

FREEDOMISM

Randomly generated opinions

Bullying has been one of the largest problems in the public school system for decades. Statistics show that 77% of students in the United States consider themselves victims of bullying^[1]. Schools have persisted in their attempts to counter bullying through cooperation with anti-bullying associations, but there continues to be a disturbing amount of bullying occurring in schools. The problem seems to lie partly with the schools, for two reasons:

1. Their refusal to allow students the right to self defense in bullying situations: in a conflict, to avoid controversy, both parties are punished.
2. Their resistance to cracking down on bullying "with an iron fist", choosing instead to promote weak anti-bullying pledges and assemblies.

Schools are too easily swayed by angry parents; this shows greatly in many bullying policies. In order to avoid controversy and appear unbiased, schools will often punish both parties in a bullying situation. No investigation is performed, no witnesses are called — both the perpetrator and the victim are given equal suspensions. The reason this so-called "fairness" is so dangerous to the student population and damaging to the anti-bullying movement is because it effectively strips students of any right to self-defense. If a staff member were to walk and view a fight where a student is being bullied yet attempting to defend him or herself, it could be easily mistaken as fighting and punished. Since no comprehensive review of bullying situations is performed, this unfair and potentially damaging error can go unnoticed.

The solution to this problem may require much more effort on the part of school administrators, but it is necessary to promote a safe and comfortable learning environment. Schools must guarantee their students the right to defend themselves when facing certain injury, without any punishment for doing so. Self-defense is a natural reaction to an exterior threat, and it should never be suppressed or denied. Schools could argue that students could simply "run away" to a nearby teacher, but there are countless possible incidents where this would not be a viable option. To prevent abuse of this policy, schools must also dictate when appropriate self-defense measures cross the line.

In addition, schools should investigate bullying situations instead of making a "five-minute decision". As with a real criminal case, staff should look into the backgrounds of the students involved, call in witnesses and review the evidence. School suspensions can have a devastating affect on a student's performance and leave a permanent mark on their records. Such damaging punishments should only be reserved for those who actually deserve it, not the innocent who were only trying to avoid injury.

Schools need to recognize that the anti-bullying rallies and pledges are weak and inefficient. It should be common sense that most teenagers will simply ignore such activities as more time out of class. Bullying isn't stopped by a collection of speeches and signed papers, it requires real action. School administrators should step up their game and fight bullying more rigorously. This means tougher punishments and a rewards system for students who report possible incidents. Combined with the new system previously mentioned, a powerful anti-bullying force could be created that would be much more efficient in protecting students and lowering bullying rates. While such a proposal is undoubtedly controversial, especially the suggestion that students should have a right to self-defense, it is necessary to counter what has become such an enormous problem in the United States public school system.

Schools are coming under increasing scrutiny for ignoring frightened students' pleas for protection. There have been many incidents throughout the years where students have been denied the security they need from bullies due to the administration's desire not to get involved. The schools that brush off such reports must stop being lazy and afraid of parental controversy and fulfill their duty to provide students with a safe and comfortable learning environment. Even a situation as small as a kindergartener "tattletailing" to the teacher that another boy

is hitting him should be paid attention to. The phrase "don't come to me unless you're bleeding", which is often used in elementary schools by irresponsible teachers, must be abolished, as it leaves the easily intimidated children afraid to report a situation.

The current system, where students aren't able to protect themselves and are often ignored, creates a climate of fear in schools — the fear that, even as the victim in a bullying incident, a student can still be punished severely and have their academic progress halted and damaged. With bullying such a widespread problem, such drastic measures are necessary. No longer can schools simply ignore what can become dire situations, they must crack down on bullying with tough but fair policies, not flimsy anti-bullying pledges. Even though parents may become angry when their "perfect" child is labeled as a bully, the safety of the student population is much more important than some irritated mother. Bullying is a problem, but it can be reduced with the right actions.

Citations:

1. "Bullying Statistics." *Pascack Valley Regional High School District* . N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Sept. 2010.
<http://www.pascack.k12.nj.us/70271919141818/lib/70271919141818/Bullying_Statistics.htm>.