

DMS Backpack Safety

As a Covid-19 safety protocol helping to prevent large clusters of many students, DMS students are no longer visiting their lockers between each class. Trips to lockers are permissible before school, at lunch, and after school on a staggered schedule. This has caused an increased reliance on backpacks.

Because wearing backpacks improperly and wearing backpacks that are too heavy has potential to contribute to backpain, and because the health and safety of students is our number one priority, DMS has recently gathered data from a random sample of students who volunteered to have their backpacks and the contents weighed. DMS has also researched medical recommendations regarding backpacks. Please consider the following information and recommendations.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that backpacks weight no more than 10% to 20% of a student’s body weight. This would be 10 to 20 pounds for a 100-pound student. [LINK](#)
- Of the backpacks recently weighed at DMS, the average weight was 14.85 pounds. The lightest was 9.81 pounds and the heaviest was 22.2 pounds.
- Backpack weight is only one factor with potential to contribute to back pain. A proper size, properly adjusted, and well packed backpack is also important. DMS recommends you and your student review the recommendations below from the American Occupational Therapy Association [LINK](#) and the National Safety Council [LINK](#).
 - Make sure the backpack is the correct size for your child. A backpack should be no wider than your child’s torso.
 - Adjust the height of the backpack so that it extends from approximately 2 inches below the shoulder blades to waist level, or slightly above the waist. A dangling backpack can cause spinal misalignment and pain.
 - Make sure your student always wears well-padded shoulder straps on both shoulders so the weight is evenly balanced. Using one strap shifts the weight to one side and can causes muscle pain and posture problems.
 - When packing the backpack, the heaviest items should be placed closest to the student’s back and the weight should be distributed evenly left to right.
 - Removing unnecessary items from the backpack should be part of every student’s daily routine.
- Some recommendations from DMS to reduce backpack weight.
 - Check papers and remove old ones on a regular basis. The addition of Chromebooks has greatly reduced our dependence on papers. Some backpacks inventoried had over 5 pounds of books and paper dating back to the first day of school, and most of the paper should have been removed. Well organized backpacks often had less than 1.5 pounds of books and paper.
 - Consider a smaller water bottle. Students are given ample opportunity throughout the day to refill water bottles. Some water bottles weighed over 3.5 pound when full.

- Regularly clean out the backpack. Trash accounted for nearly a half pound of one student's backpack.
- Check for unnecessary items. For example, one student was carrying one-third of a pound of video games. Cosmetics accounted for an average 0.5 pounds among students who carried them.
- Items needed for only one part of the day can be removed and added in the mornings and at lunch. For example, if your student has physical education in the morning, gym shoes could be removed and placed in the locker at lunch time.

- Below are the average weights of some items found in the sample of DMS students' backpacks
 - Chromebook and charger: 4.82 pounds
 - Combined Books and Papers: 3.47 pounds
 - Water Bottle: 3.18 pounds
 - Binder(s): 2.5 pounds
 - Gym shoes: 2 pounds
 - Cold Lunch: 1.17 pounds
 - Pencil Pouch: 0.93 pounds
 - Cell Phone: 0.51 pounds
 - Clothes: 0.5 pounds
 - Calculator: 0.25 pounds