



POLICY SERIES

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

**A Guide for School
Board Members and
Superintendents**



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Introduction

Even though the law does not require that school boards follow parliamentary procedure in conducting their meetings, WSSDA recommends that they do so. Using parliamentary procedure as a guide in conducting meetings helps school boards with efficient, orderly, and civil meetings. (WSSDA Model Policy 1400). Sometimes, however, strict adherence to parliamentary procedure can hamper school boards in carrying out their business. If that happens, boards should not feel bound to strict adherence.

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised 12th Edition (Robert's Rules) is the most-commonly used tool for parliamentary procedure. This guide introduces board members to the basics of parliamentary procedure as found in Robert's Rules. It also addresses topics that school boards will most commonly encounter during their meetings. Given that limited purpose, the guide will not cover every detail of parliamentary procedure—for that, board members will need to read *Robert's Rules*.

PRINCIPLES OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

- The principles of parliamentary procedure can be summed up like this:
- All members have equal rights to participate.
- The rights of those absent from meetings and those in the minority must be protected.
- Decisions should be made after a full and free discussion of the subject.
- In making decisions, members have the right to know the meaning of the question before them and what the effect of their decision will be.
- Decisions should be made by at least a majority vote.
- Meetings should be conducted fairly and in good faith.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AND SCHOOL BOARDS

The rules of parliamentary procedure may be relaxed for school boards because they are considered small boards—and the formality that is necessary in large assemblies might actually hinder school boards in carrying out their business. The rules are relaxed as follows:

- Board members may raise a hand instead of standing when seeking to obtain the floor and may remain seated while making motions or speaking.
- Not all motions need to be seconded.
- There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak on a debatable question.
- Board members may informally discuss subjects even when no motion is pending.
- When a proposal is perfectly clear to everyone, the board can vote without a motion having been introduced.
- The board chair doesn't have to rise to put a question to a vote.
- The board chair may, without leaving the chair, participate in informal discussions and in debate and vote on all questions.

(*Robert's Rules*, pp. 464–65, § 49:21)

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AND BOARD POLICY

Many WSSDA model policies address topics covered by parliamentary procedure. Here are some examples:

- Board chair's role in meetings (WSSDA Model Policy 1220)
- Agendas (WSSDA Model Policy 1420 & 1420P)
- General meeting conduct (WSSDA Policy 1400 & 1400P)
- Minutes (WSSDA Model Policy 1440)

To the extent that board policy conflicts with parliamentary procedure, board policy governs. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 14, § 2:16) If school boards have adopted the above—or similar policies—they should follow those policies and use parliamentary procedure to fill in the gaps. By following WSSDA board policy, though, school boards will, in large part, be following parliamentary procedure.

Conducting the Meeting

QUORUM

According to parliamentary procedure, a quorum is the number of members that must be present at a meeting for business to be validly transacted. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 18, § 3:3) And, according to Washington State law, a quorum is a majority of all board members. (RCW 28A.343.390) So, if a board has five members, three members would make a quorum, and three members must be present to validly transact business. Moreover, a meeting under the Open Public Meetings Act (the "OPMA") doesn't occur unless there is a quorum of board members present. *Eugster v. City of Spokane*, 128 Wn. App. 1, 8, 114 P.3d 1200 (2005).

The only valid action board members can take when there is less than a quorum present is adjourning a regular, an adjourned regular, a special, or an adjourned special meeting to a time and place specified in an order of adjournment. (RCW 42.30.090; *Robert's Rules*, p. 330, § 40:7).

BOARD CHAIR

The board chair (or president) presides at all board meetings. (RCW 28A.330.030; WSSDA Model Policy 1220; *Robert's Rules*, p. 426, § 47:5) In presiding at board meetings, the board chair is responsible for making sure meetings are conducted in accordance with board policy and parliamentary procedure.

According to parliamentary procedure, the board chair has the following responsibilities:

- To open board meetings by calling the meeting to order after determining that a quorum is present
- To announce the order of business in accordance with the agenda
- To recognize members who are entitled to the floor
- To state and to put to vote all questions that legitimately come before the board
- To protect the board from dilatory motions by refusing to recognize them
- To enforce the rules relating to debate and those relating to conduct during the meeting
- To expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of board members
- To decide all questions of order
- To respond to questions relating to parliamentary procedure asked by other board members
- To declare the meeting adjourned

(*Robert's Rules*, pp. 427–28, § 47:7)

Under parliamentary procedure, a chair is sometimes limited in participating in a meeting. But, according to WSSDA Model Policy 1220, as a member of the school board, the board chair may fully participate in all aspects of the board, including debate and voting, without leaving the chair. This is consistent with the relaxed rules for small boards. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 465, § 49:21)

For new board chairs, you may consider becoming more familiar with *Robert's Rules*, especially the suggestions for new chairs. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 431–33, §§ 47:14–19) You also might consider reading *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief*—which provides a concise introduction to *Robert's Rules*.

AGENDA

During their meetings, school boards conduct their business according to an agenda. The agenda is prepared by the board secretary, who is typically the superintendent, in consultation with the board chair. (WSSDA Model Policy 1420)

If a school board has adopted WSSDA Model Policy 1420, copies of the proposed agenda will be provided to each board member three days before the board meeting. And, according to the OPMA, the agenda must be available online at least twenty-four hours before the meeting. (RCW 42.30.077; RCW 42.30.080) WSSDA Model Policy 1420P provides an example of what an agenda might look like.

Toward the beginning of a meeting—usually after the approval of minutes—the agenda is adopted by majority vote. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 353, § 41:61) Until the agenda is adopted, it can be changed by majority vote. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 353, § 41:63) After the agenda has been adopted, though, it can be changed only by a two-thirds vote, a vote of a majority of all the board members, or unanimous consent—which is addressed later. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 353–54, § 41:63) According to WSSDA Model Policy 1400, however, the board may change the agenda by a majority vote of the board members present at the meeting. This is an instance where board policy would supersede the rules of parliamentary procedure.

As part of a regular agenda, school boards can include a consent agenda—which allows them to quickly address routine or noncontroversial matters. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 343, § 41:32) Items that are placed on the consent agenda are voted on by a single motion. (WSSDA Model Policy 1420) Before voting on the consent agenda, though, a board member may request to have an item removed from the consent agenda and placed on the regular agenda. (WSSDA Model Policy 1420)

Minutes

The official record of the proceedings of a board meeting are called “the minutes”. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 446, § 48:1) “[T]he minutes should contain mainly a record of what was done at the meeting, not what was said by the members. The minutes must never reflect the secretary’s opinion, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done.” (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 446, § 48:2)

CONTENT

The first paragraph of the minutes should contain the following information:

- The kind of meeting (i.e., regular, special, adjourned regular, adjourned special)
- The name of the district
- The date, time, and place of the meeting
- Whether the board chair and secretary were present, or the names of those who substituted for them if they were absent
- Whether the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved and the date of that meeting

(*Robert’s Rules*, pp. 446–47, § 48:4)

The body of the minutes should contain a separate paragraph for each subject matter and should contain the following:

- All main motions (which are addressed later), stating who made the motion, the wording in which each motion was adopted or otherwise disposed of, and the outcome of the motion
- Secondary motions (which are addressed later) when it is necessary to record the motions for completeness or clarity
- The complete substance of oral committee reports
- All notices of motions
- All points of order and appeals with the reasons given by the chair for his or her ruling
- The declaration by the chair in “naming” an offending member as part of disciplinary procedures, along with any disorderly words that led to the naming and that the chair directed the secretary to take down

(*Robert’s Rules*, pp. 447–48, § 48:4)

The last paragraph of the minutes should state when the meeting adjourned. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 448, § 48:4)

The minutes should be signed by either the secretary or by the board chair. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 449, § 48:7)

For an example of what minutes look like when following the parliamentary procedure model, look at § 48:8 in *Robert’s Rules*.

WSSDA Model Policy 1440 also addresses what should be included in the minutes. For the most part, that policy aligns with parliamentary procedure, but it also requires a school board to include in the minutes the members who attended the meeting and any action to enter an executive session with the stated purpose for entering executive session.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

At the beginning of each regular board meeting—usually after the call to order and any opening ceremonies—the minutes of the previous board meeting are approved. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 450–51, § 48:9) Usually, when approving the minutes, the board chair would have the secretary read the minutes. However, with school boards that provide board members with copies of the minutes before the meeting, the chair can simply announce that the minutes were provided to board members before the meeting, unless a member requests that the minutes be read aloud. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 336, § 41:9)

After the minutes have been read, or after it's been announced that they were previously provided to the board members, the board chair asks, "Are there any corrections to the minutes?" If any corrections are proposed, they are handled through unanimous consent (which is addressed later). But, if any member objects to a proposed correction, then the process for considering an amendment to a main motion is followed. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 336, § 41:10)

If there is no response to the board chair's question about corrections or if any proposed corrections are taken care of, the board chair states, "There being no corrections [or no further corrections] to the minutes, the minutes are approved as read [or as corrected]." The minutes are thus approved without any formal motion. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 337, § 41:11)

When the minutes are approved, the word "approved" or "approved as corrected" with the secretary's or board chair's signature and date should be written below them. If the minutes were approved with corrections, the secretary should prepare a corrected copy of the minutes before they are signed. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 452, § 48:14)

If a board member discovers an error or a material omission in minutes that have already been approved, the minutes can be corrected by a motion to amend something previously adopted, which requires a two-thirds vote, a majority vote with notice, a majority vote of all the members, or unanimous consent. If that happens, the original minutes are not altered, but the minutes of the recent meeting must include the full text of the motion to amend something previously adopted. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 452, § 48:15)

Motions

“A motion is a formal proposal by a member, in a meeting, that the [school board] take certain action. The proposed action may be of a substantive nature, or it may express a certain view or direct that a particular investigation be conducted and [that] the findings be reported to the [school board] for possible further action, or the like.” (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 24, § 3:22)

Parliamentary procedure classifies motions as main motions, secondary motions (of which there are several sub-classes), and motions that bring a question back to the board. Each classification of motion has its own characteristics as to whether they must be seconded, whether they are debatable, whether they can be amended, what type of vote they require, and if they can be reconsidered. (See Chart)

For school boards, about 20% of the rules related to motions found in *Robert’s Rules* will be used during board meetings. If school board members want to become acquainted with the most used motions and their accompanying procedures, they should review *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised in Brief*.

Main Motion

The basic form of a motion is a main motion. A main motion is the only motion that brings business before the school board. Only one main motion can be considered at a time. But while a main motion is pending, other types of motions may be made. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 24, § 3:23)

Because the “main motion sets a pattern from which all other motions are derived,” reviewing the procedure related to main motions will help school board members understand the procedure for all other types of motions. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 25, § 3:24).

There are seven basic steps a board should follow to introduce and process a main motion.

1. OBTAINING THE FLOOR

Before a member can make a motion, the member must obtain the floor—that is, the member “must be recognized by the chair as having the exclusive right to be heard at that time.” (*RONR*, p. 26, § 3:30) To obtain the floor, the member addresses the chair: “Ms. Chair”—or whatever the proper title is. And the chair recognizes the member’s right to be heard by announcing the member’s name or title. At that point, the member has the floor and can make the motion. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 26, § 3:31)

2. MAKING THE MOTION

After obtaining the floor, a member introduces a motion by stating, “I move that ...” and then announces “what he proposes in wording intended to become the school board’s official statement of the action taken.” The board member should not introduce a motion by using words like “I think,” “I recommend,” or “We should”—those sorts of words indicate discussion, which occurs after the chair states the question on the motion. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 29, § 4:4)

The member should make the motion immediately after obtaining the floor. In other words, the member shouldn’t give a speech or engage in debate before making the motion. But, if necessary, the member can preface the motion with a concise explanation of the proposal or could briefly say what she wishes to propose and ask the chair to assist with wording the motion. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 30, § 4:7)

3. SECONDING THE MOTION

The purpose of a second “is to prevent time from being consumed by the [school board’s] having to dispose of a motion that only one person wants to see introduced.” (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 32, § 4:12) With school boards (that typically have only five members), this might not be as much of an issue; so, a second typically isn’t required. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 31, § 4:9, fn. 7)

Nonetheless, to second a motion after it has been made, a member who wishes the motion to be considered should say: “‘I second the motion,’ or, ‘I second it,’ or even, ‘Second!’—without obtaining the floor.” (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 31, § 4:9)

By seconding the motion, the member only indicates that she believes the motion should come before the school board. It doesn’t mean the member favors the motion. Indeed, the member may wish to have the motion come before the board so that there is a record of the board rejecting the proposal. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 32, § 4:11)

4. STATING THE QUESTION

Once a motion has been made and seconded, the next step is having the chair formally place the motion before the school board by stating the question—this involves stating the motion exactly as it was worded and indicating that it is open to debate. Before the chair states the question, though, a few things can happen.

Out of Order

The chair might point out that the motion is not in order. Here are some examples of when a main motion may be out of order:

- The motion conflicts with the school board policy or the law. A motion to amend the board’s policy may be in order, though.
- The motion was previously rejected. The motion may, however, be renewed by bringing a motion to reconsider.
- The motion conflicts with a motion that was previously adopted and still in force. A member, however, may bring a motion to rescind or to amend something previously adopted.

(*Robert’s Rules*, pp. 102–03, § 10:26)

If the motion appears to be out of order, the chair might be able to suggest an alternative motion that would be in order and would carry out the intent of the member making the motion. If that’s not possible, the chair might have to rule that the motion is out of order. In doing so, the chair should say something like this: “The motion is out of order because” The chair shouldn’t say to the member making the motion, “You are out of order,” or, “Your motion is out of order.” Stating that a member is out of order implies that the member has acted out of line. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 35, § 4:17)

Modifying the Motion

Before the question is stated, either the member who made the motion or another member can modify the motion. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 36, §§ 4:19–21) “Until the chair states the question, the maker has the right to modify his motion as he pleases or to withdraw it entirely.” (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 36, § 4:19) If another member wants to modify the motion, they can say: “Ms. Chair, I would like to ask the maker of the motion if he will accept the following modification:” The member who made the motion can then either accept the modification, reject it, or propose that the motion be modified differently. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 36, § 4:20) This method of modification should usually be limited to minor changes. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 105, § 10:30)

Once the question has been stated and the motion is pending, the motion can only be modified through a motion to amend—which is a subsidiary motion discussed in greater detail later. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 36, § 4:19) A motion to amend could propose changes to particular words or paragraphs in the main motion or could involve substituting an entirely new text in place of the original motion. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 106, § 10:30)

Unanimous Consent

If there seems to be no opposition in routine business, or on questions of little importance, time can be saved by following the procedure for unanimous consent—which foregoes stating the question and voting on the motion. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 49, § 4:58) Correcting meeting minutes might be the sort of business that is addressed through unanimous consent. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 50, § 4:61)

To obtain unanimous consent, the chair states that if there is no objection, the action that she mentions will be taken. Then she pauses, and if no member objects, the chair announces that the action is decided upon because there was no objection. If there is an objection, then the chair proceeds in stating the question, allowing for debate, and putting it to a vote. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 49, § 4:59)

Unanimous consent doesn’t mean that every member present is in favor of the proposed action. It may only mean that those

opposing the action feel that it would be futile to oppose or discuss the matter. Similarly, if a person objects, that doesn't mean they oppose the action. It may simply mean that they believe it is appropriate for the matter to be addressed through the formal voting process. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 49–50, § 4:60)

5. DEBATE

Once the motion is before the school board, the chair facilitates debate. Debate involves the “discussion on the merits of a pending question—that is, whether the proposal under consideration should, or should not, be agreed upon.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 365, § 43:1)

To begin debate, the chair—after stating the question—might ask, “Are you ready for the question?” or, “Is there any debate?” Or the chair could simply turn to the member who made the motion to see if they desire to speak first. After the maker of the motion has spoken, other members who wish to speak may do so by following the protocol for obtaining the floor described earlier. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 366, § 43:4)

During debate, there are rules that board members are expected to follow. Here are several of those rules:

- Those speaking must keep their remarks germane to the question before the school board. In other words, board members should ensure their comments are relevant to the topic at hand. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 371, § 43:20)
- Board members must not personally attack other members during debate. The motion, not the member's character, is up for debate. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 371–72, § 43:21)
- Board members should address their comments to the chair, not directly to one another. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 372, § 43:22)
- Each board member must not speak longer than is permitted by the rules of the school board or no longer than ten minutes if there are no rules. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 367, § 43:8) (“Merely asking a question or making a brief suggestion is not counted as speaking in debate.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 368, 43:12))

When it appears that debate has concluded, the chair may ask, “Are you ready for the question?” or, “Is there any further debate?” If the board members respond that there is no further debate—or if it appears that debate has concluded—the chair can proceed to voting on the motion. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 39–40, § 4:34)

6. VOTING

After debate has concluded, the chair has the school board vote on the motion.

There are two ways that school board members typically vote: by voice vote or by roll call.

Voice Vote

A vote is usually taken by voice vote. In taking a voice vote, the chair states the proposed motion then says, “Those in favor of the motion, say ‘yes’.” After which, all the members in favor of the motion say, “Yes.” After board members have responded, the chair then says, “Those opposed, say ‘no’.” And the members opposing the motion say, “No.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 41, § 4:37)

Roll-call Vote

A roll-call vote may occur if a board member makes a motion to have such. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 266, § 30:1) A roll-call vote involves asking each board member to state how they vote by calling their names. For example, this is how the board chair might call a roll call vote: “Those who are in favor of the adoption of the motion will answer ‘yes’ when their names are called, and those who are opposed will answer ‘no’ when their names are called.” Then the secretary of the board reads the board members' names in alphabetical order. As each member's name is called, they may respond in the affirmative or negative. If the member doesn't want to vote, they can answer “Present” or “Abstain.” Or, if they are not ready to vote when their name is called, they can answer “Pass.” (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 398–400, §§ 45:45–53)

After the members have cast their votes, the secretary gives the final number of votes to the board chair, who then announces the figures and states the result. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 400, § 45:51) A record of how each member voted is included in the minutes—

which is not the case with a voice vote. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 400, § 45:52)

A roll-call vote of all board members is required for the election of board officers, the filling of a vacancy on the board, and the selecting of a superintendent. (RCW 28A.330.020)

7. STATING THE RESULT

The board chair announces the results of the vote once it's concluded. Announcing the results generally includes the following: reporting which side has more votes, declaring that the motion is adopted or lost, and stating the effect of the vote. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 43, § 4:43)

The basic requirement for approval of an action is a majority vote. A majority vote usually means more than half of the votes cast by board members—excluding abstentions. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 379, § 44:1) For example, if five board members attend a board meeting and only three members vote on a motion while the other two abstain, a majority vote would be two. However, in certain circumstances, such as electing officers or filling a vacancy, a majority of all the members of board is required. (RCW 28A.330.020)

For a voice vote, stating the result might look like this: “The yeses have it and the motion is adopted.” Or conversely, “The nos have it, and the motion is lost.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 45, § 4:49) Then, the chair would state the effect of the vote—in other words, what action or inaction is required because of the vote. This may include declaring where the action will be recorded, or what will or will not be done, or assigning tasks to complete the action on the motion adopted.

Secondary Motions

Because only one main motion can be addressed at a time, there is a need for secondary motions. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 53, § 5:4) There are three types of secondary motions: subsidiary motions, privileged motions, and incidental motions. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 53, § 5:2)

Secondary motions have the following characteristics:

- A secondary motion can be made and considered while a main motion is pending without violating the principle of taking up only one question at a time.
- When a secondary motion has been made, it must be acted upon or disposed of before the board can directly consider the main question.

(*Robert's Rules*, p. 53, § 5:5)

Secondary motions are generally made the same way that main motions are made—except some of them are in order while a member has the floor, in which case a second usually isn't required. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 54, § 5:6)

When a secondary motion is placed before the board, it becomes the immediately pending question. And the main motion remains pending while the secondary motion is pending. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 54, § 5:7)

PRECEDENCE

If a motion can be made while another motion is pending, that motion takes precedence (pronounced pree-SEED-ence) over the other motion. Thus, a secondary motion takes precedence over a main motion, and a main motion takes precedence over nothing. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 54, § 5:8)

“Certain secondary motions also take precedence over others, so that it is possible for more than one secondary motion to be pending at a time (together with the main motion). In such cases, the motion most recently stated by the chair . . . is the immediately pending question.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 54, § 5:9) The main motion, the seven subsidiary motions, and the five privileged motions, all fall into a definite order of precedence, which gives a rank to each of those thirteen motions. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 55, § 5:11) (To see the order of precedence for those motions, look at the chart appended to this Guide.)

Incidental motions do not fall into the order of precedence like the other motions. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 55, § 5:12)

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS

The purpose of subsidiary motions is to assist the board in dealing with pending main motions. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 56, § 6:3) There are seven subsidiary motions:

- Postpone Indefinitely
- Amend
- Commit
- Postpone to a Certain Time
- Limit or Extend Limits of Debate
- Previous Question
- Lay on the Table

(*Robert's Rules*, pp. 57–58, § 6:5)

This Guide briefly addresses each of the seven subsidiary motions. For a complete treatment of the characteristics of each motion, see *Robert's Rules* §§ 11–17.

Unless otherwise stated, a subsidiary motion is debatable, amendable, and subject to a majority vote.

Postpone Indefinitely

This motion is used if a board member wants to “kill” the main motion. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 116, § 11:1) By postponing a main motion indefinitely, the motion is not merely postponed to some other time; rather, it is indirectly rejected. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 117, § 11:3)

The motion can be made simply by stating: “I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 118, § 11:6)

Amend

This motion is a motion to modify the wording—and within certain limits the meaning—of a pending motion before the pending motion is acted upon. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 119, § 12:1) This is probably the most-commonly used subsidiary motion. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 119, § 12:2) Because it's the most common, it will receive more attention than the other subsidiary motions.

By adopting a motion to amend, the motion that is amended is not adopted. Similarly, by rejecting a motion to amend, the original motion is not rejected. Rather, the motion is still pending as it was originally worded. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 120, § 12:4)

An amendment must be closely related to, or have bearing on, the subject of the motion being amended. This prevents a new subject from being introduced under the pretext of being an amendment. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 120, § 12:6)

There are two degrees of amendment: primary amendment and secondary amendment. A primary amendment relates directly to a pending main motion. A secondary amendment applies to a pending primary amendment. In other words, a secondary amendment applies to a pending motion to amend. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 124, § 12:11)

And there are three basic processes for amending a motion. The first process is to insert or add—which involves inserting or adding words or paragraphs to a motion. (The difference between inserting and adding is that adding entails placing the word or paragraph at the end of a sentence or passage.) The second process is to strike out—which involves striking out words or paragraphs. And the third process is a combination of the first two processes—which involves striking out and inserting words or substituting one paragraph for another. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 123, § 12:8)

To make a motion to amend by inserting or adding words or paragraphs, the person making the motion says something like this: “I move to amend the motion by inserting ‘waterfront’ before the word ‘property,’” or, “I move to add the following paragraph . . .” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 131, § 12:32)

When the chair states the question, she should follow these three steps:

- The board chair should state the question as for any other motion: “It is moved and seconded to . . .”
- Then the chair should read the main motion (or the portion affected by the amendment) as it would stand if the amendment were adopted: “If the amendment is adopted, the main motion will read . . .”
- The chair then makes clear once more that it is the amendment under immediate consideration: “The question is on . . .”

(*Robert's Rules*, p. 131, § 12:34)

The board chair should follow similar steps when putting the motion to a vote:

- The chair repeats the amendment: “The question is on . . .”
- The chair reads the main motion (or the portion affected by the amendment) as it would read if the amendment were adopted: “If the amendment is adopted, the main motion will read . . .”
- Then the chair takes the vote.

(*Robert's Rules*, p. 132, § 12:36)

After taking the vote, the chair announces the result. If the amendment was adopted, the chair states the motion as amended, which then becomes the immediately pending question. If the amendment isn't adopted, the chair states the main motion as originally made, which then becomes the immediately pending question. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 132, §§ 12:37–38)

A motion to amend by striking out or by a combination of inserting and striking out follows the same procedure described above. The wording of the motion to amend is different, though. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 137–49, §§ 12:53–89)

Commit

This motion is generally used when further study by a committee would be useful to either gather more information or refine the pending motion. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 157, § 13:1)

The motion also has three variations that are not intended to turn the main question over to a committee but rather to permit the board to consider the motion without any limits on the number of times a member can speak. These forms of the motion include to “go into a committee of the whole,” to “go into quasi committee of the whole,” and to “consider informally.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 157, § 13:2)

The motion can be made in several ways. Here are some examples:

- “I move to refer the motion to a committee.”
- “I move that the board go into a committee of the whole to consider the motion.”
- “I move that the motion be considered informally.”

(*Robert's Rules*, p. 168, § 13:25)

When a motion proposes to assign a task or refer a matter to a committee when no question is pending, that motion is not a subsidiary motion to commit. Rather, it is a main motion (*Robert's Rules*, p. 158, § 13:4)

Postpone to a Certain Time

This motion is used to put off consideration of a motion until later in the same meeting or the next meeting. It might be used to consider a main motion at a more convenient time, or because debate has shown that there are reasons for delaying a decision. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 169, § 14:1)

To make a motion to postpone to a certain time, a board member could say: “I move to postpone the motion to the next meeting.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 177, § 14:20)

Limit or Extend Limits of Debate

As the name of this motion suggests, it can be used to limit debate or extend the standard limits of debate. The motion can limit debate by reducing the number or length of speeches during debate or by setting a time limit for debate. And it can extend the limits of debate by allowing more or longer speeches than are allowed under the regular rules. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 180, § 15:2) The motion is not debatable and must be approved by a two-thirds vote. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 181, § 15:5)

Depending on what a board member is seeking, there are several ways this motion can be made:

- To reduce the number or length of speeches, a member could say: “I move that debate be limited to one speech of five minutes for each member.”
- To increase the number or length of speeches, a member could say: “I move that members be allowed three speeches of fifteen minutes.”
- To set a time limit for debate, a member could say: “I move that after twenty minutes, debate on the motion be closed.”
- (*Robert's Rules*, p. 185, § 15:19)

Previous Question

This motion requests the board to stop debate and take a vote on the pending motion or motions. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 187, § 16:1)

By adopting the motion, the following occurs: debate immediately stops, the ability to amend the immediately pending question stops, and members are prevented from making any other subsidiary motion except the motion to lay on the table. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 187, § 16:2) The motion is not debatable, is not amendable, and requires a two-thirds vote. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 189–90, § 16:5)

The motion is made by stating: “I move the previous question.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 196, § 16:20)

Lay on the Table

This motion is probably the most misused motion. The intent of this motion is to temporarily set aside a pending motion. It is not used to postpone the motion to another time (like a motion to postpone to a certain time) or to kill a motion (like a motion to postpone indefinitely). It is used when something comes up that is considered an “emergency” interruption. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 198, § 17:1) Something may come up at a meeting that may require a pause in the pending business until later, perhaps a speaker or an unplanned event. This motion is not debatable or amendable. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 200–01, § 17:3)

The motion is made by stating: “I move to lay the question on the table.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 200, § 17:20)

Privileged Motions

Privileged motions do not deal with the pending business (as subsidiary motions do); rather, they deal with special matters of immediate and overriding importance that should be allowed to interrupt the consideration of anything else. No privileged motion is subject to debate. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 60, § 6:11) And, unless stated otherwise, privileged motions are not amendable.

There are five privileged motions:

- Orders of the Day
- Raise a Question of Privilege
- Recess
- Adjourn
- Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn

(*Robert's Rules*, pp. 60–61, § 6:12)

As with the subsidiary motions, this Guide will briefly address each privileged motion. For a more complete treatment of privileged motions, look at *Robert's Rules* §§ 18–22.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

This motion requires the board to return to the order of business or timeline as set forth in the agenda if the board has gotten off track. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 207, § 18:1) The motion doesn't need to be seconded, and a two-thirds vote is required to set aside the orders of the day—that is, a two-thirds vote is required to reject the motion. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 208–09, §18:4)

The motion is made by saying: “I call for the orders of the day,” or, “I demand the regular order.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 211, § 18:9)

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE

This motion is used to protect the safety, welfare, and comfort of the board or an individual member. Questions of privilege may relate to the board's organization and existence; to the issues such as heating, ventilation, lighting, noise, etc.; to board member conduct or conduct of members of the public; to the accuracy of published reports; etc. It also applies to subjects that require immediate action. Questions of privilege for individuals rarely arise. But such questions could relate to something like charges circulated against a member's character. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 214–15, § 19:7)

Typically, this motion can be made as an informal request. To raise a question of privilege in such a manner, a board member would say: “I rise to a question of privilege affecting the board.” The board chair would then say: “The board member will state her question.” And the board member might respond: “I don't think we're going to be able to hear each other unless some of the windows are closed.” After which, the board chair rules and might say: “Will someone close the windows on the left side of the room.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 216, §§ 19:11–13)

RECESS

A recess is a short break in the meeting that does not close the meeting; and after the break, the meeting resumes where it left off. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 217, § 20:1) The motion is amendable as to the time of the recess. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 218, § 20:5)

The motion is made by stating: “I move that the meeting recess for ten minutes [or however long the board member proposes recessing].” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 219, § 20:8) If the motion is adopted, the chair announces the result like this: “The yeases have it, and the meeting is in recess for ten minutes.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 219, § 20:9). When the recess ends, the chair gains everyone's attention and states: “The meeting will come to order. The time of recess has expired.” (*Robert's Rules*, p. 219, § 20:10)

ADJOURN

To adjourn means to close the meeting. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 220, § 21:1) The privileged motion to adjourn is a motion to close the meeting immediately, not to close the meeting at some future time. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 220, § 21:2)

The motion can be made by stating: "I move to adjourn." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 227, § 21:16). If the motion is adopted, the board chair announces the result of the vote and declares the meeting adjourned. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 227, § 21:17)

At most board meetings, though, a motion to adjourn isn't necessary. Rather, when it appears that there is no further business to address at the meeting, the chair can ask: "Is there any further business?" And if there is no response, the chair can announce: "Since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 227, § 21:15)

FIX THE TIME TO WHICH TO ADJOURN

This motion is used to set the time, and sometimes the place, for another meeting to continue the business of the meeting with no effect on when the present meeting will end. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 228, § 22:1) This motion can be amended as to the date, hour, or place. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 229, § 22:6)

A motion to fix the time at which to adjourn establishes an adjourned meeting. An adjourned meeting is a meeting that will be a continuation of the meeting at which the motion was adopted. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 230, § 22:9) When a motion to fix the time is used, the board needs to follow the requirements of the OPMA regarding adjourned meetings. (RCW 42.30.090)

The motion can be made by stating: "I move that when this meeting adjourns, it adjourns to meet at 6 p.m. tomorrow [or at whatever time proposed]." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 231, § 22:12). If the motion is adopted, the chair would say: "The yeas have it. When the meeting adjourns this evening, it will adjourn until 6 p.m. tomorrow [or at whatever time was proposed]". (*Robert's Rules*, p. 231, § 22:13)

Incidental Motions

Incidental motions deal with questions of procedure arising out of another pending motion, or another motion or item of business, that is desired to be introduced, that has been made but has not yet been stated by the chair, or that has just been pending. Incidental motions are said to be incidental to the other motions or matter out of which they arise. They are related to the main question in such a way that they must be decided immediately before business can proceed. That is why most incidental motions aren't debatable. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 62, § 6:15)

Some incidental motions are deemed incidental main motions. As original main motions do, incidental main motions bring business before the board when nothing is pending. But those motions are distinguished from original main motions by the following characteristics:

- Incidental main motions propose actions that are specifically defined in parliamentary procedure and described by a particular parliamentary term.
- Incidental main motions do not introduce a substantive matter to the board like original main motions do. Rather, they relate to further steps in dealing with a substantive matter that has already come before the board or relate to procedure without direct connection to a particular substantive item of business.

(*Robert's Rules*, pp. 92–93, § 10:4)

Examples of incidental main motions include a motion to recess when no business is pending or a motion to place limits on the length of speeches throughout a meeting. In those examples, the terms “recess” and “limit” are parliamentary terms that describe the motion. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 93, § 10:5)

There are eleven incidental motions:

- Point of Order
- Appeal
- Suspend the Rules
- Objection to the Consideration of the Question
- Division of a Question
- Consideration by Paragraph or Seriatim
- Division of the Assembly
- Motions Relating to Methods of Voting and the Polls
- Motions Relating to Nominations
- Request to Be Excused from a Duty
- Requests and Inquiries

(*Robert's Rules*, pp. 63–65, § 6:17)

Since school boards will not likely use several of those motions, only the ones that are more likely to be used are addressed below. For a complete treatment of incidental motions, look at *Robert's Rules* §§ 23–33.

POINT OF ORDER

When a member thinks that a rule has been violated, she can ask the chair to rule on the matter by making a point of order. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 233, § 23:1) The motion must be raised at the time the violation occurs. For example, if the chair states the

question on a motion that hasn't been seconded, the time to raise the point of order is when the question is stated—not after debate on the motion. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 236, § 23:5) The only exceptions to the promptness requirement are when a main motion violates board policy, a main motion conflicts with a previously adopted main motion that's still in force, or an action has been taken in violation of law or a fundamental principal of parliamentary procedure. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 236–37, § 23:6)

To raise a point of order, a board member would say: "I rise to a point of order." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 239, § 23:12) The board chair would then ask the board member to state his point of order. And the board member would do so as follows: "I make the point of order that . . ." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 239, § 23:14) After the board member completes his statement, the board chair makes a ruling, stating whether the point of order is well taken or is not well taken. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 239, § 23:15) If the board chair is in doubt, he can submit the question to the board for a vote. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 240–41, §§ 23:18–19)

APPEAL

A board member may appeal the board chair's ruling on a question of parliamentary procedure if seconded by another member. By appealing the ruling, the question is taken from the chair and given to the board. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 242, § 24:1) An appeal must be made at the time the chair rules. If any debate or business occurs after the ruling, a board member cannot appeal. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 245, § 24:8)

A member desiring to appeal states: "I appeal from the decision of the chair." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 245, § 24:9) After stating the exact question at issue and the reasons for his decision, the board chair states the question: "Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?" (*Robert's Rules*, p. 245, § 24:10) Then the chair puts the question: "Those in favor of sustaining the chair's decision, say 'yes'. Those opposed to sustaining the chair's decision, say 'no'." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 246, § 24:12) After the result of the vote is announced, the meeting picks up where it left off. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 246, § 24:13)

SUSPEND THE RULES

When the board wishes to do something contrary to rules of parliamentary procedure, it can adopt a motion to suspend the rules. For example, a motion to suspend can be used to forego debate of a main motion or to consider a matter out of order. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 246–47, §§ 25:1–4) A motion to suspend, however, cannot suspend the law, board policy, or fundamental principles of parliamentary procedure (like the rule that allows only one question to be considered at a time). (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 248–9, § 25:7–9)

Typically, suspending the rules requires a two-thirds vote. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 250–51, § 25:14) But, when the matter doesn't appear to be controversial, the rules can be suspended by unanimous consent. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 251, § 25:16)

This motion can be made by saying: "I move to suspend the rules that interfere with . . ." or, "I move to suspend the rules and take up . . ." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 251, § 25:17)

DIVISION OF THE QUESTION

When a motion encompasses different and distinct parts that may be considered and voted on separately, the motion may be divided through a division of the question. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 255, § 27:1) A motion cannot be divided when the separate parts of the motion depend on each other or are not easily separated, though. For example, if there was a motion to establish a committee and give the committee instructions, that motion couldn't be divided into two parts—one relating to the establishment of the committee, and the other to the instructions—because there is no point to provide instructions if the motion to establish a committee fails. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 257–58, §§ 27:5–6)

This motion can be made by stating: "I move to divide the motion into two parts [or however many parts are applicable] as follows: . . ." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 259, § 27:13) If the motion prevails, then the chair states each motion in full when it is time to consider them. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 260, § 27:15)

REQUESTS AND INQUIRIES

During a meeting, a board member may like to obtain more information or seek permission from the board to have something done. In those cases, a board member may make the following types of requests: a parliamentary inquiry; a request for information; a request for permission to withdraw or modify a motion; a request to read papers; or a request for any other privilege. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 275, § 33:1)

This Guide addresses parliamentary inquiry, requests for information, and requests for permission to withdraw or modify a motion.

Parliamentary Inquiry

A parliamentary inquiry is a question directed to the board chair to obtain information about parliamentary procedure as it relates to the business at hand. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 276, § 33:3) To make that inquiry, the member would say: "A parliamentary inquiry, please." The chair would then have the member state the inquiry. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 276, § 33:4) After considering the inquiry, the chair provides their opinion. The chair's opinion cannot be appealed, though, because it is merely an opinion, not a ruling. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 276, § 33:5)

A parliamentary inquiry isn't voted on. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 275, § 33:2)

Request for Information

A request for information is a request directed to the board chair or through the board chair to another member that is unrelated to parliamentary procedure. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 277, § 33:6) The request is made as follows: "I have a request for information." The board chair then has the member state the question. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 277, § 33:7)

A request for information isn't voted on. (*Robert's Rules*, 275, § 33:2)

Request for Permission to Withdraw or Modify

The board member who made a motion doesn't have to seek permission to withdraw or modify it before it has been stated by the chair. Rather, the member can simply withdraw or modify the motion. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 278, § 33:12) Once the chair has stated the motion, though, the member who made the motion must seek permission from the board to withdraw it or modify it. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 278, § 33:13)

To withdraw the motion after it's been stated, the maker of the motion may state: "I ask permission to withdraw the motion." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 279, § 33:14) This request must be made before the motion has been put to a vote. (*Robert's Rules*, 279, § 33:16) Initially, the board chair treats the request as one for unanimous consent. So, the chair states: "Unless there is objection, the motion is withdrawn." If there is an objection, the chair puts the question to a vote. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 279, § 33:15) And if the motion is withdrawn, then it's as though there had never been any motion made—which means the same motion could be made again later in the same meeting. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 279, § 33:18)

The same process is followed for requesting to modify the motion after it has been stated. If no one objects to the request, the board chair states the motion as modified. If anyone objects, the board chair can treat the request as a motion to amend and follow the procedure for amending a motion. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 280, § 33:19)

Bring-back Motions

Besides main motions and secondary motions, there is a third category of motions called motions that bring a question again before the board—sometimes called “bring-back” motions. These motions allow the board to consider again the merits of a question that was previously disposed of. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 67, § 6:25) These motions have no order of precedence. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 68, § 6:26)

There are four bring-back motions:

- Take from the Table
- Rescind (Amend Something Previously Adopted)
- Discharge a Committee
- Reconsider

(*Robert’s Rules*, pp. 68–69, § 6:26)

A brief review of those motions follows. For a complete treatment of the characteristics of those motions, look at *Robert’s Rules* §§ 34–37.

TAKE FROM THE TABLE

This motion is used to place an item of business before the board that was temporarily laid aside by the motion to lay on the table. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 283, § 34:1) The motion may be taken from the table only at the same meeting or the next meeting if held within a quarterly interval. If the motion isn’t taken from the table within those time limits, it dies—although it can be reintroduced later as a new question. (*Robert’s Rules*, pp. 284–85, § 34:3) If the motion is brought back, then, as far as possible, the motion comes back exactly as it was before being laid aside. (*Robert’s Rules*, pp. 286–87, § 34:6)

To make this motion, a board member states: “I move to take from the table the motion relating to . . .” (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 287, § 34:8)

RESCIND (AMEND SOMETHING PREVIOUSLY ADOPTED)

These motions are two ways a board can change a previous action. A motion to rescind cancels the previous action. A motion to amend something previously adopted is used to change only a part of a text. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 288, § 35:1) There is no time limit on when these motions can be made. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 290, § 35:3) Before making either of these motions, notice may be required—which is typically the case if someone intends to propose rescinding or amending a board policy. (*Robert’s Rules*, pp. 289–90, §§ 35:2–3)

In making a motion to rescind, a board member can say: “I move to rescind the motion that . . .” And in making a motion to amend something previously adopted, a board member can say: “I move to amend the resolution relating to . . . by adding . . .” (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 292, § 35:7)

DISCHARGE A COMMITTEE

This motion takes a matter out of a committee’s hands before the committee has made a final report and brings it back to the board to consider. (*Robert’s Rules*, pp. 293–94, § 36:1) This motion usually isn’t used unless a committee has failed to promptly report, or the board has an urgent reason to proceed with the matter. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 295, § 36:5) Either a two-thirds vote or a majority vote of all the members is required to adopt this motion. (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 295, § 36:4)

The motion can be made by stating: “I move that the . . . committee be discharged.” (*Robert’s Rules*, p. 297, § 36:12)

RECONSIDER

This motion allows a majority of the board to bring an item back for further consideration. It enables the board to correct hasty, ill-advised, or erroneous action, or to account for new information that may have come up since the original vote. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 298, § 37:1) The motion can be made only by a member who originally voted on the prevailing side; it must be moved on the same day as the original vote; and it can be made even when it normally would be considered out of order. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 299, § 37:8)

There are three stages to this motion:

- Once the motion is made, any action growing out of the previous vote is temporarily suspended. Thus, the motion cannot apply to a motion that has already been partially carried out or that has caused something to occur that can't be undone. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 298–99, § 37:5)
- The motion is considered by the board. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 299, § 37:6)
- If the motion is adopted, the original motion is canceled and is brought back to the board in the same position it was in before originally being voted on. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 299, § 37:7)

The motion is made by stating: "I move to reconsider the vote on the motion relating to . . . I voted for the motion." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 314, § 37:36)

Conclusion

As one can see, there are a lot of details and nuances to parliamentary procedure—and to understand those details and nuances fully, one must review *Robert's Rules*. Nonetheless, school board members do not have to be parliamentarians. They don't need to memorize every type of motion, nor which one takes precedence over another, nor how they all interact. Rather, board members simply need a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure to efficiently conduct school board meetings. And they should remember that *Robert's Rules* is a guide—not the law—and parliamentary procedure is meant to assist in conducting school business, not hinder it or make it more complicated.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a quorum?

A: A quorum is the number of board members that must be present to validly conduct business, which is a majority of all board members. (RCW 28A.343.390; *Robert's Rules*, p. 18, § 3:3) That means for most school boards, three board members constitute a quorum.

Q: Is there a quorum even if a board member is participating remotely?

A: Yes. Board members may participate in meetings by phone or through electronic means that allow for real-time oral communication.

Q: What happens if a quorum of board members gathers at an event other than a scheduled board meeting?

A: If a quorum of board members gathers at an event other than a board meeting, the gathering might constitute a meeting under the OPMA, depending on what the board members are doing. For example, if the board members are at a book club discussing the most recent novel they've read, that's not a meeting under the OPMA. But if the board members start discussing which books should be included in the school's library and which should be banned, then the gathering transforms into a meeting because they are discussing school business. (See RCW 42.30.020)

Q: Can an agenda be amended after the board has approved it?

A: Yes. Even after the agenda has been approved by the board, a new agenda item can be added. Under parliamentary procedure, a new item can be added by a two-thirds vote, by a vote of a majority of all the board members, or by unanimous consent. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 353–54, § 41:63) But if the school board has adopted WSSDA Policy 1420, the board can add an item to the agenda by a majority vote of the members present at the meeting.

Q: Can the minutes be amended after they've been approved?

A: Yes. If the minutes have been approved, but it's later discovered that they are inaccurate or have omitted information, they can be corrected. The board chair can offer that the minutes be corrected by unanimous consent if there is no objection (see below for more information about unanimous consent). If there is an objection, the minutes can be corrected through a motion to amend something previously adopted. If the board had at least 24-hours' notice that the motion was going to be presented, this motion would pass with a majority vote. If this motion is made without 24-hours' notice, the motion would pass with either a two-thirds vote of those board members present or a majority vote of all the members of the board. If the motion passes, the original minutes aren't corrected. Instead, the minutes of the meeting where the motion passed include the full text of the motion, which should show what was corrected. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 452, § 48:15)

Q: Can a board informally discuss an issue even if a motion isn't pending?

A: Yes. Because of the small size of school boards, they are permitted to discuss topics informally without a motion pending. In other words, a motion doesn't have to be made for the board to start discussing a topic. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 465, § 49:21)

Q: Do all motions have to be seconded?

A: No. Typically, motions are required to be seconded so that time isn't wasted on an issue that only one person wants addressed. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 32, § 4:12) But because of the small size of school boards, where one person usually makes up a fifth of a board, that's not as much of an issue. So, motions aren't required to be seconded. They still can be, though. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 464, § 49:21)

Q: What is unanimous consent?

A: Unanimous consent is a way to make decisions without the board chair stating a motion, having the members debate the motion, or voting on the motion. Rather, the board chair states that if there is no objection, the proposed action will be taken. And if no one objects, the proposed action is approved. This is a way to save time when considering issues that are of little consequence or that are likely to be approved by all the members. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 49, §§ 4:58–59)

Q: Is there a limit on how many times a board member can speak when discussing a motion?

A: No. Because of the small size of school boards, there is no limit on how many times a board member can speak while discussing a motion. (*Robert's Rules*, pp. 464, § 49:21)

Q: How is a motion recorded in the meeting minutes?

A: The minutes should include the wording of the motion and whether the motion passed or failed. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 447, § 48:4) If the motion required only a voice vote, the minutes don't have to include how individual board members voted. But if the motion required a roll-call vote, the minutes must state how the individual board members voted. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 400, § 45:52)

Q: Are the discussions in executive session confidential?

A: According to parliamentary procedure, "anything discussed in executive session may not be divulged to nonmembers." (*Robert's Rules*, p. 87, § 9:25)

Q: Can the board vote in executive session?

A: No. Any vote must be made in open session in front of the public. There is no secret voting. (RCW 42.30.060)

Q: What is a voice vote?

A: A voice vote is the usual way that a vote is taken. A voice vote is taken by the board chair asking all those in favor of a motion to say yes and then asking all those opposed to the motion to say no. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 41, § 4:37)

Q: What is a roll-call vote?

A: A roll-call vote involves reading each board member's name and asking each member how they vote when their name is called.

Q: When is a roll-call vote required?

A: A roll-call vote must be taken when electing a board officer, filling a vacancy, or selecting a superintendent. (RCW 28A.330.020) Additionally, a roll-call vote can be required by a majority vote of the board. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 398, § 45:46)

Q: What constitutes a majority vote?

A: Usually, a majority vote means more than half of the votes cast by board members. So, if only three members cast votes, a majority vote would be two. (*Robert's Rules*, p. 379, § 44:1) But when the board is electing officers, filling a vacancy, or selecting a superintendent, a majority of all the members of the board is required. (RCW 28A.330.020)

Order of Precedence of Motions

	Second	Debate	Amend	Vote	Reconsider	Rules Section
PRIVILEGED						
▲ Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn	Y	N	Y*	M	Y	§ 22
Adjourn	Y	N	N	M	N	§ 21
Recess	Y	N	Y*	M	N	§ 20
Raise Point of Privilege	N	N	N	RC	N	§ 19
Call for the Orders of the Day	N	N	N	NA*	N	§ 18
SUBSIDIARY						
▲ Lay on the Table	Y	N	N	M	N n	§ 17
Previous Question	Y	N	N	2/3	Y	§ 16
Limit or Extend Debate	Y	N	Y*	2/3	Y	§ 15
Postpone Definitely	Y	Y	Y	M	Y	§ 14
Commit or Refer to Committee	Y	Y	Y	M	Y	§ 13
Amend	Y	Y	Y	M	Y	§ 12
Postpone Indefinitely	Y	Y	N	M	Y p	§ 11
• MAIN MOTION	Y	Y	Y	M	Y	§ 10
INCIDENTAL MOTIONS						
Point of Order	N	N	N	RC	N	§ 23
Appeal the Decision of the Chair	Y	Y*	N	M*	Y	§ 24
Suspend the Rules	Y	N	N	2/3	N	§ 25
Object to Consideration	N	N	N	2/3 n	Y n	§ 26
Division of the Question	Y	N	Y	M	N	§ 27
Consider Seriatim	Y	N	N	M	N	§ 28
Division of the Assembly	N	N	N	N	N	§ 29
Vote by ___ (Method)	Y	N	Y	M	Y	§ 30
Close Nominations / Polls	Y	N	Y	2/3	N	§ 31
Reopen Nominations / Polls	Y	N	Y	M	Y	§ 31
Excused from Duty	Y*	Y	Y	M	Y n	§ 32
Parliamentary Inquiry	N	N	N	NA	N	§ 33
Point of Information	N	N	N	NA	N	§ 33
Grant Withdraw of Motion	Y*	N	N	M	Y n	§ 33
Request to Read	Y*	N	N	M n	Y	§ 33
RESTORATIVE (Bring-Back)						
Take from the Table	Y	N	N	M	N	§ 34
Rescind	Y	Y	Y	M/2/3	Y n	§ 35
Amend Previously Adopted Motion	Y	Y	Y	M/2/3	Y n	§ 35
Discharge a Committee	Y	Y	Y	2/3*	Y n	§ 36
Reconsider	Y	Y	N	M	N	§ 37

Y = Yes

N = No

* = Special rules apply

RC = Chair makes ruling

n = Only allowed with a negative vote

p = Only allowed with a positive vote

M = Majority vote required

2/3 = Two-thirds vote required

Motion Guide

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED

WHAT DO I WANT TO DO?	MOTION TO USE	HOW DO I SAY IT?	Second	Debate	Amend	Vote
Introduce business	Main Motion	I move that ... (state action to be taken)	Y	Y	Y	M
'Kill' motion without the assembly taking a position	Postpone Indefinitely	I move to postpone indefinitely the motion ... (identify pending main motion)	Y	Y	N	M
Change or modify a motion before adoption	Amend	I move to amend by ... (identify words and where amendment is to be placed)	Y	Y	Y	M
Have a few members study or take charge of a matter	Commit or Refer to Committee	I move to refer the motion to ... (identify details)	Y	Y	Y	M
Postpone the making of a decision	Postpone Definitely	I move to postpone consideration of this motion until ... (identify time)	Y	Y	Y	M
Changing rules of debate temporarily	Limit or Extend Limits of debate	I move that debate be limited (or extended) to ... (give times and other criteria)	Y	N	Y	2/3
Stop debate and have a vote taken on the questions under debate. (Generally affects only immediate question)	Previous Question (Stop debate)	I move the previous question (After recognition by the chair)	Y	N	N	2/3
Set aside a matter in order to take care of an emergency or interrupting matter that cannot wait	Lay on the Table	I move to lay on the table the pending motion(s) in order to allow ... (identify interruption)	Y	N	N	M
Protest noise, hearing, room conditions, etc.	Question of Privilege	I rise to a question of privilege (may interrupt speaker if emergent)	N	N	N	N
Inquire about parliamentary procedure	Parliamentary Inquiry	I to a point of inquiry concerning... (may interrupt only if emergent)	N	N	N	N
Call attention to a procedural error	Point of Order	I rise to a point of Order (may interrupt proceedings if it must be timely)	N	N	N	N
Disagree with the ruling of the chair	Appeal	I appeal the decision of the chair	Y	Y	N	M
Short Intermission	Recess	I move to recess for ... (time), or I move to recess until ... (time)	Y	N	Y	M
Do something the rules prohibit or take a question out of proper order. (Does not apply to bylaws)	Suspend the Rules	I move to suspend the rules ... (identify) to ... (action desired as result of suspension)	Y	N	N	2/3
Close the meeting	Adjourn	I move to adjourn (Usually done by general consent)	Y	N	N	M



The Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) provides its members research-based leadership development services, policy and legal resources, and legislative advocacy supports. WSSDA builds leaders by empowering its members with tools, knowledge, and skills to govern with excellence and advocate for public education.

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