

Perceptions of Secondary School Boards of Management on Multi-Agency Security Partnerships in Preventing Student Unrest in Secondary Schools in Nyakach Sub-County, Kisumu, Kenya

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Abstract

Student unrest in Kenyan secondary schools has become a recurring challenge, often resulting in property destruction, death of students through arson attacks, learning disruptions, and strained community relations. In 2026 alone, 204 senior schools were affected. In Kisumu County, Nyakach Sub-County, 43% of schools have experienced unrest in the recent past. While many studies recommend establishing multi-agency security partnerships to address school unrest, empirical evidence on the views of the Board of Management (BOM) regarding their inclusion is lacking. This study explores the perceptions of BOM regarding the role of multi-agency security partnerships in managing and preventing unrest in Nyakach Sub-County. The team integrates the National Police Service (NPS), National Government Administration Officers (NGAO), and the National Intelligence Service (NIS). The study employed a cross-sectional design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A total of 126 were sampled from 742 BOM members in 53 senior schools in the study area. Key informants selected included 2 Sub-County education officials, 1 Curriculum Support Officer (CSO), 12 principals, and 5 student leaders. The survey results reveal positive perception on collaborative security model, with 89.2% of respondents agreeing that the proactive involvement of multi-agency security teams can prevent school unrest. However, the study noted that challenges such as mistrust, delayed response, and inadequate sensitization can hinder effectiveness. The study concludes that the establishment of the MAS partnership is supported, but the government must strengthen trust, communication, and proactive engagement among the stakeholders is critical to sustainable school security.

Keywords: Board of Management, Multi-Agency Security, Partnership, prevention, school unrest.

Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2018) reported that over one-third of educational institutions worldwide have faced escalating security incidents, ranging from arson and riots to physical violence. Gottfredson et al. (2020) highlighted the United States' "School Resource Officers" model, which prioritizes mentorship and early intervention to mitigate security risks. Similarly, in the United Kingdom's "Safer Schools Partnerships," leverage multi-agency intelligence to

identify early risks (Shaw, 2004). These models suggest that integrating security agencies into the school fabric can proactively address unrest. While Gottfredson et al. (2020) and Shaw (2004) in the US and UK, respectively, emphasized how the multi-agency model proactively addresses security issues in schools, there is limited empirical data on how these preventive frameworks are perceived or implemented in developing countries, particularly within local governance structures like school boards of management. In South Africa, programs such as "Crisp" were designed to link schools with police stations and local safety teams to manage violence and sexual harassment (Government of South Africa, 2025). A study by Masingaa and Sibanda (2025) showed that participants (learners and educators) supported the need to involve the South African Police Service and other stakeholders in the fight against violence and crime in schools. However, while the Department of Basic Education (2025) reported that persistent shortages of police personnel continued to hamper effective conflict resolution, empirical data on how school boards of management perceive the integration of security agencies remains scarce. In Botswana, Secondary schools have been plagued with cases of student unrest and indiscipline, and studies recommend partnerships with security agencies rather than reactive force by the police (Akwai, 2016; Oats, 2018; Garegae, 2019). Empirical literature on how the school board of management works with security agencies is lacking.

In Kenya, student unrest and strikes have been perennial occurrences, resulting in wanton destruction of school property and loss of life (National Crime Research Centre, 2017). In June 2026, the Education Cabinet Secretary, in a press briefing, noted that over 200 secondary schools experienced unrest (Kenya Times, 6th June 2026). Manifestations of student unrest usually include the burning of dormitories, fighting among students, boycotting classes, theft of school property, refusing to accept punishment, bullying, and striking against the school administration (Chemutai, Onkware & Iteyo, 2020; Kenya Times, 6th June 2026). These incidents are frequently accompanied by physical assaults on educators and peers, alongside mass walkouts (Chemutai et al., 2020). National data indicate that these disturbances often peak in the second term (National Crime Research Centre, 2017; Kenya Times, 6th June 2026). A lot of studies on secondary school unrest have revolved around causes including poor communication between students and administrators, harsh disciplinary measures without counselling support, inadequate facilities and welfare (diet, recreation, dormitories), lack of participatory leadership and impact on academics especially loss of instructional time and poor performance (Orodho, 2014; Ouma & Simatwa, 2015; Nyaga, & Muthaa, 2016; National Crime Research Centre, 2017; Opere et al. 2019; Chemutia et al., 2020. Iteyo et al. 2020).

Previous studies have revealed that the collaboration conflict management strategy is rated the best strategy of solving and averting conflicts in secondary schools in Kenya (Mboya, Kiplagat & Yego, 2019). The research emphasized that when teachers, administrators, and students engage in joint problem-solving, open communication, and shared responsibility, conflicts are less likely to escalate into unrest (Mboya et al., 2019). In Manderu, Daud, Thinguri, and Mugwe (2023) showed that involving multiple stakeholders (teachers, parents, community leaders, and local authorities) is the most effective way to prevent and manage student unrest in secondary schools. The study revealed that schools with well-implemented security plans reported fewer cases of unrest, vandalism, and violence (Daud et al., 2023). However, views of the school board of management are lacking in the existing literature. Currently, education stakeholders are calling for a multi-sectoral approach to address the root causes of this instability affecting secondary schools (Kenya Times, 6th June 2026). However, lack of empirical evidence, especially on the BOM's

perception of the proposed multi-sectoral collaboration, is likely to hamper the effectiveness of the process.

In Nyakach Sub-County, 23 out of 53 public secondary schools have suffered from devastating waves of arson and riots (Ageng'a & Simatwa, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2019). In this area, student unrest is deeply embedded in the region's socio-environmental risks of a long-standing Sondu border conflict between Kisumu and Kericho counties, mainly involving the Luo and Kipsigis communities (Odero & Onyango, 2026). Iteyo et al. (2020) and Opere et al. (2019) observe that students in this area could frequently emulate the violent conflict in the surrounding community, particularly those arising from inter-ethnic tensions along the Nyakach-Sondu border. The nature of unrest here is often defined by a "forcing goals" strategy—a win-lose approach adopted in the absence of functional Peace Clubs—which results in targeted strikes against school administrations. These localized manifestations also display gender-specific variations, with physical destruction more common in male-dominated environments, while verbal abuse and passive resistance are more prevalent in female institutions (Iteyo et al., 2020). Although prior studies have recommended collaborative approaches involving teachers, parents, community leaders, and local officials in school governance, there remains a critical gap in understanding how BOM perceive collaboration with other security actors such as the police, chiefs, county commissioners, and national government administrators. Without clarity on these perceptions, efforts to build sustainable, multi-agency strategies for managing student unrest risk being fragmented and ineffective, leaving schools vulnerable to recurring cycles of disruption and insecurity. Therefore, this study examined how Boards of Management perceive multi-agency security partnerships in managing student unrest.

Statement of the Problem

Despite existing research highlighting collaboration as the most effective conflict management strategy in secondary schools, there remains a significant gap in understanding the role and perceptions of BOM in Kenya. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of joint problem-solving among teachers, administrators, students, and community stakeholders in preventing unrest. However, these studies have largely overlooked the BOM's views on multi-agency collaboration with critical security actors such as the police, chiefs, county commissioners, and national government administrators. In Nyakach Sub-County, student unrest is often compounded by socio-environmental risks and inter-ethnic tensions along the Sondu border. Thus, without clarity on how BOMs perceive and engage in multi-sectoral security partnerships, efforts to build sustainable strategies risk fragmentation, leaving schools vulnerable to recurring cycles of disruption, violence, and insecurity. Therefore, this study sought to examine the perceptions of BOM regarding multi-agency security collaborations in managing student unrest in secondary schools within Nyakach Sub-County.

Justification of the Study

The justification for this study is rooted in the intersection of national policy mandates, global development agendas, and an urgent localized security crisis in Kenya's education sector. At the macro level, this investigation directly aligns with Kenya's Vision 2030 and the United Nations' SDG (4), both of which position safe, non-violent, and inclusive learning environments as foundational pre-requisites for quality education and national development. By critically evaluating a collaborative framework, this study shifts contemporary scholarship away from reactive containment toward proactive violence prevention.

Legally, BOM holds the primary custodial responsibility for school safety, yet there is a complete lack of empirical clarity on how these boards perceive or collaborate with MAS teams. Consequently, this study bridges this vital empirical and contextual gap, offering actionable insights to optimize institutional governance, refine educational security policies, and foster sustainable, secure learning environments.

Theory Underpinning the Study

Symbolic Interactionism (SI), as advanced by Herbert Blumer (1969), offers a powerful lens for this analysis by arguing that human actions are guided by the meanings individuals assign to their experiences. The theory has three tenets. Blumer states that meaning dictates behaviour. The first tenet asserts that human beings act toward things—including physical objects, other people, institutions, or situational contexts—based on the specific meanings those things hold for them. This principle fundamentally breaks away from psychological behaviourism, which suggests humans simply react automatically to external stimuli. In Blumer's view, there is a crucial buffer between a stimulus and a human response: the process of assigning meaning. People do not experience the world raw; they experience it through their definitions of reality. For example, if two people see a police car, they do not react automatically or identically. A person who has lived a privileged life free of legal trouble might view the police car as a symbol of safety, prompting them to relax. Conversely, a person from a heavily policed, marginalised community might interpret the exact same vehicle as a symbol of threat or impending harassment, causing their heart rate to spike and prompting them to change direction.

The second tenet according to Blumer (1969) states that meaning comes from interaction. The second tenet focuses on the origin of these meanings, stating that meaning is a social product born out of the ways people interact with one another. Blumer rejects two traditional views of meaning: the realistic view (that meaning is inherently baked into an object naturally) and the psychological view (that meaning is a private, internal mental state created by a person's isolated mind). Instead, meaning is created through communication, language, and socialization. It is negotiated between people. Consider a simple object like a diamond ring. A diamond is geologically just a pressurized lump of carbon; it holds no inherent marital meaning on its own. It also does not mean "marriage" simply because an individual decided it did in isolation. The ring symbolises love, commitment, and marital status because generations of human beings interacted, marketed, ritualised, and collectively agreed that this specific object represents that specific social arrangement. We learn what things mean by watching how others act toward them and by interacting with those people directly.

The third tenet, according to Blumer, states that meanings are modified through interpretation. In simple terms, this means we do not just react to the world like robots. Instead, we constantly rethink what things mean to us based on our changing experiences. Blumer argued that the meaning of an object, a word, or an action can change over time. When you encounter something, your mind goes through a quick two-step process: That meanings remain dynamic rather than static, asserting that they are shaped and altered through an internal interpretive process. When an individual encounters a situation, they do not merely apply a pre-learned meaning like a robot reading code. Instead, they engage in a silent internal dialogue. During this internal monologue, the individual selects relevant facts, tests potential meanings against the current reality, and transforms those meanings to fit the immediate context. This interpretive flexibility is visible when social rules are bent. For instance, if you are walking down a street and a stranger aggressively runs toward you, your initial interpretation might be "danger," prompting you to run or defend yourself. However, as you hold a split-second internal dialogue, you notice a runaway stroller rolling into

traffic behind you. You instantly modify your interpretation: the stranger is not an attacker; they are a desperate parent trying to save a child. Your behaviour instantly shifts from self-defence to cooperation or empathy. This internal handling allows humans to navigate a changing world creatively rather than being trapped by rigid definitions.

In the context of school governance, "unrest" is not merely a spontaneous disruption for the BOM to suppress, but a physical manifestation of the meanings the board attaches to the school environment, policies, and social climate.

To effectively analyse how school disruptions are handled, researchers must move beyond viewing the BOM's reactions as random administrative tasks. Instead, they must explore the board members' internal interpretations and symbolic understanding of their roles. When student dissatisfaction arises, the BOM processes these events through their own peer dynamics. This transforms individual administrative concerns into a shared institutional stance on discipline and control.

When the BOM operates solely through top-down directives, the BOM denies itself the platform to negotiate meaning with the wider school community. Consequently, when the BOM introduces new regulations without dialogue, they undergo an internal interpretive process that frames these rules as necessary tools for order. However, because they lack a collaborative channel to adjust these interpretations alongside stakeholders, the BOM often views the resulting student unrest as a direct threat to institutional authority rather than a call for dialogue.

This theoretical grounding becomes equally critical when evaluating the interventions, the BOM uses to curb these disruptions, specifically MAS activities. Under the tenets of Symbolic Interactionism (SI), the BOM's sensitization efforts are fundamentally a social interaction. Through these activities, the board attempts to project and establish its own defined meanings of policy and discipline onto the school community.

For MAS initiatives implemented by the BOM to be successful, students must assign positive and constructive meanings to them. If learners interpreted sensitisation efforts as manipulative or overly policing, the strategies will inevitably fail to prevent conflict. Thus, the extent and effectiveness of MAS strategies hinged entirely on their ability to foster open engagement and active listening. Ultimately, effective unrest prevention relies on transforming the social patterns within schools. By involving students in decision-making—such as through active student councils—MAS strategies can alter the students' internal interpretive process. Instead of viewing the administration as an adversarial force, students begin to see them as partners. SI demonstrates that when open, collaborative interaction was established, mutual meanings are co-created.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design, which was primarily concerned with describing a phenomenon in its current state without manipulating any variables (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). This design was selected because it was effective in gathering detailed, original data regarding the determinants of a phenomenon within a large population (Kothari & Garg, 2019).

The descriptive approach was particularly appropriate for this study as it allowed the researcher to investigate how BOM perceives the role of multi-agency security teams in influencing safety in public secondary schools in Nyakach Sub-County. Given the large magnitude of the target population and the constraints of time and resources, this design facilitated the use of representative sampling to generate

findings that could be generalized across the sub-county (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). By employing this design, the researcher was able to construct a comprehensive profile of the perceptions and roles of various stakeholders in managing school security.

Study Area

The research was conducted in public secondary schools within Nyakach Sub-County, Kisumu County, covering approximately 326.7 km² across five wards. Nyakach was purposively selected due to disproportionately high unrest rates, with 23 of 53 schools experiencing insecurity (Ageng'a and Simatwa, 2011, MoE, 2019).

Study Population

The primary population of interest consisted of the BOM members within the 53 public secondary schools in Nyakach Sub-County, Kisumu County.

Each of the 53 schools is governed by a board comprising fourteen (14) members, resulting in a primary target population of 742 BOM members. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of school security, the study population also integrated key education stakeholders, including Sub-County education officials, Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs), teachers, students, and parents. These groups were included to provide a holistic perspective on the multi-agency security approach within the sub-county's educational framework.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

Sample Techniques

To ensure a representative and robust data set, the study employed a multi-stage sampling design integrating both probability and non-probability techniques. Initially, stratified random sampling was used to categorize 53 public secondary schools into five strata based on administrative wards, ensuring geographic representation across Nyakach Sub-County. Within these strata, systematic random sampling was applied to the sampling frame of 742 Board of Management (BOM) members; specifically, seven participants were selected from each 14-member board to achieve the desired sample size. Complementing this, purposive sampling was utilized to recruit key informants—including education officials, teachers, and student leaders—based on their specialized knowledge and direct experience with school unrest. This methodological triangulation ensured that the final sample provided a balanced, credible, and academically rigorous reflection of the region's security dynamics.

Sample Size

Adhering to the methodological framework proposed by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), which recommends a sample size of 10% to 30% for descriptive research, this study adopted the upper threshold of 30% to enhance statistical power and representativeness. Consequently, 18 Boards of Management (BOM) were sampled from the 53 public secondary schools in Nyakach Sub-County. From each selected board, seven respondents were systematically recruited, ensuring a total sample of 118 BOM participants. This sampling strategy prioritized participants with the requisite expertise and institutional knowledge to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected, thereby providing a robust analytical basis for evaluating the role of MAS in school management.

Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire, selected for its efficiency, versatility, and ability to yield both quantitative and qualitative data (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The instrument was partitioned into four thematic sections tailored specifically for BOM members. To enhance

the depth and rigor of the data, a triangulated question format was employed: open-ended questions were utilized to elicit nuanced qualitative insights and detailed explanations; closed-ended questions provided structured data for statistical inference; and Likert-type scales were integrated to quantitatively measure the intensity of respondents' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the MAS approach.

The study utilized Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to elicit nuanced insights and expert perspectives that standardized instruments might omit. The researcher conducted twelve purposive interviews with a strategic cross-section of stakeholders to address the study's core objectives. These included; Four Education Officers were interviewed to evaluate administrative and policy-level frameworks regarding the BOM's proactive engagement with the MAS team for unrest prevention. Four deputy principals provided granular, field-level data on the tactical involvement of MAS in de-escalating and countering active disturbances within the school environment. Four senior teachers were consulted to obtain detailed procedural insights into the role of MAS in facilitating post-unrest investigations and recovery. To ensure methodological consistency and systematic coverage of the research themes, a standardized interview guide was employed. This qualitative approach facilitated the triangulation of professional experiences, capturing the expert discourse of key education administrators in Nyakach Sub-County.

The study also employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), a qualitative technique involving the convergence of individuals with shared experiences to engage in structured dialogue. This method was instrumental in capturing nuanced data regarding the perceptions, attitudes, and lived experiences of stakeholders directly impacted by institutional instability. The researcher conducted ten purposive FGDs, each comprising six participants, stratified to address the study's core objectives: Four FGDs with Parents: These sessions elicited community-level insights into the extent to which BOM engage MAS teams for the proactive prevention of school unrest. Three FGDs with School Prefects: As primary student leaders, this cohort provided granular data on the tactical role of MAS in de-escalating and countering active disturbances. Three FGDs with General Students: These discussions gathered broader student perspectives on the procedural impact and perceived fairness of involving MAS in post-unrest investigations.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data gathered from open-ended questionnaire items, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved a rigorous process of reviewing the collected data word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence to identify, categorize, and code recurrent themes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The qualitative findings are presented in narrative form, supported by verbatim quotations to capture the authentic voices and perspectives of the participants.

Data derived from closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics. This process involved the use of frequencies and percentages to summarize the data. The results are presented clearly through frequency tables and charts to illustrate the trends and patterns regarding the role of MAS in Nyakach Sub-County.

Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to strict institutional and governmental ethical protocols. Formal approvals were obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), the Maseno University Ethical Review Committee (MUERC), and the Kisumu County Commissioner's Office. Before data collection, all respondents provided written informed consent. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To protect participant privacy and school security, data collection and reporting maintained absolute anonymity and confidentiality by excluding all identifying information. All collected

data were securely stored on a password-protected computer restricted exclusively to the researcher. Finally, a summary of the findings was promised to the participants, and the comprehensive results have been disseminated through an open-access, peer-reviewed journal to contribute to the broader scientific literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

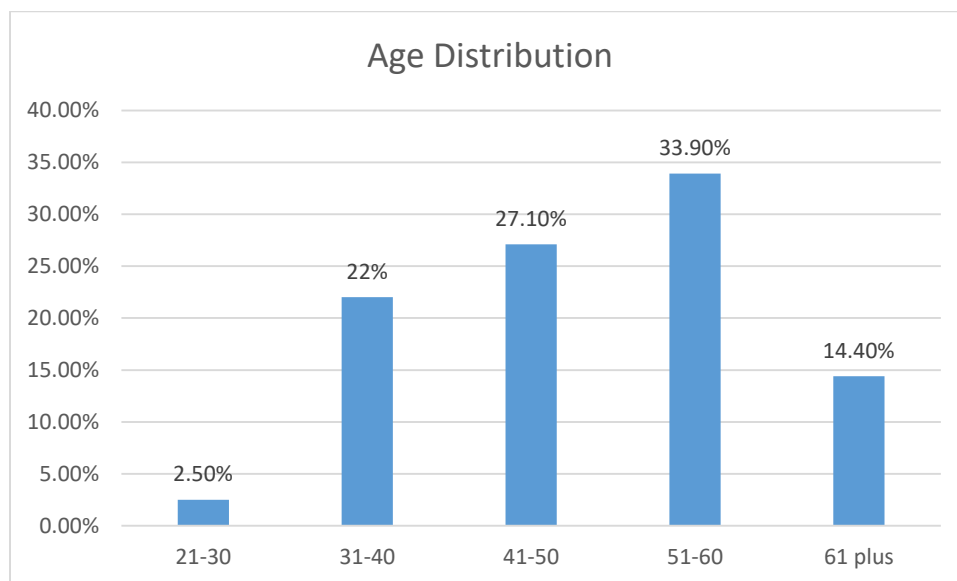
Demographic Characteristics

A total of 118 questionnaires were completed and returned, yielding a 100% response rate, eliminating any potential biases relating to non-response. It is important to note that of the BOM selected 48.3% were for mixed-day schools, 28.0% mixed-day and boarding, 16.1% boarding girls, 7.6% boarding boys.

Gender distribution

The study found that 73.7% of the BOM interviewed were male and while 26.3% female members. This shows that school BOM are male-dominated, despite the constitutional requirement of two thirds gender rule. This gender imbalance could have implications for decision-making, inclusivity, and policy outcomes.

Age distribution



A majority (33.9%) of the BOM members were between 51-60 years of age, followed by 27.1% (41-50 years) and 22.0% (31-40 years) while those aged 60 and above were 14.4%, 2.5% were between 21 and 30 years. This shows that the BOM is dominated by older age groups (41–60 years), who together make up over 60% of the membership. This suggests the leadership is concentrated among individuals with substantial professional and life experience. However, youth representation was extremely low (only 2.5%), indicating limited involvement of younger voices in management.

Educational attainment

The BOM is generally well-educated, with a majority (53.4%) holding bachelor's degrees, while 20.3% have diplomas and 14.4% possessing master's degrees. This profile reflects a leadership body with a solid academic foundation, likely capable of informed decision-making.

Types and Prevalence of Unrest

On a 5-point Likert scale (1=Not Very Common to 5=Most Common), strikes were perceived as most prevalent (M=2.35), followed by riot (M=1.95), assault (M=1.90), arson (M=1.83), and murder (M=1.35).

(See Table 1.)

Table 4.: Means and Standard Deviations for Types of Unrest

Unrest Type	Mean	Standard deviation
Riot	1.95	1.218
Arson	1.83	1.003
Assault	1.90	1.013
Murder	1.35	0.819
Strikes	2.35	1.331

Data from Table 4.8 reveals that strikes are perceived as the most prevalent form of unrest in Nyakach schools, with a mean score of 2.35. This is followed by riots ($M = 1.95$), assault ($M = 1.90$), and arson ($M = 1.83$). Conversely, murder was identified as the least common type of unrest, recording the lowest mean of 1.35. These results indicate that while BOM members recognize a noticeable presence of various disturbances, strikes remain the primary concern, while extreme violent crimes like murder are viewed as rare occurrences. These results corroborate qualitative evidence from focus group discussions and key interviews, where participants noted that "strikes are common in schools."

“Our school had a strike in 2016” FGD 2025:

Another participant stated during the key interviews that.

“Strikes are common in schools”. KII 2025

Furthermore, the findings align with research by Iteyo, Onkware, and Chemutai (2020), which highlighted the frequency of strikes in Kenyan schools. The global nature of this issue is further supported by Omodan (2024), who observed similar patterns of student-led strikes in Nigeria. The prevalence of strikes suggests that students in Nyakach have collectively constructed a shared meaning of strikes as the most "effective" symbolic tool to voice grievances (Blumer, 1969). This social interaction—occurring in dorms and classrooms—transforms the strike from a simple act of defiance into a perceived legitimate method of communication when formal channels fail. For BOM members, this implies that strikes are not merely random outbursts but are socially learned and reinforced behaviors. The study concludes that strikes are the dominant form of school unrest in Nyakach, significantly overshadowing more violent but less frequent acts like murder. Because students perceive strikes as a functional tool for addressing grievances, the BOM and school administrators must shift from reactive disciplinary measures to proactive social engagement. Addressing the "shared meaning" students attach to strikes through improved dialogue and grievance handling is essential to de-escalating unrest before it reaches a collective boiling point.

Timing of Unrest

The second term was identified by 44.4% of respondents as most probable for unrest, followed by the third term (36.8%), unpredictable occurrence (17.9%), and the first term (0.9%). See Figure 2. This aligns with the National Crime Research Centre (2017) findings that insecurity peaks during the second term due to academic pressure and fatigue.

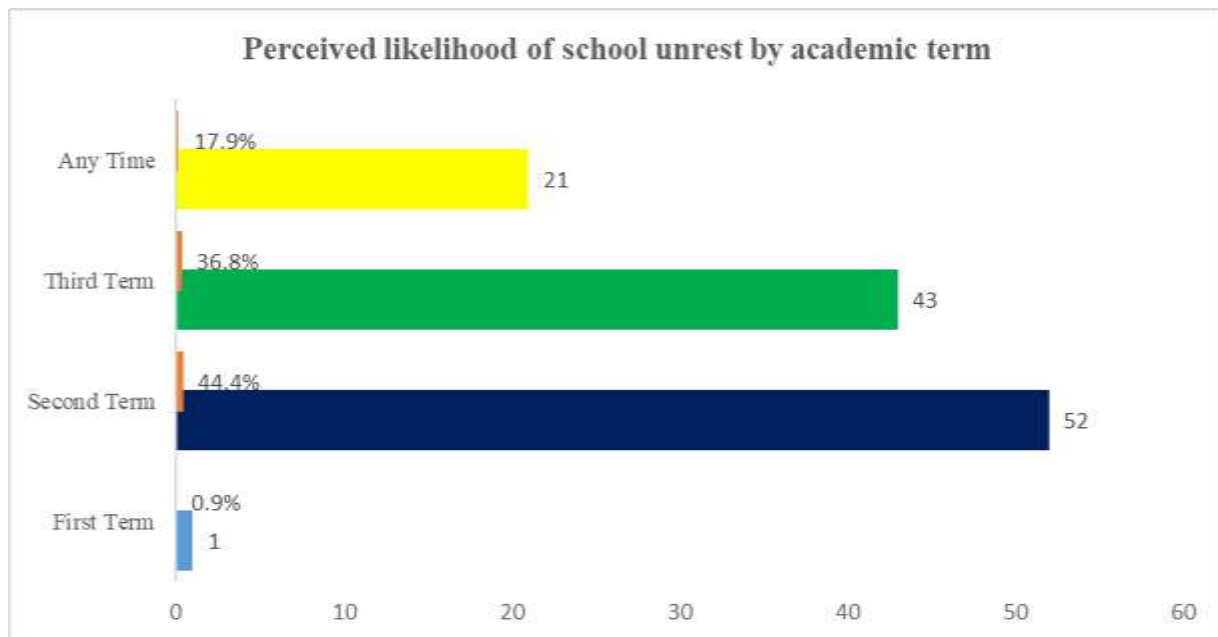


Figure 4.4 above presents the distribution of responses regarding the perceived likelihood of student unrest by term. The data indicated that the second term was identified by the largest proportion of respondents (44.4%) as the most likely period for unrest, followed by the Third Term (36.8%). A smaller percentage (17.9%) indicated that unrest could occur unpredictably, while only a very small fraction (0.9%) perceived the First Term as the most likely time. The second term is perceived as the period most prone to unrest, while the third term is the second most likely period for unrest. A significant majority views it as random, while the first term is perceived as highly unlikely for unrest. This trend aligns closely with the findings of the National Crime Research Centre (2017), which categorized school unrest as a "second term phenomenon." Their Rapid Assessment of school arsons revealed that cases of insecurity are rampant during this period. Scholars like Okello et al. (2022) have consistently noted that the second term is often the longest and most rigorous, frequently hosting demanding "mock" examinations. According to Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism, human behavior is governed by the meanings individuals ascribe to symbols through social interaction. In the Kenyan educational context, academic terms serve as symbols loaded with shared student meaning. The First Term (Symbol of Renewal): Students assign meanings of optimism, caution, and "starting fresh" to this period. The Second Term (Symbol of Pressure): Over time, the second term has evolved into a symbol of high-stakes testing and endurance. The study concludes that the timing of school unrest is deeply symbolic, with the second term acting as a flashpoint for student grievances. While the first term is protected by a shared meaning of "new beginnings," the second term's association with academic pressure and long durations makes it a period of high vulnerability. For school administrators and Boards of Management (BOM), these findings imply that intervention should not be uniform throughout the year. Instead, there is a critical need for heightened social engagement and stress-reduction strategies, specifically during the second term, to deconstruct the negative meanings students associate with this period and prevent them from manifesting as violent unrest.

Perceived Causes of Unrest

On a 5-point scale, peer pressure received the highest mean ($M=3.48$), followed by exam phobia ($M=3.42$), drug and substance abuse ($M=3.27$), community influence ($M=2.54$), and high-handedness of administration ($M=2.34$). (See Table 2.)

Table 2: Perceived Causes of School Unrest.

Cause	Mean	Standard Deviation
High-handedness of Administration	2.34	1.157
Drug and Substance Abuse	3.27	1.137
Community Influence	2.54	1.110
Peer Pressure	3.48	1.136
Exam Phobia	3.42	1.141

Source field 2025

According to the data in Table 4.10, BOM members perceive peer pressure (3.48) and exam phobia (3.42) as the most dominant causes of school unrest. Drug and substance abuse (3.27) also emerged as a significant catalyst, viewed by leadership as a pervasive factor that alters student behavior and triggers instability. These high mean scores suggest that the board primarily attributes unrest to the students' immediate social and psychological environment.

The qualitative result of the key informant affirmed that peer pressure and strikes were the most common causes of unrest in school, as stated.

“Students burn schools due to poor food (‘githeri too small’), teacher mistreatment (‘teachers skin you’), and peer pressure (‘a friend influences you’). Strikes peak in Term 3 when bullying/fights increase as students deliberately trigger fights to be sent home early”. (KII, 2025)

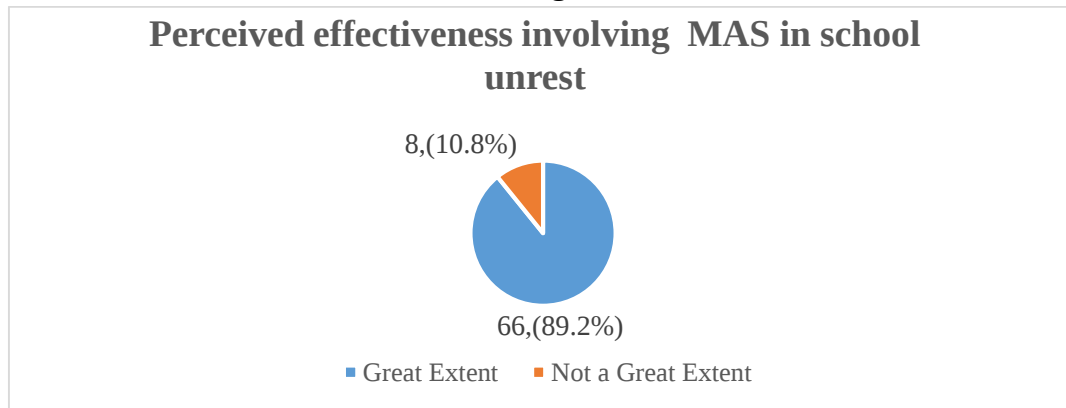
Another discussant stated that:

“Unrest erupts when ‘three stones’ (students-teachers-community) collapse: Fee pressures make parents fail; hungry students blame teachers; community takes sides. Mid-term is peak time – January tensions over unpaid fees boil into strikes.” (Parents FGD, 2025)

These findings are consistent with research by Kindiki (2015), which identified peer influence and the dread of examinations as major triggers for student strikes in Kenya. Furthermore, studies by Ngesu et al. (2014) support the perception that drug abuse acts as a critical driver of indiscipline. The emphasis on "exam phobia" aligns with the earlier finding that unrest peaks during the Second Term, often due to the pressure of mock examinations. From the perspective of Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism, these causes act as "symbols" through which the BOM interprets student behavior. The board assigns high meaning to external and student-centered factors (peer pressure and drugs) while assigning the lowest meaning to their own administrative high-handedness. This indicates a "blind spot" in leadership perception: because BOM members are part of the school governance, they are less likely to interpret their own management style as a source of grievance. Instead, they construct a shared reality where unrest is an "external" problem brought into the school by social pressures or personal student anxieties. The study concludes that school leadership views unrest as a product of social and academic pressures—specifically, peer influence and exam-related stress—rather than systemic administrative failures. While drugs and peer dynamics are undeniably influential, the low rating given to administrative high-handedness suggests a disconnect

between how students and boards may perceive the fairness of school discipline. Effective mitigation requires the BOM to look beyond student-centered causes and critically evaluate how management policies might contribute to the collective "meaning" students attach to rebellion.

Perceived Effectiveness of MAS Prevention Strategies



The survey results revealed a robust confidence in collaborative security models, with 89.2% of respondents agreeing that the proactive involvement of multi-agency security teams—such as the National Police Service, intelligence units, and local administration—can prevent school unrest. This overwhelming majority suggests that stakeholders view inter-agency coordination not just as a reactive necessity, but as a critical preventive strategy. Conversely, a small minority (10.8%) remains skeptical, potentially reflecting concerns over the practical execution or the intrusive nature of such a team. The high level of support (89.2%) for multi-agency engagement aligns with the Systems Theory of security management, as discussed by Maratani and Omboto (2024). This theory posits that security is most stable when various actors (police, intelligence, and local administration) work in harmony to create a "climate of safety." Despite the high approval rating in this study, research by Maratani (2024) in West Pokot found that 54% of security personnel cited a "lack of a unified framework" as a major hurdle, often leading to clashes between different agencies. This suggests that the 89.2% approval might be tempered by operational difficulties in the field. The 10.8% who expressed doubt may align with findings by Terrill and Reisig (2003) and recent studies in Nairobi (2024), which indicate that some communities view high-visibility multi-agency teams as "occupying forces." These studies warn that while security measures may be objectively effective, they can generate "discomfort or resistance" among students if perceived as overly fortifying or intrusive. According to Blumer (1969), joint action is the fitting together of individual lines of conduct. The BOM members must align their internal policies with the national government's mandate for the regional security committee to remain alert.

The study concludes that there is a strong "social consensus" in Nyakach that multi-agency security teams are a viable preventive tool for school unrest. However, for this high expectation to be met, school administrators must balance the visibility of security teams with the psychological comfort of the students. The findings imply that a multi-agency approach is most effective when it is integrated into a broader framework of community policing and proactive dialogue, rather than acting solely as a force for surveillance.

BOM Engagement of MAS in Prevention

Results showed 59.8% of respondents involved MAS teams in pre-unrest sensitization, while 40.2% reported no such engagement. (See Table 3.)

Tab

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	59.8
No	48	40.2
Total	118	100.0

Source: Field data 2025

Data from Table 4.12 shows that while a majority of schools (59.8%) involve multi-agency security teams in pre-unrest sensitization efforts, a significant minority (40.2%) operates without any such engagement. This indicates a divided approach to school security in Nyakach, where nearly four out of ten schools rely solely on internal management rather than collaborative policing and outreach. However, qualitative data indicated BOM are often reactive, where they mainly involve MAS when unrest occurs. One of the key informants noted that.

“The response has been reactive when unrest happens, boards meet, and multi-agency members come to find causes. However, when things are normal, multi-agency involvement is not required. Proactive sensitization isn’t done effectively. Chiefs should attend board meetings, but they’re often not notified or may be busy.” (KII, 2025).

Another key informant stated that

“MAS only appears during exams. They ignore non-exam threats like drug issues. Chiefs attend AGMs as parents, not stakeholders; they don’t address systemic risks. We have never invited the chief or police for drug talks. Only see police during exams” (Key Informant, 2025)

This shows that even if 59.8% seem to engage MAS, the process is not active. When situations are calm, there is little to no ongoing sensitization or preventive engagement. The divergent findings of this study—highlighting a 59.8% engagement rate versus a 40.2% non-engagement rate with security personnel—reflect a deep ideological division in school security. This data maps directly onto contemporary criminological and educational debates. While proponents like Laughland, Luscombe, and Yuhaz (2018) argue that law enforcement officers fulfill a vital role when integrated into academic spaces, this is often a missed opportunity, where other security agencies could also serve as mentors and active deterrents, providing critical early-stage de-escalation that prevents student dissatisfaction from turning into destructive unrest.

Reasons for Not Involving Multiagency Teams

The limited involvement of multi-agency security teams in certain schools reflects broader systemic challenges identified in this study. These included perceived financial implications, perceived low need, fear of the police, and lack of understanding regarding the purpose and role of these teams.

Table 4 Perceived reasons for not involving MAS

Perceived reasons	Frequency	Percent
Perceived financial implications	18	37.5%
Perceived low need	12	25%

Lack of understanding regarding the purpose and role of these teams.	10	20.8%
Fear of the police	8	16.6
Total	48	100

Financial implication

The financial implication remained the primary deterrent for the minority who do not engage these teams. The resistance was deeply rooted in the meaning assigned to security costs versus other school priorities. Schools were expected to provide transport, meals, and a stipend for visiting officers or external speakers. For resource-constrained schools in Nyakach, these facilitation fees could disrupt an already lean budget. The MoE emphasized strict adherence to capitation usage, and BOM members feared that security-related expenditures might be flagged as irregular or misuse of funds. Research in West Pokot County by Nambande (2024) found that 72% of respondents identified a lack of adequate resources and equipment as a severe impediment. Similar findings in Lamu County by Kibusia and Musya (2024) indicated that budget constraints force agencies to prioritize certain sectors, often leaving local institutions like schools with gaps in their security strategies. This "resource-intensive" nature of modern security management often made it inaccessible for schools with limited funding.

Bulmer's theory explains why some BOM members interpret these costs as a reason for exclusion rather than inclusion. To the hesitant BOM members, the multiagency team was not just a symbol of safety but was a symbol of financial liability. The findings implied that schools with the lowest budgets were the ones that were likely to exclude security agencies due to costs, paradoxically making them more vulnerable to unrest. This created a divide in Nyakach where security becomes a luxury for well-funded schools, while poorer schools must have relied on internal, less expert methods of monitoring. The study concluded that security involvement is not just a matter of will but a matter of perceived affordability.

A perceived low need

The perceived low need serves as a significant psychological and social barrier for the minority of the BOM members who chose not to engage with the MAS. The perceived low need was not necessarily a lack of risk but a specific social construction. In schools that had not experienced recent arson or strikes, BOM members had developed a sense of false security. They viewed their schools as peaceful, rendering the external interventions like drug and sensitization or exam monitoring as redundant and unnecessary. Some BOM believed that their internal intelligence, such as the prefects and the teachers, was sufficient. They interpreted school as a closed system where outsiders, such as multiagency teams, might interfere or disrupt the established harmony. Blumer's theory argued that humans act towards thing based on the meanings as they assign to them. If a BOM member defined a police officer as a symbol of crisis, they will only be involved them when crisis existed. If there were no visible crisis the meaning of the security team became irrelevant. The perceived low need was often a collective interpretation that arises from boardroom discussion. In cases where the BOM chair and the principle constantly reassured each other that our students were disciple, they reinforced a shared social reality teams were unnecessary. Schools that perceived a low need were the least prepared when unrest eventually occurs, as they had not established the joint action patterns with the police or local administrators that Blumer emphasized as vital for social order. This perception created a culture where involving the police was seen as a confession of failure. This made the BOM reluctant to reach out until it was too late, turning the preventable issue into

a full-scale riot. The perceived low need was a socially constructed barrier. Until the BOM members changed the meaning of security teams from emergency responders to proactive partners.

Lack of understanding regarding the purpose and role of these teams

The failure of the BOM members to involve multi-agency security teams was rooted in the fundamental understanding regarding those teams' specific purposes. The BOM excluded the MAS because they assigned a symbolic meaning to these agencies that conflicts with the organization's social object. The BOM perceived security as a symbol of policing or criminalization rather than supportive guardianship. Without direct interaction, the BOM viewed these as external intruders whose purpose was to seize control, rather than collaborators whose role was to provide expert protection. The lack of understanding was a result of minimal prior interaction. The lack of understanding regarding the purpose and role of MAS created a breakdown in joint actions. Unless the BOM engaged in direct symbolic interaction with these agencies to re-integrate their meaning, they would continue to see MAS involvement as a cost rather than a protective asset. The organization remained vulnerable because its leadership was reacting to outdated symbols and stereotypical images of security rather than the reality of modern safety needs.

4.3.9.4 Fear of police

The fear of police remained a significant sociological barrier that prevents the BOM from involving the MAS teams. The BOM may intentionally avoid involving MAS, specifically the police, due to deep-seated apprehension rooted in the perceived loss of control. The BOM may fear that the presence of police would shift the institution's atmosphere from education to punitive, effectively criminalizing minor disciplinary issues. The BOM feared that police presence in schools would be interpreted by parents and the community as evidence of high crime, thereby damaging the institution's brand. Concerns regarding historical or systematic aggressive policing could lead the BOM to view police as a source of potential symbolic violence or physical escalation rather than protection. The police officers were not seen as a neutral security tool but as a symbol of authority and coercion. This meaning has been constructed through the past experience of the social history of the community. The findings implied that, excluding MAS teams, the BOM relied on internal, often ill-equipped personnel, leaving the institutions vulnerable to complex modern threats. The disconnection between the objective need for safety and the subjective fear of the security symbols created a paralyzed leadership that could not respond effectively to crises. The exclusion of MAS was rarely about the objective utility of the police it was about the symbolic weight of fear. Until the BOM and the MAS engaged in new positive social interaction to reintegrate the meaning of their partnership, the symbolic barrier of fear will continue to override the objective safety requirement of the institution.

These factors suggested a potential obstacle to broader engagement with multi-agency teams that needed to be addressed through clear communication, demonstrating the value proposition, and potentially providing resources to facilitate their involvement.

The cited reasons (cost, low perceived need, lack of understanding, and fear) reflect a fundamental failure to appreciate the stakeholder role of MAS within the school's stakeholder ecosystem. This lack of knowledge hinders the BOM's ability to manage all stakeholder relationships for mutual security value creation effectively.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study reveals a powerful consensus among BOM members on the value of multi-agency security, with approval ratings reaching as high as 89.3%. This overwhelming support positions

collaborative governance as a cornerstone of school stability and a vital tool for resource mobilization and conflict reduction.

However, a significant gap remains between the acceptance of this principle and its practical impact. While these partnerships have successfully evolved into a symbol of institutional safety, their operational effectiveness is often hindered by fragmented coordination, resource constraints, and tactical disagreements between different agencies. To move beyond symbolic presence and reach full operational potential, the study suggests that school security frameworks must transition from informal collaboration to a unified, well-structured institutional system that ensures meticulous execution and seamless inter-agency communication.

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