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How to Run a School Election in Kenya: From Prefect Nominations to Final Results

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A step-by-step guide to running fair school elections in Kenya — positions, rules, nominations, secret ballots, counting and results, plus how digital voter codes replace paper ballots.

Running a school election well comes down to six jobs: agree the positions and who votes for them, publish written rules, vet candidates, run orderly campaigns, give every voter a fair secret ballot, and count and announce results the same day. When any of those steps is improvised on the day, you get disputes that follow the school for the rest of the term.

This guide walks through the whole process the way Kenyan schools actually run it, from class monitors in primary school to full student councils in secondary school, and shows where a digital voting system removes the two biggest headaches: printing and securing ballot papers, and counting votes in front of an audience.

Who this guide is for

Headteachers, deputy heads, patrons of the student council, and teachers who have just been told "you are organising the prefect elections this term." It also helps school owners who want student leadership elections that parents and the board can trust.

Step 1: Decide the positions and the electorate

Before anything else, write down exactly what is being elected and who votes. In most Kenyan schools that is some mix of:

- **School-wide positions** — head boy/head girl (or school captains), deputy captains, dining hall, games, library and dormitory prefects. Every student votes.
- **Per-class or per-stream positions** — class monitors and class prefects. Only that class or stream votes. In a school with Grade 8 East and Grade 8 West, each stream elects its own monitor.

Get the position list signed off by the head and, where your school rules require it, the Board of Management. Changing the list mid-election is how disputes start.

Step 2: Publish written rules and a timeline

One page is enough. It should state the nomination window, campaign period, voting day, who counts the votes, and what happens in a tie. Pin it on the noticeboard and read it out at parade. Students forgive a result they dislike; they do not forgive rules that appear to change to suit a favourite.

Pick a date that does not collide with exams. Early in the term works best: outgoing prefects can still brief the incoming team, and the election does not eat into revision time for candidates sitting KJSEA or KCSE.

Step 3: Nominations and vetting

Open nominations for a few days. Let students nominate themselves or be nominated by classmates, usually with a seconder. Then vet against criteria you published in the rules: for example, no pending disciplinary case, and a reasonable academic and conduct record. Vet quietly and announce only the final approved candidate list — vetting publicly turns into a popularity trial.

Step 4: Campaigns

Give candidates a fixed campaign window, often one week, with clear boundaries: where posters may go, whether class-to-class campaigning is allowed, and a speech session at parade or in the hall where each candidate gets the same number of minutes. A short, supervised campaign teaches more civic sense than six weeks of chaos.

Step 5: Register voters and prepare the ballot

Your class register is already your voter register, so this step is mostly about the mechanics of casting a secret vote:

- **Paper ballots:** print ballot papers per position, prepare ballot boxes, and plan how students will be called to vote class by class without queue-jumping or double-voting.
- **Digital voting:** each voter gets a unique code instead of a ballot paper. They enter the code at a voting station (a laptop, tablet or the lab), mark their choice on screen, and the code stops working once used. No paper to print, spoil or recount.

Whichever method you use, the register must be final before voting day. Late admissions and transfers need to be handled at the desk, not guessed at.

Step 6: Voting day

Appoint returning officers — usually two or three teachers plus a few trusted senior students to manage queues. For each polling station, the flow is the same: verify the voter, issue the ballot (or check their code), let them vote in private, send them off. Keep a tally of how many voters each station has served so you can reconcile at the end.

With a digital ballot this is simpler. In Mwalimu Ease, an admin creates the election, adds the positions and approved candidates, then generates and prints a unique voter code for every student. A teacher opens a polling-station link on a shared device, unlocks it with a personal PIN, and students vote one after another in kiosk mode — the device stays locked to the ballot between voters. Live turnout shows on the admin page while voting is open, so you can see that Grade 7 has voted but Grade 9 has not.

Step 7: Count and announce the same day

Counting in front of observers is what makes the result believable. On paper, count at each station with candidate agents watching, fill a tally sheet per position, and get it signed before moving to the next. On a digital ballot, results are already tallied — you only need to review them for ties or unopposed positions before declaring.

Announce at parade or in the hall the same day if you can. A result announced a week later invites rumours. State the vote counts, not just the winners; transparency is the point.

Step 8: Hand over and keep records

Issue the new leaders with their badges or certificates, set their first meeting, and file the nomination list, rules, tally sheets (or a results PDF) in the school records. If a parent or board member questions the result later, your paperwork is the answer.

Common mistakes that cause disputes

- **No written rules.** Every disagreement then becomes a negotiation about what the rules "should" be.
- **Teachers steering the outcome.** Vetting is fine; quietly disqualifying a popular candidate is how you lose the students' trust in the whole idea of elections.
- **A ballot that is not secret.** Voting by show of hands or on a shared sheet produces results nobody can defend.
- **Counting behind closed doors.** Even an honest count looks rigged without observers or a visible tally.
- **No record of the numbers.** Keep tally sheets or export the results report; "the computer said so" is not a record.

Election day checklist

- Position list and electorate approved and published
- Written rules and timeline on the noticeboard
- Nominations closed, candidates vetted, final list announced
- Campaign rules agreed with teachers on duty
- Voter register final; ballot papers printed or voter codes generated
- Polling stations, returning officers and counting observers named
- Tie-break rule agreed before counting starts
- Announcement slot booked (parade or hall) for same day
- Certificates/badges ready and results filed

Where Mwalimu Ease fits

Mwalimu Ease includes a school elections module built for exactly this workflow. You create positions once — school-wide ones like head boy/head girl, or per-station ones like class monitors where each class elects its own — add candidates, and generate printable voter codes for the whole register in one click. Voting runs through a shareable link: students vote by code on their own phones, or a teacher opens a PIN-locked station link on a shared device that stays in kiosk mode between voters. Results tally live, unopposed candidates can be declared directly, and the election closes with a results record you can print — including winner certificates with your school branding. It replaces the ballot boxes, the hand-cut papers and the late-night counting, and the register it uses is the same student register you already keep for fees and reports.

Frequently asked questions

Can school elections be done online in Kenya?

Yes, and many schools now do. The practical concern is preventing double-voting, which is what per-student voter codes solve: each code votes once and then stops working. A supervised station (a laptop in the library or a tablet carried class to class) is more controlled than sending the link home.

What happens if two candidates tie?

Decide before voting day and write it in the rules. Common options are a re-run between the tied candidates within a day or two, or a decision by the election committee where the rules allow it. What matters is that the rule existed before the tie did.

Should primary schools run elections or appoint prefects?

Both approaches are common. Even in primary school, a simple ballot for class monitor teaches pupils how elections work before they meet the real thing. Keep it small: fewer positions, shorter campaigns, more teacher supervision.

Who should count the votes?

At least two people who did not campaign for anyone — typically teachers acting as returning officers — with candidate representatives or senior student observers watching. With a digital ballot, the system tallies automatically and your job shifts to reviewing and declaring.

Do parents need to be involved?

Not in voting, but telling parents the election is happening — and announcing results in the same newsletter or WhatsApp group where they hear school news — builds trust in the process and in the student leaders it produces.

Sources: Kenya Basic Education Act (2013) on school governance; Ministry of Education (education.go.ke). Election procedures in this guide are practical recommendations, not a legal requirement. Last reviewed 15 November 2026.

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