



ANALYSIS OF  
BACKPACK SURVEY RESULTS

OCTOBER 2006

SECTION I

## 2006 Backpack Survey Executive Summary

Over the past several years backpacks have become a “weighty” issue for our school children raising concerns that excessive weight could possibly be impacting their health. Several medical journals *Spine, Nursing and Health Sciences*, an independent research study conducted by the Director of Physical Therapy at Northeastern University in Boston, MA are just a few of the multitude of articles that have been written focusing on this issue. These and other reports will be reviewed by the newly formed HCPSS Backpack Task Force a committee being co-chaired by Linda Rangos (Coordinator for Physical Education, Health Education and Dance), Rose Dennison (Chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee) and Mary Jane Barbato-Grauso (PTA Council President for Howard County).

To gather a snap shot of the school children in Howard County, Maryland, the PTA Council of Howard County conducted a survey beginning on September 20, 2006 National Backpack Day (survey questions are enclosed in this report) running through October 6, 2006. To maintain the anonymity of all the participants in this report PTA Council is not disclosing the names and/or e-mail addresses of the participants. A confidential report correlating the school, comments and data for each participant is being maintained by Council.

PTA Council has conducted 2 prior surveys regarding the backpack issue;

- In 1999 a survey was conducted on how local schools in the Howard County were addressing the use of backpacks with wheels vs. the traditional backpacks. Random sampling of our local schools was conducted ensuring that all areas of the county were equally represented. This sampling consisted of 20% of the elementary schools, 30% middle schools and 50% of the high schools were chosen. The data indicated that there was no consistent policy across the schools, some schools allowed the use of backpacks with wheels others did not. This was shared with the Board of Education and Department of Education. No action was taken at that time.
- In 2002, PTA Council conducted a similar backpack survey to the 2006 survey, approximately 300 responses were received and the data was shared with the Board of Education and Department of Education. Responses indicated a concern of the excessive weight of the backpacks. Unfortunately, again no action was taken at that time.

This time PTA Council received an overwhelming response to our recent survey confirming that this issue is growing in importance and needs to be addressed. PTA Council received 998 responses correlating to approximately three times the responses that were received from the 2002 survey. The submitted responses were recorded on a school level basis Elementary, Middle and High School. Upon collecting the data the information was segmented by school grade level (i.e. Kindergarten, First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth grades for the Elementary school level, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth grades for the Middle school level and Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth grades for the High School level). In addition, weights of the backpacks have been tracked and segmented by grade level. A representative sample of comments for each grade level were separated out and enclosed after each school level in this report for easy access. An entire listing of all comments provided by the survey participants is reported in the addendum and are listed by grade level.

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The data collected represents the following participation of the schools in HCPSS. 63.6% of Elementary schools (25 of 39 total responded), 100% of both Middle (18 total) and High (12 total) schools responded.

- The Elementary school data indicates that the fourth and fifth grades are carrying the heaviest backpack which correlates to the fact that these grades are transitioning more between classes and the curriculum is more extensive in preparing the students for Middle school.
- The Middle school data indicates that grades (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, & 8<sup>th</sup>) appear to be similar in the amount of weight that the students carry with the major concern being that there isn't enough time allotted during the day schedule for students to go to their lockers more frequently and change out the books that they are carrying. In some instances some students have academics throughout the morning (5 core subjects) allowing only time before lunch or after lunch to switch out books.
- With regards to the High schools, seniors have figured out the system and by this level are carrying the least amount. The ninth, tenth and eleventh graders are carrying backpack loads ranging from 20 lbs to 100 lbs. (this takes into consideration sports equipment, music equipment and any other extra curricular activity the student participates in).
- Other concerns voiced in the responses to the survey is the impact that the weight of the backpacks maybe having on their child's health i.e. complaints of back, neck, knee and wrist pain, back and neck strain, posture, scoliosis, curvature of the spine (bending forward when walking with their backpack) in some cases there has been a need for Chiropractic care and physical therapy.

The goal of this report is not to provide the same recommendations that have been proposed over the past several years which hinge on utilizing the backpack correctly, and limiting the weight of the books that are being transported. But rather, to stimulate conversation within the Backpack Task Force Committee (that has been recently created and will be addressing this issue) that will lead to more creative solutions that will actually be implemented in a consistent manner throughout the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS).

PTA Council would like to thank all the 2006 survey participants, Mrs. Sandy Erickson and Mr. Robert Glascock for initiating the Backpack Task Force Committee, Jane Holcomb and Veronika Carella for conducting the survey and compiling all the survey response data for PTA Council. In addition, PTA Council looks forward to co-chairing the Backpack Task Force Committee with both Linda Rangos and Rose Dennison.

Mary Jane Barbato-Grauso  
President of the Howard County PTA Council

## 2006 Backpack Survey Questions and Cover Letter

Dear PTA Presidents,

Please assist us in distributing this time-sensitive survey today. We ask that the survey, included below, be sent to all of your membership via your school's email list, eNewsletters, yahoo groups or whatever means available to contact parents.

Please ensure that PTACHC receives at least **all responses** from your school.

Please ask that parents respond by **Friday, October 6, 2006**.

PTACHC's Health & Environmental Issues Committee is gathering information from all schools regarding backpack weight. This information will be used to determine if our children's backpacks exceed the recommended maximum weight equal to 15% of a student's body weight.

The results of this quick email survey will be used to determine if further action is needed by PTA to advocate for safe backpack weight limits. If you have any questions or would prefer to phone in the results of your backpack weigh-in survey, please contact Veronika Carella at [jlcarella@msn.com](mailto:jlcarella@msn.com) or 410-489-5495.

Your prompt assistance is very much appreciated.

Advocating for Every Child,  
Mary Jane Barbato-Grauso  
PTACHC President

## 2006 Backpack Survey Questions and Cover Letter

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**PTA Council of Howard County  
ACTION ALERT  
2006 Backpack Survey for Parents**

Dear Parent,

Backpack weight has become a matter of increasing concern for parents everywhere. For this reason, the PTA Council of Howard County's Health & Environmental Issues Committee is looking into this issue and how it impacts the health of our children.

Please assist us in gathering information about this issue by answering the following 7 questions:

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMITTING SURVEY RESPONSES:**

- A. Click on Reply All to and verify that your reply is sent to [ptachc@erols.com](mailto:ptachc@erols.com) .
- B. Type your response in the space provided for each question.
- C. Click on send.

Our target date of collecting this backpack survey information is **Friday, October 6, 2006**. Please try to respond by this deadline.

Thank you for your time and your prompt response to this request.

**2006 PTA BACKPACK SURVEY QUESTIONS:**

1. What school does your child attend?
2. What grade is your child in?
3. [OPTIONAL] What is the actual weight of your child's loaded backpack?
4. Does the weight of your child's backpack exceed 15% of your child's body weight?  
YES or NO ?

[For example, if your child weights 100 lbs, your child's backpack should not exceed 15 lbs. Carrying a backpack that exceeds 15%, can lean to pain and strain on a child's growing body.]

5. For bus riders, approximately how far does your child walk to the bus stop?
6. For walkers, approximately how far does your child walk to school?
7. Please share any comments, concerns or ideas you have about this topic here:

## Close to Home



To lessen the strain on their backs, many students are opting for the new Velcro shirts.

<http://www.gocomics.com/closetohome/2006/11/27/>

### Close to Home by John McPherson

John McPherson makes us howl at his adroit mix of everyday settings and extraordinary events. John's offbeat, oddball characters turn up in familiar places, but their actions are always hilarious and unexpected.

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