

Assembly Concurrent Resolution

No. 10

Introduced by Assembly Member Dymally

December 11, 2002

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 10—Relative to pupil health.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 10, as introduced, Dymally. Heavy backpacks.

This measure would acknowledge the health risks that heavy backpacks pose to pupils and urge the Superintendent of Public Instruction to inform every school district about the passage of this resolution. The measure would also urge the Superintendent of Public Instruction, school districts, and parents and guardians to take actions necessary to avoid potential injury to pupils caused by heavy backpacks.

Fiscal committee: yes.

- 1 WHEREAS, Surveys have found that backpacks can cause
- 2 pupils problems; and
- 3 WHEREAS, A recent survey has found that heavy backpacks
- 4 can cause pupils back problems; and
- 5 WHEREAS, Back to school should not signal the start of aches
- 6 and pains, but for many pupils who use backpacks it could mean
- 7 visits to the physician's office; and
- 8 WHEREAS, In a survey conducted by the American Academy
- 9 of Orthopedic Surgeons in October of 1999, 58 percent of the
- 10 orthopedists reported seeing patients complaining of back and
- 11 shoulder pain caused by heavy backpacks; and

1 WHEREAS, “Overloaded backpacks are contributing to these
2 increased visits to the physician’s office,” reported Charlotte B.
3 Alexander, MD, practicing orthopedic surgeon, Houston Sports
4 Medicine Associates, Houston, Texas, at the academy’s
5 Orthopedics Update; and
6 WHEREAS, More than 70 percent of the orthopedists surveyed
7 indicated that backpacks can become a clinical problem in
8 school-age children if not enough attention is given to keeping the
9 weight of the backpacks within reasonable levels; and
10 WHEREAS, The survey conducted by the American Academy
11 of Orthopedic Surgeons which included responses from more than
12 100 physicians at the Children’s Memorial Hospital, Chicago,
13 Illinois, and at the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children,
14 Wilmington, Delaware, also concluded that a backpack could
15 cause injury to a child when it weighs 20 percent or more of the
16 child’s body weight, stating that “If you have an 90-pound female
17 carrying a 20-pound backpack, then the backpack weight becomes
18 a medical issue,” and that ‘It is at this level when pupils should
19 experience some sort of muscle fatigue or injury to their bodies
20 especially the spine and shoulders’; and
21 WHEREAS, Fifty percent of the physicians surveyed also
22 indicated that a pupil’s backpack becomes a clinical problem if it
23 weighs 20 pounds or more; and
24 WHEREAS, Most pupils surveyed are carrying backpacks
25 weighing more than 10 percent of their body weight and many
26 pupils are carrying backpacks that exceed 20 percent of their body
27 weight; and
28 WHEREAS, The survey found one 10-year-old female pupil
29 was carrying a backpack weighing 47 pounds; and
30 WHEREAS, Overloaded backpacks used by children have
31 received a lot of attention in schools; and
32 WHEREAS, Parents, school staff, and administrators have
33 started to voice concern about the dangers that use of heavy
34 backpacks pose to pupils; and
35 WHEREAS, As specialists who treat the musculoskeletal
36 system, orthopedists are concerned about this potential hazard to
37 a child’s body; and
38 WHEREAS, Orthopedic surgeons are starting to notice an
39 increase in children visiting their offices with muscle fatigue
40 problems that in the past were generally seen only in adults; and

1 WHEREAS, In 1998, the Consumer Product Safety
2 Commission tracked visits to physician offices, clinics, and
3 hospital emergency rooms that were related to backpacks and
4 found children 5 to 14 years of age had 10,062 visits and teens 15
5 to 18 years of age had 2,719 visits; and

6 WHEREAS, The survey indicated that excessive weight carried
7 in backpacks can cause some children to develop bad habits,
8 including poor posture or excessive slouching, early in life; and

9 WHEREAS, The orthopedists in the survey noted that one of the
10 reasons why children's backpacks are now heavier than they were
11 years ago is that pupils carry more books with them because there
12 is less time between classes during which pupils may visit their
13 lockers; and

14 WHEREAS, Asking pupils to modify the way they currently
15 use their backpacks is one way to combat the problem; and

16 WHEREAS, Orthopedic surgeons involved in the survey
17 recommended that children and their parents adopt the following
18 guidelines when using backpacks:

19 (1) A backpack's weight should not exceed 20 percent of the
20 pupil's body weight, and even less for younger children.

21 (2) A pupil should use a hip strap for heavier backpacks.

22 (3) A pupil should use a backpack with wide, padded, straps
23 and a padded back; and

24 WHEREAS, It is, also, recommended that pupils do all of the
25 following:

26 (1) Use both of the backpack's straps, firmly tightened, to hold
27 the backpack so that the bottom of the backpack remains at least
28 two inches above the waist.

29 (2) Engage in exercise to condition back muscles and ask an
30 orthopedic surgeon for advice.

31 (3) Use the correct lifting techniques, remembering to bend
32 with both knees when picking up a heavy backpack.

33 (4) Place the heaviest items closest to your back.

34 (5) Neatly pack the backpack and try to keep the contents from
35 shifting.

36 (6) Try to make frequent trips to the locker, where appropriate,
37 to replace books between classes.

38 (7) Consider purchasing a backpack with wheels.

39 (8) Consider obtaining a second set of books for use at home;
40 and

1 WHEREAS, Across the nation millions of elementary and high
2 school pupils race off to the schoolbus or scurry to their classes
3 with overstuffed backpacks slung over their shoulders; and
4 WHEREAS, While carrying a backpack to school each morning
5 might seem harmless, it can cause some painful back and neck
6 problems for pupils who overload their backpacks or who do not
7 pack or carry their backpacks properly; and
8 WHEREAS, The improper use of backpacks can lead to muscle
9 imbalance that could turn into chronic back and neck problems
10 later in life; and
11 WHEREAS, Back pain is pervasive in our society. 80 percent
12 of all Americans will suffer from it at some point in their lives, and
13 50 percent will suffer from lower-back pain this year alone; and
14 WHEREAS, Lower-back pain is the most common health
15 problem experienced by working Americans today and is a
16 condition that costs our nation’s economy at least 50 billion dollars
17 a year in lost wages and productivity; and
18 WHEREAS, Much of this suffering is brought on by bad habits
19 initiated during younger years, which can be attributed in part to
20 the carrying of overweight backpacks to and from school; now,
21 therefore, be it
22 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate*
23 *concurring,* That the Superintendent of Public Instruction inform
24 every elementary school district, high school district, and unified
25 school district about the passage of this resolution, and that the
26 districts, in turn, inform parents and guardians about the passage
27 of this resolution; and be it further
28 *Resolved,* That the Superintendent of Public Instruction, school
29 districts, and parents and guardians are urged to take action
30 necessary to avoid potential injury to pupils caused by heavy
31 backpacks.
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