

Board Minute – Understanding Robert’s Rules of Order for School Board Members

Part 2 of 2

In Part 1, we looked at how motions help school boards make decisions in a fair and organized way. Now, we’ll explore how Robert’s Rules guide the flow of discussion, how past decisions can be revisited, and how members can ask questions or raise concerns during meetings.

At times, board discussions can become lengthy or heated. Robert’s Rules provide tools to help meetings stay focused and productive. If a member feels discussion has gone on long enough, they can say, “I move the previous question.” This means they want to end debate and vote. It usually requires a two-thirds vote to pass. A member may also suggest, “I move that debate be limited to two speeches of three minutes each,” to help manage time and ensure everyone has a fair chance to speak.

When things become tense, or when the board simply needs a short break, a member can move for a recess by saying, “I move to recess for ten minutes.” Recesses are helpful for cooling down emotions or gathering thoughts, but members should not discuss board business during the break.

Sometimes, the board may want to revisit a previous decision. Robert’s Rules outline how to do this fairly. If a motion was tabled earlier, a member can completely remove it from the agenda by saying, “I move to take the motion from the table.” This can only happen if the board set a time or condition for reconsideration when it was tabled. If the item is not brought back by the next meeting, it is usually considered dead.

A motion to rescind allows the board to cancel or reverse a prior decision. If advance notice is given, a simple majority vote is enough. Without notice, it takes a two-thirds vote. However, some actions, like checks already sent, cannot be undone so cannot be revisited.

A motion to reconsider lets the board reexamine a motion that passed earlier in the same meeting. Only someone who originally voted in favor can make this motion. If it passes, the board debates and votes on the motion again. This helps ensure fairness if new information or perspectives come to light.

Board members can also ask for clarification or make sure proper procedures are being followed. A parliamentary inquiry is used when a member wants to check whether the meeting is following the correct process. A point of order is raised when a member believes something is being done incorrectly or outside the rules. The chair decides whether the concern is valid. A point of information, in contrast, is simply a request for clarification about the topic being discussed and not a procedural question.

If a member believes a motion is inappropriate, they can object to its consideration. The chair rules on whether the objection is valid. Members can also request to withdraw their own motion if they change their mind. Withdrawal requires only a majority vote.

Understanding Robert's Rules helps board members participate confidently and respectfully. These tools keep meetings fair, organized, and focused on the shared goal of serving students and the community.

While there is always more to learn, even a basic understanding of these procedures strengthens teamwork and ensures that every voice is heard in the decision-making process.

This document is not intended as legal advice or a replacement for expert opinions on Robert's Rules of Order. It is only intended as an informational piece providing a broad overview. Individual states often have information put out by their corresponding school board associations.