

Are students safe under current plans?

By Shane Magee
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The goal of any school is to have children learn in a safe and caring environment. But are procedures in the case of intruders really the best they can be? Recent rumours of a school shooting to take place at Park View Education Centre were covered by the media, but most stories have focused on how quickly the rumour spread over MSN or other instant messaging services. There is a bigger story though, and that is how at many levels the school board and the school's administration failed to calm students during the week the rumours spread.

Students were left wondering what could be true and what was an over blown rumour. On Tuesday morning a meeting was held with Park View's principals, Bridgewater High principals and various police and school board members. In this meeting it was decided after a debate to not go public about the 'threats' due to a fear of over reaction by students and media and so by mid-day Tuesday many of Park Views students were already aware of the 'threats' made. By not saying anything until early Wednesday, many students had made the choice already to not go to school.

On Wednesday, the day the shooting was rumoured to take place, attendance levels were down 30 percent at Park View, usually this number would be at 5-10 percent. During the first period Wednesday an announcement was made by principal Jeff DeWolfe clearing the air about what wouldn't be taking place that day. Some still had questions and throughout the day many students remained skittish.

Some students began to wonder what could happen if a shooting were to take place at Park View? One student when asked what the emergency plan was responded with "there is a plan?" When teachers were asked, they were able to give a rough outline of a emergency plan. The question arises, why do so few of the students know what to do? When a grade 12 student was asked if she had ever had a drill she said she's been in plenty of fire drills, but could not recall an intruder drill. Hardly anyone besides school administrators and teachers have any idea what they should do if a shooting should take place.

Mr. DeWolfe admitted that "The one thing we [the school] needed to do is to practice it [the plan]" also saying "I'm not one hundred percent sure, but I think there was one done in not last year, but the year before. Usually our practice has been one a year."

When questioned about the school's intruder plan, teachers and Mr. DeWolfe said that the Park View plan involves the students staying in their classes and the teachers turning out the lights and locking the door to the class. The office is then to be alerted. The problem is that many of the classes at Park View do not have phones or a method of two way communication and so they are unable to contact the office leaving the students virtually alone in their classes.

At the infamous Columbine massacre, 11 of the 13 people killed were in the library. When the shooting started a teacher told those in the library to hide there and not to try and leave. They died there because they were told not to move out of the school.

Mr. DeWolfe said that their intruder alert policy was the most comprehensive that they've seen and that it is as good as they can get within the physical confines of the school building and grounds.

Some schools in the Fort Worth school district are adopting a new intruder policy that allows and even demands students and teachers fight back. The students have been instructed that they should use everything and anything they have at hand to attack the intruder and to try to rush the person.

The man responsible for training the students on fight back procedure, Robin Browne, a major in the British Army reserve said "We show them they can win, the fact that someone walks into a classroom with a gun does not make them a god." This idea though is receiving much criticism.

Teachers said that the idea of putting phones in classrooms had been discussed in staff meetings. Mr. DeWolfe has sent multiple letters to the school board which have asked for improvements but nothing major has been done yet.

Everyone wants a safe school, but do the current policies keep students and staff safe from intruders? It is hard to apply a logical plan to an illogical occurrence, but currently the Park View plan is equivalent to the 'Duck and Cover' plans of the nuclear age.