



- About WSSDA
- Advocacy & Legislation
- Conferences & Meetings
- Policy & Legal
- Board Training & Resources
- Publications
- News & Multimedia
- Awards & Recognition
- Foundation
- PRODUCTS & SERVICES
  - » Policy Updates & Consulting
  - » School Law Digest
  - » Lighthouse Training
  - » Customized Workshops
  - » Consultant Services
  - » On Call School PR Service
  - » Superintendent Search
  - » Paperless Meetings
  - » Community Engagement
  - » Strategic Planning

## WSSDA's Guide to Parliamentary Procedures

### Revision based on Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR), 10th Edition

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[Conducting Business](#) | [Order of Business](#) | [Minutes](#)  
[Main Motions](#) | [Subsidiary Motions](#) | [Privileged Motions](#)  
[Incidental Motions](#) | [Bring Back Motions](#)

### PREFACE

This guide to parliamentary procedures is presented by the Washington State School Directors' Association for use by local school boards within the State of Washington (for a printed copy, please contact WSSDA at 360.493.9231 or [mail@wssda.org](mailto:mail@wssda.org)). Each school board that uses the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)* should consult that manual for more complete treatment of parliamentary procedure.

### INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary law and parliamentary procedure is the key to order and to provide justice and fairness to all. Through both formal and informal parliamentary procedures, business meetings can be conducted in a thorough, orderly fashion, yet retain a democratic process. This manual will provide the basic concepts and guidelines, however, individual circumstances may fall under other rules of the parliamentary authority and the reference numbers should be accessed to clarify any complex situation.

Proper parliamentary procedure expedites the business and makes the most constructive use of limited time. All school board members should familiarize themselves with parliamentary rules and how to appropriately use either these rules, or special rules that have been approved by the board, or the parliamentary authority adopted by the board.

### Principles Of Parliamentary Law

- Equality of rights;

### RELATED LINKS

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Chart of Parliamentary Motions \(PDF\)](#)

- Majority decision;
- Minority rights;
- Right of discussion;
- Right to information;
- Fairness and good faith; and
- Courtesy and justice to all.

### **Purpose Of Parliamentary Procedure**

- To facilitate and expedite the transaction of business and promote cooperation and harmony;
- To consider one thing at a time;
- To have free and full debate;
- To protect the rights of the absentees;
- To channel the business procedures through the presiding for group action; and
- To record action which is taken and make it a matter of record.

### **CONDUCTING BUSINESS**

#### **Chairman**

The chairman (president) is the presiding officer and announces agenda items in the proper order for discussion. As each item on the agenda is disposed of, it is the duty of the chairman to announce the succeeding item on the agenda. Included on most agendas will be the minutes of the prior meeting, action items, communications, reports, unfinished business and, sometimes, new business. The agenda may also contain a "consent calendar" for handling routine, non-controversial, business items. (*WSSDA Policy 1210, RONR page 349-350*)

The chairman has only the rights as prescribed in the adopted documents. They are generally the spokesmen for the board. They may fully participate in all aspects of the assembly including making motions, debate and voting. (*WSSDA Policy 1210, RONR page 471*)

#### **Business**

The board handles its business by the presentation of communications to the board, reports, motion of a member or by consensus (general consent) of the board. All meeting must comply with the open meetings act. (*RCW 42.30*)

Although a board, the meetings are often held in a more informal format than a large board. Parliamentary process should be used to assist the board in accomplishing its purpose and not to be used in an obstructive manner. If the process is followed correctly, the meeting will progress smoothly and the rights and privileges of all members will be protected. (*RONR pages 470-471*)

On a board where the members are elected and

representing a constituency, all members have the duty and responsibility to participate fully in all deliberations and vote on behalf of their constituency.

### **Quorum**

A quorum is the number of board members that must be present to legally conduct business. The only business that can legally be transacted without a quorum is procedural business such as non-action items, adjourn to a specific time, adjourn, recess, or take measures to procure a quorum.

Washington State statute requires a majority of the entire board to be present for a quorum (*RCW 28A.343.390*)

### **Rules of Order**

A local school board functions under the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (RONR) and special rules to govern the proceedings for the conduct of business. Special rules adopted by the board supercede any rules contained in an adopted parliamentary authority in which they are in conflict. The business meeting is carried forward by motions or through informal procedures according to the authority or rules adopted by the board. (WSSDA Policy 1440)

## **ORDER OF BUSINESS**

### **Agenda**

School boards conduct their business according to an agenda cooperatively developed by the superintendent of schools, secretary, and the chairman or president of the board. The agenda lists topics in the order they will be discussed. Board agreement on the agenda is usually the first order of business.

To change or add to the order of business after adoption requires suspension of the rules. This requires a 2/3 vote or general consent. (*RONR pages 351-353*)

## **MINUTES**

### **Purpose**

The legal documents of the board are the minutes. They contain the actions taken by the board. Once approved, the signed copy becomes the official document of the proceedings of the board. Any copies provided to members prior to adoption should be marked as "draft" or other identifying mark to identify that they have not been approved. (*RONR pages 451-463*)

### **Content**

The first paragraph of the minutes should include the name of the board, date, time, place, type of meeting, name and title of the presiding officer,

names of members present or absent and the action taken on the previous meeting minutes. If a member is excused for a specific reason, this may also be listed. (RONR pages 451-456)

Minutes contain only the business and actions of the board and should not contain personal comments. All main motions (not withdrawn), points of order and appeals should be noted as well as substantial privileged, incidental motions or motions brought back before the board for consideration.

The name of the member moving a motion is recorded. If a second is made to a motion, the name of the person does not need to be recorded. Motions should be stated in the exact wording that was adopted or otherwise disposed of. The fact that they were amended should be indicated parenthetically. The results of all votes are recorded including counted and roll call votes. (RONR page 452)

The last paragraph contains the hour of adjournment and whether this was done by general consent or by motion.

Any public comments are stated by topic and overview only unless a full transcription is taken of testimony. Programs are referred to in summary form only. Tape recordings can assist in the preparation of minutes but may not be used as legal documentation.

All reporting members, including principals, superintendents, and other reporting personnel are noted in summary form indicating subject and actions. Personal comments are generally not included. However, any action taken on a report is recorded.

### **Corrections**

If previous minutes are corrected, the correction is made in the original document prior to approval and a notation is made in the current minutes that the previous meeting minutes were "adopted as corrected". Minutes are generally approved by general consent. (RONR page 452)

### **Changing**

If an error is found in previously adopted minutes, they can be corrected at any time through the motion to Amend Something Previously Adopted. (RONR 294-299)

### **MOTIONS**

#### **Classes**

Motions are classified as main, subsidiary, privileged, incidental and motions that bring a question again before the board (bring back

motions).

An **original main motion** brings new business before the board for action. A subsidiary motion deals with the pending motion. **Privileged motions** deal with items of business of the board that are of high priority. An **incidental motion** relates to the business of the board, not directly with the pending motion.

All motions have governing rules that state whether they need to be seconded, are debatable, amendable, the vote required and if they can be reconsidered. (See [Chart of Parliamentary Motions.](#))

### **MAIN MOTIONS**

Definition: A main motion is a new proposal that the board takes certain action or expresses itself as holding certain views. (RONR page 95)

There are eight basic steps in processing a motion. They are:

1. **Recognition** – A member addresses the chair and receives recognition by the chair. In this manner the member obtains the right to the floor.
2. **Motion** – After recognition by the chair, a member introduces a motion by stating, "I move that..." or by moving for the adoption of a written recommendation or resolution.

If clarification is needed the chair should assist the member in making the motion clear and concise before formally stating the motion.

A motion should be ruled out of order by the chairman if not proper for consideration at the time it is presented.

3. **Seconds** – Seconds are not routinely required for motions made by members of local school board. In small boards the chairman may recognize the motion without a second. (*WSSDA Policy 1440, RONR page 34*)
4. **Chair states the motion** – Until a motion is pending, the maker of the motion may suggest modification or withdraw the motion. A member may also recommend modifications to the motion ("friendly amendment"). Once the motion has been stated by the chair it becomes the property and under the control of the board. After being stated by the chair, any actions on the motion must have approval of the board. The stated motion becomes the pending motion before the board. (*WSSDA Policy 1440, RONR page 154*)
5. **Debate** – Once the motion is before the board, the chair shall direct discussion on the motion.

All debate must go through the chair and should not be member-to-member. This provides for continuity of debate. The chair is responsible to be sure all sides of an issue are presented fairly. It is in order for a member to speak in debate and conclude by offering a secondary motion. Remember, the motion is the item under discussion and personal remarks are always out of order. (*WSSDA Policy 1440, RONR page 41,374*)

*Pending Question* – The question most recently stated by the chairman is the immediately pending question, the one to be acted upon first. All debate must be limited to the immediate pending question. This means that if there is an amendment to the motion, this is the focus of debate until that particular question is settled. (This is the "last in-first out" principle).

*Germane* – The term "germane" means that the subject is relevant to, or having a bearing on, the subject of the pending motion. Debate must be germane to the immediate pending question. (*RONR page 125, 130*).

*Informal Debate* – Informal debate, which allows members to speak without limitations, is permitted in small boards. (*RONR pages 470-471, WSSDA Policy 1440*). When a motion is required it is stated as "I move to allow informal consideration on ...". Or "I move to allow informal discussion on ... for ... minutes". This is adopted by majority vote.

- 6. Closing Debate** – When debate has ceased on the pending question, and there is no objection, the chair states the question and takes a vote.

*Previous Question* – When a member wishes to stop debate, before regular debate has ended, the pending question they may "move the previous question". This motion requires a two-thirds vote. If the motion is adopted, the chair then takes a vote on the immediate pending question. If a member wishes to close debate on all pending questions they must "move the previous question on all pending questions". This procedure is discouraged in small boards (*RONR page 470*).

- 7. Vote** – Before action on a motion is completed a vote must be taken on the main or pending motion. This step should never be ignored even if there is agreement on the disposition of the pending business. There are many ways in which the vote may be taken which are listed below.

*General Consent/Consensus* – Often, when there is a consensus on a motion, time may be saved by the use of general consent. The chair states, "If there is no objection the motion to (restate the motion in final form) will be adopted." If a member objects, a formal vote must be taken. This method of voting is most often used to approve minutes, consent agendas, appointments, adopt non-controversial motions, and adjourning the meetings.

Like consensus, adoption by general consent does not imply that everyone agrees and is unanimous in their agreement, only that they may agree to go along with the majority decision. This is preferable to the use of consensus as it is recorded in the minutes as action taken.

*Voice Vote* – All votes on motions and resolutions shall be by 'voice' vote unless a member of the board requests an oral roll call. A tie vote shall cause a motion to be defeated. No action may be taken by secret ballot at any meeting required to be open to the public. (RCW 42.30, WSSDA Policy 1440)

*Roll Call* – A roll call vote may be requested by a member by stating "I move a roll call vote be taken". If adopted by a majority vote or general consent, the name of each member is called and their response is taken and recorded in the minutes. If a member wishes to abstain they answer "present". (WSSDA Policy 1440, RONR pages 405-407)

*Abstention* – Unless otherwise required by law or the documents of the board "the vote is determined by the number of members **present and voting**", therefore, abstentions are not considered a vote (RONR page 390). They are not recorded except in cases where a record of quorum must be established.

Abstentions may be required in cases of conflict of interest. These should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

8. **Vote and Results** – The result of all votes should be announced by the chair and recorded in the minutes. On a voice vote the chair states "The motion is adopted (defeated) and ...". On a vote requiring two-thirds vote, the chair states "There being (not being) two-thirds in the affirmative, the vote is adopted (not adopted) and ...."

*Action* – The chair has the responsibility to state any action to be taken as a result of the vote. This may include declaring

what will or will not be done or assigning tasks to complete the action on the motion adopted. Any action taken or assignments made should be recorded in the minutes.

### **SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS**

The purpose of the subsidiary motion is to assist the board in dealing with the pending main motion. The motions involved deal directly with the main motion or the disposition of the main motion. The subsidiary motions have an order or priority called precedence. Only a motion of higher rank can be proposed. For example, a motion to refer to committee is in order while the pending motion is being amended but the motion to postpone indefinitely would not be in order until the amendments had been voted on. (See [Chart of Parliamentary Motions](#).)

**Postpone Indefinitely** – This seldom-used motion is generally used for "killing" a motion that the assembly does not want to deal with. This is the lowest ranking motion. The motion is debatable, not amendable, and requires a majority vote. Only the adoption of the motion may be reconsidered. (RONR pages 121-124)

**Amend** – The motion to amend is the most commonly used motion. Its purpose is to refine the wording of the main motion before the main motion is adopted in its final form. The motion is amendable, debatable, requires a majority vote (even if the main motion requires a higher vote), and may be reconsidered. (RONR pages 125-160)

*Primary/Secondary* – There can be two forms of amendments. The **primary** amendment deals with changes to the wording in the main motion. The **secondary** amendment deals only with changes to the primary amendment.

*Germane* – Debate on amendments must be germane to the level of the motion being discussed. For example, secondary amendments must deal directly with the content of the primary amendment and not the content of the main motion.

**Refer to Committee** – This motion is used when further study by a particular subcommittee would be useful to either gather more information or refine the pending motion. If the committee is a subcommittee of the board its membership and duties should be defined. This committee may be given power to take action if that is the will of the appointing body. The motion is debatable, amendable, requires a majority vote and may be reconsidered if the committee has not begun action on the referred motion. (RONR pages 160-171)

No committee can be appointed that is in conflict

with duties assigned to another special or standing committee. (RONR pages 160-171)

**Postpone Definitely** – This motion is used when you want to put off consideration of a motion until the next meeting. This can also be used for delaying action to later in the same meeting. It is stated as "I move to postpone the pending motions (or all pending motions) to ...". The motion is debatable, amendable and requires a majority vote. (RONR pages 172-183)

**Limit Debate** – This motion is used to set a time for debate. It may either limit or extend limits of debate time. The motion should identify the limits as to whether it includes all pending motions, only the pending motion, or total debate time. It is stated as "I move to limit (or extend) debate on ...(motion(s) ... for ... minutes". Because this motion takes away the basic right of debate, it requires a 2/3 vote. It is not debatable and amendable only as to time or motions involved (the pending motion, all pending motions). (RONR pages 183-189)

**Previous Question (Stop Debate)** – This motion requests the assembly to stop debate and take a vote on the pending motion or motions. The "Call for the Question" should not be recognized without a formal motion and a 2/3 vote or general consent. It is stated as "I move the previous question", "I move to stop debate" or "I call the question". This motion is not debatable but is amendable as to how inclusive the motion should be (on pending question or all pending questions). Because this motion takes away a basic right of the member, it requires a 2/3 vote. (One member does not have the right to demand that debate be stopped and a vote taken).

This motion is generally not allowed in small boards or committees. (RONR pages 189-201)

**Table** – This motion is to *temporarily* set aside a pending motion. It is not used to postpone the motion to another time or to kill a motion. It is stated as "I move to table the pending motions to allow ...". This motion is not debatable or amendable and requires only a majority vote. This motion can be taken from the table after any intervening business. (RONR pages 201-210)

### **PRIVILEGED MOTIONS**

This category of motions pertains mostly to the rights of the board or member rights. Because of their importance they are not debatable. Some of them may interrupt pending business and/or speakers. (See [Chart of Parliamentary Motions.](#)) (RONR pages 211-239)

**Orders of The Day** – This motion requires the assembly to return to the order of business or time

line as set forth in the agenda. It is stated as "I call for the orders of the day" or "I request we return to the agenda". A 2/3 vote is required to suspend this right and continue with the business at hand or to change the order of the agenda. This motion takes priority over recognition of another member by the chair. (*RONR pages 211-216*)

**Question of Privilege** – This motion is used to protect the rights of the board or the rights of the individual member when something interferes with their ability to hear or be comfortable in the meeting. It also applies to subjects that pertain to the safety or welfare of the board that requires immediate action. It is stated as "I rise to a point of privilege". The chair then inquires as to the point and responds to solve the problem when possible. If emergent (such as "I cannot hear") then the motion may interrupt even if someone is speaking. (*RONR pages 216-222*)

**Recess** – This motion is for a temporary interruption in the meeting. It can only be amended as to time. It is stated as "I move to recess for \_\_\_\_\_ minutes". The motion is not debatable, is amendable and requires a majority vote or general consent. (*RONR pages 222-225*)

**Adjourn** – This motion formally closes a meeting. Adjournment is most often taken by general consent when the business of the meeting has been completed. The chair states "If there is no further business to come before the meeting the meeting will be adjourned ... (pause) ... the meeting is adjourned". When moved by a member it is stated as "I move to adjourn". The motion may not be associated with a specified time. It is not debatable or amendable and requires a majority vote. (*RONR pages 225-234*)

**Fix Time to Adjourn (Continued Meeting)** – This motion is to set the time for a meeting to be held before the next scheduled meeting. It is stated as "I move to adjourn to meet at ...." (stating place, time and date). The motion is not debatable, amendable as to location, date, and time and requires a majority vote. This motion does not adjourn the current meeting. If this motion is used it must not be in conflict with any of the open meeting act requirements. (*RCW 42.30, RONR pages 234-239*)

### ***INCIDENTAL MOTIONS***

Incidental motions arise out of another question that is or has just been pending. They deal with actions of the board in relation to pending business. They cannot be debated, except the motion to appeal. Most motions cannot be amended because of their intent is limited. They have no order of precedence. See [\*Chart of Parliamentary Motions.\*](#) (*RONR pages 240-288*)

There are two forms of incidental motions. They are ***incidental main motions*** that are made when no motion is pending (i.e. establishing time limits, form of voting, etc.). ***Incidental motions*** are those relating to actions of the board during consideration of a pending question (i.e. calling for roll call vote).

**Point of Order** – This motion is used to identify a breach of the assembly rules. It must be raised promptly at the time the breach occurs. It is stated as "I rise to a point of order". The chair must respond to the point unless the point continues to be dilatory. The decision of the chair may be appealed. (*RONR pages 241–247*)

**Point of Information** – This motion is a request directed at the chair, or through the chair, for information relevant to the business at hand but not related to parliamentary procedure. This should not become an entry for debate. It is stated as "I rise to a point of information". (*RONR pages 282-283*)

**Suspend the Rules** – This motion is used to ***temporarily*** change the order of business or rules of the assembly. Bylaws may not be suspended. Only individual items (not a class of items) on the agenda may be suspended at one time. However, each item may be laid aside individually to make necessary adjustments to the agenda. Because this motion changes a motion adopted by the assembly, it requires a 2/3 vote, a majority of the entire membership, or general consent. The motion is stated as "I move to suspend the rules and ....". (*RONR pages 252-258*)

**Division of the Assembly** – This motion is used to recount a vote taken. It is a demand vote and, if called, the chair takes a vote by another method than that of the original vote. If the initial vote was taken by voice, a hand or rising vote could be called for. If the member wishes to have the vote counted it must be so stated in the motion as "Division ... I call for a counted vote".

**Method of Voting** – This motion is used to request a roll call vote. It is stated as "I move the vote be taken by roll call". According to WSSDA Policy 1440 any one member can request this method of voting. Members respond by 'aye' or 'no' or, if abstaining, 'present'. The vote of the chair is taken last. Any vote taken under this motion is recorded in the minutes.

**Division of the Question** – When a motion encompasses different and distinct parts it may be divided. The motion should not require major rewriting to divide the parts of the motion. This motion is stated as "I move to divide the question by ... (identifying clear points of division)". (*RONR pages 261-264*)

**Appeal decision of the chair** – This motion is used when the member disagrees with the ruling of the chair on a question of parliamentary law. The chair may also use it to solicit a decision from the board on a point. This can relieve the chair of making a decision when they are not sure of the proper ruling. The motion is stated as "I appeal the decision of the chair".

There are specific debate rules for this motion. The chair may debate twice (opening and closing of debate) and other members may debate once. The vote is stated as "Shall the decision of the chair be sustained". A tie vote sustains the decision of the chair. (*RONR pages 247-252*)

**Withdraw** – This motion is used to permit a member to withdraw a motion after stated by the chair, withdraw a committee from an assigned action, or a member to withdraw from a committee assignment. Once the chair states a motion, a motion can only be withdrawn by consent of the assembly. This is most often done by general consent. It is stated as "If there is no objection ... will be withdrawn. (*WSSDA Policy 1440, RONR pages 283-386*)

### **BRING BACK MOTIONS**

This group of motions is formally called Motions That Bring A Question Again Before the Assembly. More commonly referred to as Bring Back Motions (BB's). Their purpose is to allow reconsideration of actions taken by the board or on behalf of the board. These motions have no order of precedence. (*RONR pages 72-78*)

**Take from the Table** – This motion is used to place an item of business that was temporarily laid aside back before the board. The motion can be taken from the table only at the same meeting or the next meeting if held within a quarterly interval. It is stated as "I move to take from the table the motion ...." The motion is taken from the table by majority vote. (*RONR pages 289-293*)

**Rescind/Amend Something Previously Adopted** – These motions are used to allow the board to change an action previously taken or ordered. The effect of rescind is to strike out an entire main motion, rule, resolution etc. The motion is then before the board as if never acted upon. It is stated as "I move to rescind the action taken on the motion ...(identify)..." This may not be used to change actions that are non-reversible.

Amend Something Previously Adopted is used to change only a part of the text or substitute a different version. The most common usage is amending bylaws or standing rules. It is stated as "I move to amend ... (rule) ... by ...(state proposed

changes) ... "

The motion requires a 2/3 vote or majority vote with previous notice or a majority of the total membership of the board. Bylaw (Rules of Order) amendments always require previous notice. (RONR pages 293-299)

**Reconsider** – This motion allows a majority in the board to bring an item back for further consideration. This allows correction of hasty, ill-advised, or erroneous action or to take into account additional new information that may have come up since the original vote. In a small board or committee, a member who did not vote on the losing side can make the motion to reconsider. (RONR page 304)

Making of the motion stops any actions that would be taken under the original motion. For this reason it can only be made on the same day as the adoption of the original motion. It is stated as "I move to reconsider the vote taken on ..." This requires a majority vote on reconsideration before the motion is again before the meeting. (RONR pages 304-324)

**Discharge a Committee** – This motion allows the board to remove a committee from consideration of a question assigned to them. It is generally used if a committee fails to report or meet as directed. It can also be used when urgent action is required and the board cannot wait for the committee to report. It is stated as "I move to discharge the committee from consideration of ...(identify) ... referred to them. This motion requires a majority vote with notice, 2/3 vote with-out notice, or a majority of the total board membership. (RONR pages 301-304)

**Ratify** – This motion is not recognized by RONR as a Bring Back motion but is often included in this category by other authorities. It is an incidental main motion and allows the board to approve **emergency** actions taken without a formal meeting. Actions must be in compliance with the open meeting laws and are limited to those actions that they would have the authority to do within a regular meeting. It is stated as "I move to ratify the actions taken by ...(who and what) ...". It requires a majority vote. (RCW 42.30, RONR pages 118-120)