

Fight or Flight?

Little Room to Maneuver

by Jack Bowen

Many people were angry, and not without reason. Since last October's assembly on school violence, people have been asking, "How are you supposed to defend yourself?" It's a sensible question, and I'm confused, not to mention worried. What am I supposed to do, let someone attack me? Or run away? I'm sure I can speak for others when I say that the options are rather limited and unappealing. The school administration's new stand on violence left little room to maneuver. Some students felt that the new rules obstructed their ability to protect themselves. From what I gather, the teachers seemed to like the new policy, but students aren't satisfied; they had questions and wanted answers. So did I, and to fix that problem I talked to Assistant Principal Guy Donnelly.

"The regular policy was ineffective," said Donnelly, stating that such changes in school policy had happened before. "We needed to bring people's attention to the fighting within the school." Donnelly reiterated his earlier request from the assembly, asking that students tell a teacher or other staff member in the event of an attack. "Not to rat," he said, "but to find someone who you are comfortable talking to." He stressed the issue of letting someone know you were in danger.

So then I half knew what to do. But what if you can't find a teacher, or aren't comfortable talking to one? Or what if you feel you can handle the situation? I'm sure there are plenty of people who are capable of defending themselves, and will likely do so, but according to the new rules, they'll get in trouble, right? Well, not necessarily. I decided that the School Resource Officer Greg Cooper could certainly answer some of my questions, and he did.

For the most part, Cooper said much the same as Donnelly, but he raised a few points that laid some concerns to rest. "I think some people got the wrong vibe," he said. "*Victims* of fights won't receive punishment."

Frankly, I was relieved to hear it. That was a major concern of mine, but there was still a sliver of concern for self-defense. Cooper and Donnelly both agreed that they weren't asking students to allow themselves to be beaten, and that certain measures of self-defense were acceptable. It's the mutual fights that both parties will receive penalties for. Basically, the planned fights are the ones to be worried about. Resource officer and assistant principal alike also ask that friends of fighters not get involved, beyond asking a teacher for help.

Overall, these new rules on school violence aren't all that bad, but it remains to be proven whether a ten-day suspension is enough to sway the minds of determined students. So far, knock on wood, violence has decreased since the announcement made last October. I'm not advocating the "No tolerance" policy; there's always a better option out there, but it appears to be working so far. I admit that fight-or-flight instincts are hard to get over, and I don't blame anyone who chooses to take a stand. My advice is to worry about yourself first, then about the rules. If you're okay, nothing else matters.