

RESOLUTION OF THE
TENNESSEE PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
REGARDING HEAVY BACKPACKS

WHEREAS, Overloaded school backpacks are causing an increasing problem of back pain and spinal strain for students across the nation; and,

WHEREAS, Because spinal ligaments and muscles are not fully developed until after age sixteen, over weight backpacks are a source of repeated low-level stress that may result in chronic neck, shoulder or back pain in children; and,

WHEREAS, Reviews of hospital data have revealed over 7,000 emergency room visits per year for children being treated for backpack related injuries and over 28,000 office visits for backpack related injury; and,

WHEREAS, The effects of children carrying heavy backpacks are continually being studied and have shown heavy loads carried on the back have the potential to compress intervertebral disc height and damage the soft tissues of the shoulder causing microstructural damage to the nerves; and,

WHEREAS, Children's textbooks are much heavier now than many years ago and in addition to textbooks students often carry computers, cell phones, water bottles, running shoes, band instruments and other equipment considered essential to have readily available; and,

WHEREAS, More than 90 percent of students carry backpacks which in studies have been found to weigh as much as 25 percent of the child's body weight; and,

WHEREAS, Backpacks are often not worn correctly – often slung over one shoulder or allowed to hang significantly below their waistline, increasing the weight on the shoulders and making the child lean forward when walking or stoop forward when standing to compensate for the weight; and,

WHEREAS, Rolling backpacks do remove the weigh from a child's back but are sometimes not allowed in schools due to the concern over being a trip hazard in the hallways or the difficulty carrying them up and down stairways,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Tennessee Public Health Association strongly recommends all school administrators, teachers, parents and schoolchildren be educated about the potential health impact of heavy backpacks and take proactive measures to avoid injury, and,

BE IT FURTHER Resolved, schools should work with their PTA/PTO to assess the extent to which students use over weight backpacks and promote innovative homework strategies lessening the need to take all school materials and books back and forth each day, and

BE IT FURTHER Resolved, schools should consider the following points when developing their backpack education talking points:

- Backpack should weigh no more than a maximum of 10% of a child's body weight
- Encourage ergonomic backpacks with individualized compartments to efficiently hold books and equipment
- Urge children to wear both shoulder straps and not sling the pack over one shoulder
- Encourage wide, padded adjustable straps to fit a child's body
- Encourage the heaviest books be left at school and handouts or workbooks be used for homework assignments
- Schools need to consider moving toward e-textbooks as federal and state funding becomes available
- Schools should consider integrated education about backpacks by using a hanging scale in the classroom allowing students to weigh their pack and enter the results into a graph that would track the weights and then look at the data to determine what can be done to lighten loads

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be furnished to members of the Tennessee General Assembly, the Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee School Board Association and that a copy of this resolution be spread upon the minutes of the Association.

Chris J. Taylor, Chair
2013 Resolutions Committee

Karen Lynn
President, 2013

Doris G. Spain
Executive Director