	2003	The Department of Homeland Security was created in response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Several positions hold Cabinet rank even though they are not secretaries of Cabinet level departments. These include the Vice-President of the United States, White House Chief of Staff, the Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

2. Florida State and Local Government

C. The Florida Governor

Article IV of the Florida Constitution outlines the Governor's core duties as follows:

The supreme executive power shall be vested in a governor, who shall be commander-in-chief of all military forces of the state not in active service of the United States. The governor shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed, commission all officers of the state and counties, and transact all necessary business with the officers of government. The governor may require information in writing from all executive or administrative state, county or municipal officers upon any subject relating to the duties of their respective offices. The governor shall be the chief administrative officer of the state responsible for the planning and budgeting for the state.

The state lawmaking process is also similar to the federal process. There is a provision for an override of a governor's veto requiring a 2/3 vote in each house. Unlike the president of the United States, Florida's governor has the power of the line item veto.

The governor serves with a cabinet comprising three statewide elected officers: Chief Financial Officer, Attorney General, and Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

D. Florida Local Government

Florida's local governments are comprised of counties and municipalities such as cities, towns and villages.

An elected board of county commissioners governs in each of Florida's 67 counties. Counties must carry out constitutionally mandated responsibilities and those established by the state. County-level constitutional services include law enforcement and jail administration, tax collection, property appraisal, state court administration and election supervision. Counties oversee road maintenance, public health, and solid waste disposal, among other responsibilities. County commissions determine other county services. Orange County, Florida's county government is unique in that Orange County has a countywide elected mayor. Otherwise, Florida's county commissioners choose their own commission chair from among their membership. Commission chairs oversee commission meetings.

Each county has its own school district that has elected school boards that govern the day-to-day operations of K-12 public education. School districts are a special-purpose local government. Funding is provided through property taxes and state revenues.

Florida also has special districts of which there are two types. Independent districts are created by the legislature for a specific purpose to be provided in a certain area such as water management districts, fire service, inland navigation, and ditch maintenance. The funding and governance of each is set by the legislature. Dependent special districts are created by cities and counties, are governed by the city or county elected commission, and derive their authority, funding and support from that government. There are about 600 independent and 300 dependent special districts throughout Florida.

E. Florida Cities

Cities are independent municipal governments founded by citizens who choose their name. Ordinances are the laws that govern cities. The city charter serves as a constitution. The charter sets forth the boundaries of the municipality, its form of government, the size of the council and governmental processes. In Florida, the legislature approves the municipality through a special act, and the charter is approved by the citizens through a referendum.

In Florida, a city is recognized with certain rights and privileges; the most important is home rule. Florida's constitution recognizes that cities may enact their own ordinances and self-govern as long as the city's law does not conflict with state and federal law. Home rule powers do not extend to fiscal home rule because the state reserves all taxing authority to itself.

Self-government at the city level occurs with mayors, who serve as cities' chief executives, and city councils, who serve as city legislatures. City charters determine how much power mayors have. Some mayors function within "strong mayor" forms of government, while other cities utilize the "weak mayor" form of government. Rules regarding the length of terms, whether terms are limited, and, in how many persons will serve on city councils, are outlined in city charters.

Lesson Summary

ESSENTIAL QUESTION		
How do the structure, functions, and processes of the executive branch vary at the national, state, and local levels of government?		
BENCHMARK		
SS.7.CG.3.8 Explain the structure, functions and processes of the executive branch of government.		
CIVICS EOC REPORTING CATEGORY		
N/A		
OVERVIEW		
In this lesson, students will learn about and compare the structure, functions, and processes of the executive branch at each level of government.		
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will examine the processes of the executive branch (e.g., executive order, veto, appointments). Students will compare and contrast executive authority at the local, state and national levels. Students will explain the function of administrative agencies (e.g., advise, make regulations, enforce law and regulations). 		
BENCHMARK CONTENT LIMITS		
N/A		
CIVICS CONTENT VOCABULARY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cabinet, commander-in-chief, executive agencies, executive order, governor, head of state, home rule, impeach, law, mayor, ordinance, pardon, president, presidential appointment, regulations, statute, veto 		
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES		
Close reading of complex text	Collaborative learning	Compare/Contrast
MATERIALS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crayons or colored pencils Executive Branch Placards Executive Branch Graphic Organizer The Six Roles of the President slides Organizational Chart of the U.S. Government (external link) A Very Big Branch reading A Very Big Branch activity sheet 		

- Government Leaders: Triple Venn Diagram
- The Florida Electorate Organizational Chart image
- What is the Role of a Governor? video (external link)
- The Executive Branch at the Local Level video (external link)

B.E.S.T. STANDARDS

- ELA.7.R.2.1- Explain how individual text sections and/or features convey a purpose in texts.
- ELA.7.R.3.2- Paraphrase content from grade-level texts.
- ELA.V.1.3- Apply knowledge of context clues, figurative language, word relationships, reference materials, and/or background knowledge to determine the connotative and denotative meaning of words and phrases, appropriate to grade level.
- ELA.K12.EE.1.1- Cite evidence to explain and justify reasoning.

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<p>Planning Note: Prior to the start of this activity you will need to print, cut and post the “Executive Branch Placards”. There are four placards for this activity and if you have a larger class, you may want to have two sets around the room to avoid large crowds at each. You could also make them larger and print as whole sheets and not half pages.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To start the lesson, advise students that they will be learning about the executive branch. Ask them: Why do you think the executive branch is an important part of the government within the United States? Have students write down their responses. (Ensure students understand that the executive branch enforces laws.) 2. Review student answers and compile a list of responses on the board or on a document. 3. Ask a student to name the current U.S. president and to explain whom he/she represents. Lead students to the understanding that the president represents all the people of the United States. Their job is to make decisions in the best interest of the entire nation. 4. Hand out the “Executive Branch Graphic Organizer”. 5. Project the “The Six Roles of the President” slides and review Article II of the U.S. Constitution with the students, going over each role. 6. Have students take notes on the roles in the top box. 7. Have students individually choose one of the roles and write a short response, on their graphic organizer, of why they think that is the most important role that the president carries out. 8. Then, have students meet with a partner to share their responses. Have students choose a new partner 2-4 times to get a variety of responses from other students. 9. As a whole group, have students share their responses and discuss how each of the roles are important to what a president does. 10. Explain to students that they will complete a Carousel Activity/Gallery Walk to learn more about the executive branch at the national level. Explain to students that they can complete this activity independently or with a partner. 11. Assign students to the “Executive Branch Placards” around the room so that the students are spread out. 12. Instruct students to read the placard and summarize the central idea. Indicate that students will have a certain amount of time to work on their graphic organizer at each station and advise students to wait until the end of the activity to draw their pictures. 13. After students have visited each placard, have students return to their individual seats and provide time for students to review their answers and create their images. 14. Review the graphic organizer as a whole class and have students add anything that they may have missed. 15. Ask students: What are some functions and powers of the executive branch that overlap with functions and powers of the legislative branch that you learned about previously? (impeachment process, appointments/confirmations, laws passed/veto).
DAY 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain to the students that the executive branch is more than just the president. The president is the head of the executive branch but there are also many different agencies that carry out the laws.

2. Briefly examine the executive departments and agencies using the “[Organizational Chart of the U.S. Government](#)” from the U.S. Government Manual. Have them brainstorm a list of ways that the executive branch and agencies may influence their lives on a regular, day-to-day basis. Examples could be: printed currency they use for a purchase, having safe food to eat, getting paid a minimum wage at work, etc. Help students understand that administrative agencies can advise the executive, make regulations, and enforce laws and regulations.
3. Hand out the “A Very Big Branch” iCivics reading and “A Very Big Branch” activity sheet.
4. Read aloud with the students and answer the questions together and release to small groups or pairs to work independently when appropriate.
5. Review the correct answers as a whole group and emphasize the importance of the executive branch and the function of administrative agencies.
6. Explain to students that next they will examine and compare the executive branch of government at the national, state, and local levels.
7. Pass out a copy of the “Government Leaders: Triple Venn Diagram” to each student.
8. Review who the head of the executive branch is at the national level (U.S. President). Ask: Who is the head of the executive branch at the state level? (Governor). The local level? (Mayor/county commissioners) Have the students label the executive authority position at each level of government on the venn diagram.
Teacher Note: Use the sample answer key to guide students for the entirety of this activity.
9. As a whole class, have students share out and record information about the functions/powers and responsibilities of the U.S. president in the appropriate area of the venn diagram from information already learned.
10. Next, explore the executive branch at the state and local governments and how it is both similar and different to the national government by projecting and reviewing “The Florida Electorate Organizational Chart” image.
11. Start by illustrating how the chart is broken down by branches and then focus only on the executive branch.
12. Show students how the levels change based on the labels down the left side. Ask students: What are some similarities you notice between these two levels and the national level executive branch? Do you notice any differences? Record any correct answers shared out in the appropriate section of the venn diagram.
Teacher Note: This chart has more information than is needed but it illustrates the structure of the executive branch and how things are organized in the state of Florida.
13. Have students watch the “[What is the Role of a Governor?](#)” video from Illustrate to Educate.
14. Have them take notes while watching the video in the “governor/state” section of the venn diagram. Re-watch a second time if necessary.
15. After watching, have students re-read their notes and add any additional similarities between the executive authority of the U.S. president and state governor in the appropriate section of the diagram.
16. Have students watch the “[Executive Branch at the Local Level](#)” video from Florida PASS Program.
17. Have them take notes while watching the video in the “mayor/local” section of the venn diagram. Re-watch a second time if necessary.
18. After watching, have students re-read their notes and add any additional similarities between the executive authority of the U.S. president, state governor, and local mayor in the appropriate section of the diagram.
19. Checking for Understanding (Formative Assessment):

Instruct students to write a well-crafted response to the following prompt:

Prompt

Imagine that you are the President of the United States and have just been inaugurated. Write a letter to the governor of Florida and mayor of your local city/town that highlights all of the roles and responsibilities you have within the structures of the national executive branch that are different from their roles and ones that are the same.

Civics Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
cabinet	people appointed by the president to head executive departments of government and act as official advisers to the president
commander-in-chief	leader of the armed forces
executive agencies	a federal agency that is housed under the Executive Office of the President
executive order	an order that comes from the U.S. President or a government agency and must be obeyed like a law
governor	the head of government for a state
head of state	the symbol of leadership for a nation and abroad; the U.S. president is both the head of state and head of government
home rule	self-government by citizens at the local level
impeach	to bring formal charges of wrongdoing against a public official (such as the U.S. President)
law	a rule established by government or other source of authority to regulate people's conduct or activities
mayor	the head of government for a city or town
ordinance	a law enacted by a city or county affecting local affairs such as traffic, noise, and animal control
pardon	the formal act of forgiving someone or excusing a mistake
president	the head of the government for the nation
presidential appointment	the power of the U.S. President to choose members of his or her cabinet, ambassadors to other nations, and other officials in his or her administration
regulations	a limitation on behavior
statute	a law enacted at the state level
veto	a decision by an executive authority such as a president or governor to reject a proposed law or statute

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Civics 360 Resources](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- *Government and Democracy* by Charlie Ogden

ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: Executive Branch Graphic Organizer

Sample Answers: A Very Big Branch activity sheet

Sample Answers: Government Leaders: Triple Venn Diagram

Written Response: Sample Scoring Rubric

SOURCES

“Six Roles of the President” iCivics infographic:

<https://www.icivics.org/sites/default/files/Six%20Roles%20of%20the%20Presidency%20Infographic.pdf>

Executive Branch Departments and Agencies from U.S. Government Manual:

<https://www.usgovernmentmanual.gov/ReadLibraryItem.ashx?SFN=Myz95sTyO4rJRM/nhIRwSw==&SF=VHhnJrOeEAnGaa/rtk/JOg==&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

“A Very Big Branch” iCivics reading:

https://www.icivics.org/sites/default/files/lesson_plan/A%20Very%20Big%20Branch__StudentDocs.pdf

The Florida Electorate Organizational Chart from the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability: <https://oppaga.fl.gov/ProgramSummary/OrgChart>

What is the Role of a Governor video from Illustrate to Educate:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vLaO4pqn0>

The Executive Branch at the Local Level from Florida PASS Program:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xec_7c8UH1A