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 pupils problems; and
2 WHEREAS, A recent survey has found that heavy backpacks can cause pupils back problems; and
3 WHEREAS, Back to school should not signal the start of aches and pains, but for many pupils who use backpacks it could mean visits to the physician’s office; and
4 WHEREAS, In a survey conducted by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons in October of 1999, 58 percent of the orthopedists reported seeing patients complaining of back and shoulder pain caused by heavy backpacks; and
WHEREAS, “Overloaded backpacks are contributing to these increased visits to the physician’s office,” reported Charlotte B. Alexander, MD, practicing orthopedic surgeon, Houston Sports Medicine Associates, Houston, Texas, at the academy’s Orthopedics Update; and
WHEREAS, More than 70 percent of the orthopedists surveyed indicated that backpacks can become a clinical problem in school-age children if not enough attention is given to keeping the weight of the backpacks within reasonable levels; and
WHEREAS, The survey conducted by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons which included responses from more than 100 physicians at the Children’s Memorial Hospital, Chicago, Illinois, and at the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children, Wilmington, Delaware, also concluded that a backpack could cause injury to a child when it weighs 20 percent or more of the child’s body weight, stating that “If you have an 90-pound female carrying a 20-pound backpack, then the backpack weight becomes a medical issue,” and that ‘It is at this level when pupils should experience some sort of muscle fatigue or injury to their bodies especially the spine and shoulders’; and
WHEREAS, Fifty percent of the physicians surveyed also indicated that a pupil’s backpack becomes a clinical problem if it weighs 20 pounds or more; and
WHEREAS, Most pupils surveyed are carrying backpacks weighing more than 10 percent of their body weight and many pupils are carrying backpacks that exceed 20 percent of their body weight; and
WHEREAS, The survey found one 10-year-old female pupil was carrying a backpack weighing 47 pounds; and
WHEREAS, Overloaded backpacks used by children have received a lot of attention in schools; and
WHEREAS, Parents, school staff, and administrators have started to voice concern about the dangers that use of heavy backpacks pose to pupils; and
WHEREAS, As specialists who treat the musculoskeletal system, orthopedists are concerned about this potential hazard to a child’s body; and
WHEREAS, Orthopedic surgeons are starting to notice an increase in children visiting their offices with muscle fatigue problems that in the past were generally seen only in adults; and
WHEREAS, in 1998, the Consumer Product Safety Commission tracked visits to physician offices, clinics, and hospital emergency rooms that were related to backpacks and found children 5 to 14 years of age had 10,062 visits and teens 15 to 18 years of age had 2,719 visits; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, it is also recommended that pupils do all of the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

(7) Consider purchasing a backpack with wheels.

(8) Consider obtaining a second set of books for use at home; and
WHEREAS, Across the nation millions of elementary and high school pupils race off to the schoolbus or scurry to their classes with overstuffed backpacks slung over their shoulders; and
WHEREAS, While carrying a backpack to school each morning might seem harmless, it can cause some painful back and neck problems for pupils who overload their backpacks or who do not pack or carry their backpacks properly; and
WHEREAS, The improper use of backpacks can lead to muscle imbalance that could turn into chronic back and neck problems later in life; and
WHEREAS, Back pain is pervasive in our society. 80 percent of all Americans will suffer from it at some point in their lives, and 50 percent will suffer from lower-back pain this year alone; and
WHEREAS, Lower-back pain is the most common health problem experienced by working Americans today and is a condition that costs our nation’s economy at least 50 billion dollars a year in lost wages and productivity; and
WHEREAS, Much of this suffering is brought on by bad habits initiated during younger years, which can be attributed in part to the carrying of overweight backpacks to and from school; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate concurring, That the Superintendent of Public Instruction inform every elementary school district, high school district, and unified school district about the passage of this resolution, and that the districts, in turn, inform parents and guardians about the passage of this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Superintendent of Public Instruction, school districts, and parents and guardians are urged to take action necessary to avoid potential injury to pupils caused by heavy backpacks.