

MEETINGS A MESS? TRY PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

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Building public support for education involves conducting meetings of the Board of Education in an orderly and professional way which will assure constituencies that EFFICIENCY rather than BEDLAM characterizes board meetings. In the absence of public confidence in the fairness and efficiency of the Board of Education, there will be erosion of support for our schools. The United States Supreme Court described schools as "a most vital civic institution for the preservation of a democratic system of government", and the primary instrument for transmitting the values on which our society rests. Professional, orderly, and responsible behavior in the conduct of public business promotes support.

Public confidence is high when:

1. Board Members show familiarity with and adherence to accepted rules of parliamentary procedure.
2. The moderator conducts the meeting fairly and efficiently.
3. Volatile issues are handled in a controlled way with adherence to the principles of:
 - A. Order
 - B. Equality
 - C. Justice and Fairness
 - D. Rights of the Minority
 - E. Rights of the Majority

Public confidence is low when:

1. Meetings are conducted which violate legislative decrees, the bylaws of your organization, and rules of procedure which have been adopted by the Board of Education.
2. Board Members stray from discussion of the immediately pending question, make improper and inappropriate motions, use "parliamentary gimmicks" to unnecessarily delay and complicate the discussion.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide guidance on how a School Board Meeting can be transformed from an exercise that discourages both participants

and observers to a meeting that is efficient, organized, fair and reflective of the high standards which should be demanded of educational leaders.

PLANNING THE SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

One of the major challenges facing a School Board is the proper use of time. School Board should keep track of the length of their meetings. If a board consistently has meetings that last three (3) or four (4) hours or even longer, then it needs to take a careful look at ways to get the job done without holding long meetings which almost inevitably result in poor decision-making. If the board meeting goes beyond two hours, there is often a significant decline in problem-solving skills.

PREPARING THE AGENDA

The agenda can be used to streamline the meeting and eliminate many time consuming items that take time away from the most critical issues facing the board. By outlining the items to be covered during the meeting, the School Board can avoid surprises that come when issues are raised that have not been considered. The agenda also helps the board understand the totality of its responsibilities and provides a pattern of organization for the meeting.

The agenda for a meeting is usually prepared by the superintendent in cooperation with the chair of the board. The agenda preparation process should be disseminated to interested individuals. This will help assure that board members, administrators, staff and any concerned citizens or organizations will have an opportunity to place an item on the agenda.

Listed are tips for developing items for the agenda.

1. Board members and other concerned individuals should be informed of the date and time that the agenda is prepared. Every effort should be made to keep this time consistent throughout the year. Agenda items should be submitted in writing to the superintendent by a date/time specified in board policy. The deadline for agenda items should be at least a week prior to the meeting.
2. A record of unfinished items from previous meetings should be kept. These should be incorporated into the upcoming agenda.
3. At the beginning of each meeting, an opportunity should be provided for members to add items to the agenda. This provides the flexibility to include issues that may have arisen since the tentative agenda was prepared. However, the chair should not allow any member to add to the agenda at will. Once a member proposes the adding of an item to the agenda, the chair should ask, "is there any objection to adding this to the agenda?" If there is an objection, it should be put to a vote. If there is no objection, the agenda item can be added by unanimous consent. As a

general rule, additions to the agenda should be limited to emergency situations.

The superintendent should have the responsibility of distributing the agenda and appropriate support items at least three (3) to five (5) days prior to the board meeting. This will provide time to become familiar with the issues. A very poor image of the school board is projected when members open their packets for the first time when the meeting begins. This creates several problems:

1. Board members are reading when they should be listening.
2. It projects an image that the materials are not important enough to be examined prior to the meeting.
3. It is a sign that board members do not take their roles seriously.

Early distribution will also allow board members to organize the materials to conform to the order on the agenda. Some type of labeling or organized system should be devised to allow the board members to match support materials with agenda items. Some boards use color coding to accomplish this. A good image is not projected when one or more members finally locate pertinent materials after discussion has concluded.

TAKING ACTION IN THE BOARD MEETING

When the board reaches that portion of the agenda which calls for motions from the board, members need to be familiar with proper procedures for the handling of a motion. Many school boards may feel that they do not have to be so formal with their procedures. Such informality may work with a highly cohesive board that seldom has conflict. However, when new members come along who are accustomed to more formal procedures when motions or amendments are made that generate conflict, or when various strategies are used to defeat the motion, formal rules become a great asset to the board.

The typical practice of school boards is to use *Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, to govern the parliamentary procedures at meetings of the board, except as modified by local bylaws.

There are both reasons of legality and fairness which compel a school board to define procedures clearly. The first area of concern deals with the handling of a motion.

1. A Member Makes a Motion

It is helpful to have the motion in writing so that there will be no confusion over the wording. A board member should write the motion, introduce it, and pass it to the chair and then the secretary for recording in the minutes. There are times when a board member introduces a poorly worded motion. The chair then has the option, before the motion is seconded, to

assist in clarifying the wording. Once the motion is made and seconded, it can be altered only by amendment. It is important to understand that the chair has the same privilege to make motions as any other board member, unless your bylaws specify otherwise.

2. A Member Seconds the Motion

A second merely implies that the board member wishes to hear the motion discussed. It does not necessarily imply support for the motion. If no one seconds the motion, the chair states that "the motion fails for lack of a second." Some items that do not require a second include nominations, a call for a division of the assembly, a parliamentary inquiry, a point of information, a point of order, and a recommendation of a committee comprised of two or more board members.

3. The Chair States the Question

The chair is responsible for formally placing a motion before the members by stating the motion. It is especially important that the chair state the precise wording of the motion before debate begins and again before the vote is taken. When a motion has been amended, the chair can help clarify for the member the intent of the motion by stating the wording as amended. There are times during the course of debate when the chair should remind the board members of the motion to keep them from drifting off the subject.

4. The Members Debate

The person who makes the motion is entitled to speak first if he/she so desires. The chair should encourage members to confine their remarks to the immediately pending question. During the course of debate, some amendments to the main motion may be introduced.

If a member of the board proposes an amendment to the main motion, the amendment becomes the immediately pending question and must be resolved prior to continuing debate on the main motion. Amendments come in a variety of forms:

- A. Striking a portion of the main motion,
- B. Adding to the main motion, and
- C. Substituting for a portion of the main motion.

Listed below are some tips for handling amendments:

- A. Consider only one amendment at a time.
- B. After an amendment has been adopted, the chair should repeat the main motion as amended.

- C. While it is possible to amend an amendment, such a practice often leads to confusion and this should be used only when necessary.
- D. An amendment must be germane or in some way involved in the question that is under discussion.

Following debate and the vote on the amendment, the chair returns to discussion on the main motion.

The presiding officer cannot close debate as long as any member desires to speak on the motion. The proper way to close debate is either:

- A. To ask "Is there any objection to calling the previous question?"
- B. To have a member of the board make a motion to call the PREVIOUS QUESTION. This is a nondebatable motion requiring a two-thirds vote. It is important that the chair give everyone who wants to speak the opportunity to do so. It is also a good idea for the chair to participate in debate, as he/she represents a group of constituents.

5. The Members Vote

The bylaws of the school board should specify voting procedures. Before calling for the vote, the chair should repeat the motion so that everyone understands the issue that is being decided. The chair should always call for the negative vote even if it appears that the motion gained nearly unanimous consent. Under no circumstances should a secret ballot be allowed. The chair should announce the vote totals when giving the results and those totals should be recorded in the official minutes. The chair has the same voting rights as other members.

6. Announcing the Vote

The chair should always announce the outcome of the vote, giving the number who voted for and against the motion. Once this step is completed, the board is ready to move to consideration of other issues.

Even though many school boards utilize a formal procedure such as the one just described, some boards prefer to have a general discussion of the problem before formulating a motion. Since school boards have considerable flexibility in their adherence to formal procedures, it is possible that discussion prior to the motion might give the group wide latitude if they do not want to be restricted to being for or against the motion that is introduced. The disadvantage of proceeding with discussion prior to a motion is that members may have a difficult time limiting the scope of the debate.

RECONSIDERING OR RESCINDING A MOTION

Sometimes a board discovers information which may result in the need to reconsider or rescind an action previously taken. The purpose of a motion to reconsider is to "permit correction if hasty, ill advised or erroneous action, or to take into account added information or a changed situation that has developed since the taking of a vote." A motion to reconsider allows a board, anytime prior to adjournment of the meeting, to correct action which the board realizes should not have been taken during the meeting.

Some important things to remember about the motion to reconsider are:

- 1) The motion can be made only by a member who voted with the prevailing side,
- 2) The motion can be seconded by anyone in the group, and
- 3) The motion requires a majority vote.

According to accepted parliamentary procedure, if the school board desires to rescind an action taken at a previous meeting, it can do so by making a motion to rescind. This motion requires a two-thirds vote for adoption if no notice of intent to introduce the motion is given, but requires a simple majority if notice is given. Unlike the motion to reconsider, any member may make a motion to rescind. When this motion is introduced, it is possible to rescind the entire action or to strike out or change certain parts of the motion. Of course, local policies may not require strict adherence to these formal procedures.

DELAYING CONSIDERATION OF A MOTION

Items which are placed on the agenda may be discussed to a point where members realize that there is insufficient time to fully consider the matter. Also, matters of greater urgency may arise which make it necessary to temporarily dispose of a pending question. Thus, a member may introduce a motion to LAY ON THE TABLE which:

- 1) Can be applied to any main motion,
- 2) Is not debatable,
- 3) Cannot be amended, and
- 4) Requires a majority vote

Since the motion to table cannot be debated nor amended, the chair calls for a vote immediately after identifying the motion. Once a motion has been laid on the table, it can be taken up again at any time a majority of the members desire to consider the issue again. Any member of the board has the right to make a motion to take an issue from the table.

Another frequently used method of delaying action is to REFER TO A COMMITTEE. If the majority of board members believe that further investigation is necessary on an issue, the board may refer the issue to a committee. This motion:

- 1) Requires a second.
- 2) Is debatable, and
- 3) Can be amended.

If an appropriate committee does not exist, the chair may appoint a committee to consider the matter. The chair should seek consent from the board on the appointment of the committee.

In addition to the motion to LAY ON THE TABLE and the motion to REFER TO A COMMITTEE, the group may choose to POSTPONE consideration of a motion. A motion to POSTPONE INDEFINITELY has the effect of killing a motion for the duration of the board meeting, without forcing members to take a stand on the merits of the pending question. It is, in effect, an indirect way of rejecting a motion.

A motion to POSTPONE INDEFINITELY:

- 1) Requires a second.
- 2) Is debatable, and
- 3) Requires a majority vote for adoption.

Another alternative is to POSTPONE TO A DEFINITE TIME. This motion allows the group to dispose of the issue and move to additional business, but it allows the group to take the matter up again at the specified time. This motion:

- 1) Requires a second,
- 2) Is debatable, and
- 3) Requires a majority vote for adoption.

Thus, a school board has a number of options available to postpone consideration of the matter. These strategies should not be used to delay without good cause. If used properly, these motions allow the group to use the additional time provided to conduct further study on the matter.

Board member training should include the basic principles of parliamentary procedure. Mastery of all the rules is unnecessary for small board meetings. However, a knowledge of the basics will guide you through the chaos. Henry Robert wrote *Robert's Rules of Order* after being asked to preside over a meeting, and he did not know how. "My embarrassment was supreme," he wrote. "I plunged in, trusting to providence that the assembly would behave itself. But with the plunge went the determination that I would never attend

another meeting until I knew something of parliamentary law." Perhaps we can learn from this experience.

CHART OF PARLIAMENTARY MOTIONS

MOTION	REQUIRES SECOND	DEBATABLE	AMENDABLE	VOTE REQUIRED
14. Fix time to which to adjourn	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
13. Adjourn	Yes	No	No	Majority
12. Recess	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
11. Raise a Question of Privilege	No	No	No	None
10. Call for the Orders of the Day	No	No	No	None
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS				
9. Lay on the Table	Yes	No	No	Majority
8. Call for the Previous Question	Yes	No	No	2/3
7. Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
6. Postpone Definitely	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
5. Refer to Committee	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
4. Amend the Amendment	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
3. Amend or Substitute	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
2. Postpone Indefinitely	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
MAIN MOTIONS				
1. Original Main Motion (Resolution)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Bring Question Again/Reconsider	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

MOTION	REQUIRES SECOND	DEBATABLE	AMENDABLE	VOTE REQUIRED
Take from the Table	Yes	No	No	Majority
Rescind	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority, with notice
INCIDENTAL MOTIONS No order of precedence				
Parliamentary Inquiry	No	No	No	None
Point of Information	No	No	No	None
Point of Order	No	No	No	None
Division of the Assembly	No	No	No	None
Appeal from Decision Chair	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Modify or Withdraw a Motion	No	No	No	Majority
Divide a Motion	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Create a Blank	Yes	No	No	Majority
Suspend the Rules	Yes	No	No	2/3
Object to Consideration	No	No	No	2/3

SIMPLIFIED CHART OF PARLIAMENTARY MOTIONS

Move it, amend it, and refer it or postpone it or vote on it

MOTION	DEBATABLE	AMENDABLE	VOTE REQUIRED
8. Adjourn	No	No	Majority
7. Recess	No	Yes	Majority
6. Close Debate	No	No	2/3
5. Postpone Definitely	Yes	Yes	Majority
4. Refer to Committee	Yes	Yes	Majority
3. Amend the Amendment	Yes	No	Majority
2. Amend or Substitute	Yes	Yes	Majority
1. Main Motion (Resolution)	Yes	Yes	Majority
Reconsider	Yes	No	Majority
Rescind	Yes	Yes	Majority, with Notice

MOTIONS DEALING WITH THE GENERAL CONDUCT OF THE MEETING NO ORDER OF PRECEDENCE

Parliamentary Inquiry	No	No	None
Point of Order	No	No	None
Division of the Assembly	No	No	None
Appeal from Decision of Chair	Yes	No	Majority
Withdraw or Modify a Motion	No	No	Majority
Divide the Motion	No	Yes	Majority
Suspend the Rules	No	No	2/3

See Jon Ericson, Notes and Comments on Robert's Rules

ROBERTS RULES OF ORDER WEBSITE

<http://www.robertsrules.com>

The website includes:

- Information about *Robert's Rules of Order* and its current, up-to-date edition.
- Information about the authors who have created this leading manual of parliamentary procedure.
- How you can use *Robert's Rules of Order* to help your organization run more smoothly.
- Links that allow you to purchase copies of the book for yourself or your organization. Caution: *Robert's Rules of Order* are revised periodically, so be sure you are purchasing the edition that your board has agreed to use.
- Reference Information
- Access to questions and answers that others have provided. If you want to see the answers given by the experts to selected questions of general interest, you can browse our Ask the Authors feature.
- Ability to ask any question of the experts. If you have a question about what *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* prescribes for a particular situation, or want to provide an answer to a question someone else has posted, you can participate in the Question and Answer Forum.

**FORM TO REVEAL BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP WITH
LEE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD**

I, _____, have been
appointed by the Lee County School Board to serve on the _____
_____ Advisory
Committee.

(PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS BELOW THAT APPLY TO YOU)

1. I am presently doing business with the Lee County School Board in the
following manner:

2. I have an employment relationship with:

which is presently doing business with the Lee County School Board.

3. I have a contractual relationship with _____
which is presently doing business with the Lee County School Board. The nature
of that contractual relationship is: _____

I agree to abstain from voting on any matter of committee business that may
personally benefit me, my employer or the entity with which I have a contractual
relationship.

(Signature)

(Date)