

# Where Smoking Is an Elective

By DANIELLE FLOOD

**A** CIGARETTE butt is flicked from the fingers of a 15-year-old. It spins for a moment, then smolders on the white linoleum floor, a floor speckled with tar and nicotine stains.

Welcome to Marlboro Country. And Parliament, and True, and Kool. Welcome to the smoking room at Long Beach High School.

On a recent morning, more than half the 75 occupants of the room were girls, a reminder of the recently released survey conducted for the American Cancer Society that disclosed that smoking among teen-age girls in the last six years has increased substantially.

According to the survey, 27 percent of girls 13 through 17 years old are smokers, with girls smoking nearly as heavily as boys. Nearly half the 267 girls interviewed in the survey said their schools had special smoking rooms for students.

John Varesio, the Long Beach High vice principal responsible for the establishment three years ago of the school's smoking room, said that if the lounge contributed to an increase in student smoking at all, it did so "to a minimal degree."

"You've got to deal with realities," he said. If students were forbidden to smoke on school premises,

they would continue to do so anyway, he asserted.

He noted that as administrator in charge of discipline he was dealing with more important issues than smoking at Long Beach High, the scene of racial conflict three years ago. The smoking lounge is one of his ways of treating the students "with some dignity," he said, in return for "responsible" behavior on their part toward each other and toward teachers and administrators. "We deal with students in a respectful way and pay the price," said Mr. Varesio, who occasionally scrounges a cigarette from students in the lounge.

Some Long Island school administrators are not as decided as Mr. Varesio is on how to deal with student smoking on public school premises. "It's a dilemma," said one high-school principal. "On the smoking issue you're in a no-win situation."

"If I didn't smoke here," said Kelly Spahr, 15, in the Long Beach lounge, "I'd smoke upstairs in the bathroom anyway." Miss Spahr said she started smoking when she was 12 because she "saw everyone else doing it."

Tim Murphy, 15, smokes "to relax." At least six students in the lounge, when asked if they smoked, answered with another question, "What?" And then smiled. They said the smoking of marijuana in the

lounge occurred occasionally, but that most marijuana smoking took place outside the school building, frequently on school grounds.

Mr. Varesio said of the marijuana smoking. "We do have it occasionally but never in that lounge." Students said that when marijuana was being smoked a pupil was posted at each of its two exits.

A look at the ways in which several school dis-

## When schools provide a place to smoke, do they promote the habit?

tricts on the Island deal with student smoking shows that school boards and administrators have as much difficulty coming up with answers as they would trying to clutch a wisp of cigarette smoke.

And the questions are many. Is it the role of a public high school, mandated by the state to educate students on the dangers of smoking, to regulate the lifestyle of its students by forbidding smoking on school premises? When schools provide places for students to smoke, are they promoting the habit? Should public

schools permit students under the age of 18 to smoke on the premises when the law forbids the sale of cigarettes to those under the age of 18? Is it practical or realistic for publicly supported schools to police the habits of students? Should an administrator contradict a parent who has given his or her 15-year-old child permission to smoke?

"I think I'm taking a middle-of-the-road approach," said Christopher Sarlo, prin-

cipal of East Hampton High School, where students may not smoke in the building when the weather is warm but where they may smoke in the lobby adjacent to the cafeteria during cold months.

"It's a human way" of dealing with the students, Mr. Sarlo said. "We allow this so they don't have to go out in the rain and snow to smoke." In February the Bayport-Blue Point Board voted 5 to 3 to permit smoking in the vestibule of the gymnasium during dances and sports events, said the district's chief administrator, Robert

Covell, who opposed the move. The district's high-school principal, Dr. Stanley Friedland, who recommended the decision, explained that students were not allowed to leave school dances and then return because they sometimes "sneak in liquor." Smoking on school property is not permitted during the day because it is not "conducive to instruction," he said. Evenings, however, "are strictly social—we want to provide a recreational atmosphere of a healthy and wholesome nature."

It is possible, Dr. Friedland said, that providing a time and place for students to smoke is a way of promoting the habit. "But I put it in the category of the lesser of two evils," he said.

Daniel Donaghy, principal of John H. Glen High School, in Elwood, prohibits smoking on school property. "To condone smoking violates a general code; you're being a hypocrite if you do," he declared.

Some high schools, such as those in Massapequa, permit smoking on school grounds. "Parents give students permission to smoke—I don't think a hard line outside would give us much but grief," said Donald Woodworth, principal of Berner High School, which has 2,800 students.

"If they want to smoke," said a Bay Shore administrator, "it's their health." ■