



Department of  
Health Services

## *North East Independent School District*

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### ***Backpack Safety***

North East Independent School District feels that the amount of weight carried by students in their backpacks is an important issue that deserves serious consideration. These guidelines are designed to help prevent injuries related to the improper use of backpacks. Sources: *American Academy of Pediatrics*; *American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons*.

#### **Step 1: Choose Right**

- Wide, adjustable, padded shoulder straps – Narrow straps can dig into shoulders. This can cause pain and restrict circulation.
- Two shoulder straps – Backpacks with one shoulder strap that runs across the body cannot distribute weight evenly.
- Padded back – A padded back protects against sharp edges on objects inside the pack and increases comfort.
- Waist strap or frame – A waist strap or frame can distribute the weight of a heavy load from the shoulders and back to the pelvis.
- Lightweight backpack – The backpack itself should be made of lightweight material and should not add much weight to the load.
- Sturdy and appropriately sized – Some manufacturers offer special child-sized versions. These packs weigh less and have shorter back lengths and widths so they do not slip around on the back. If lockers are available, backpacks should be appropriately sized to fit in lockers.
- Rolling backpack – This type of backpack may not be a cure-all and is allowed at the discretion of each school's principal. Remember that rolling backpacks still must be carried up steps/stairs and usually require lifting at some point during the day. They can be cumbersome and can cause accidents, especially when large groups of students are transitioning in common hallways. Pushing the handle all the way down when entering school helps eliminate accidents caused by tripping.

#### **Step 2: Wear Right**

- Always use both shoulder straps and wear the pack on the back rather than over one shoulder.
- When the backpack has a waist strap-use it.
- Tighten the straps so that the pack is close to the body-snug, but not too tight. The straps should hold the pack two inches above the waist, keeping the top of the pack just below the base of the skull. Do not carry the pack low near the buttocks.
- Do not lean forward when walking. If this is necessary, there is too much weight in the pack.

### **Step 3: Pack Right**

- The backpack should never weigh more than 20 percent of the student's body weight. This figure may vary depending on the child's body strength and fitness. Sources: *American Academy of Pediatrics and American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons*
- Organize the backpack to use all of its compartments. Pack heavier items closest to the center of the pack.
- Prioritize the contents. Carry only the books needed. Leave unnecessary items at home.
- Pack bulky items so they do not contact the back. Use pockets and compartments for oddly shaped items.
- As applicable to schools with lockers, students are allowed to stop at lockers at a minimum of before and after school and before and after lunch. Carry only books needed between stops at lockers.
- Classroom books may be utilized when available in order to eliminate carrying books.
- Consideration will be given to those students who have official notification by a physician of a medical need for a second set of textbooks.

### **Step 4: Lift Right**

- Face the backpack.
- Bend using both knees. Do not bend over at the waist when wearing or lifting a backpack.
- Lift the backpack by using leg muscles and keeping it close to the body; not by bending over with arms extended.
- Learn abdominal and back-strengthening exercises to build up the muscles used to carry a backpack.
- Ask physician for advice.

***The information contained in these guidelines should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of a physician. There may be variations in treatment that a physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.***

Sources: *American Academy of Pediatrics*  
*American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons*