

Ban the Ban Backpack Rule

Visit a school and you'll probably discover that kids these days are not allowed to carry backpacks into their classrooms. They have to take their stuff out of their bags, and transfer it to small bags. The reason for this is that there isn't enough room for their backpacks. Sometimes people trip. Sometimes people can't squeeze between chairs. Kids have been going to school for many years. Why now have their backpacks become such a problem? More importantly, how did teachers and kids get so divided on this issue? Stay tuned though—as in this school, they may not be as divided as you think.

This reporter interviewed students, and found that 70% of them reported that since they had to stop carrying backpacks, they have lost more homework, arrived late to class, and been in trouble for not having their supplies. This data indicates clearly that while the no backpack rule might make the passing room better in class, it's not a good solution to that problem, as it creates other, more momentous problems. It's a slippery slope. First no backpacks, then no homework or school supplies, then no passing grades, then no entrance to college, then no successful career.

It turns out that teens have been taking this case to court. The article, "Backpack Ban Has Teen In Front Of Court," tells the story of Elyse Meredith. Meredith has been fighting her school's backpack ban, to the extent of defending her position in court. "I believe it's a constitutional right that students should be able to carry or use their property that does not materially or substantially interfere with the education process," testified Meredith, sounding decidedly older than her 14 years. "I don't believe my backpack interferes in the educational process." Meredith's civic action shows that this is more than a case of teenagers whining. Young people, like all citizens, have rights, including the right to do their best in school, which includes being able to have their educational property with them.

You might find it hard to picture what it's like when kids aren't allowed to carry backpacks. If you do visit a school, you might see a scene like this one, that unfolded recently. Picture this: 8:15 am on the sixth floor. Three eighth graders rushed to make it to first period. Backpacks were stuffed into lockers. First, though, the eighth graders had to empty them. You might wonder why these students would take all their school supplies out of their backpacks, which were, after all, made to carry those schools supplies. They were victims of the NO BACKPACK rule. "WHY aren't we allowed to carry them?" one victim muttered. Witnesses overheard her friend reply, "It's the RULE." Another victim muttered as she pulled mountains of papers and books out of her Walking Dead pack. They gathered their piles of materials. The notebooks, the binders, the laptops, the pens, the books. The calculators, the slide rules, the erasers, the rulers. They turned away. Their piles started to slip from their arms. Slip . . . slide . . . CRASH. The books, the pens, the laptops, the binders, the notebooks, the calculators, the slide rules, the erasers, the rulers hit the floor. "I can't stand this!" erupted from three throats.

Two minutes later, the same girls were seen entering English class. "You're late. You need a pass, leave your stuff with me and go get one," Ms. S. said. Nothing happened for a moment. The girls looked at each other. Then, together, they began to hand materials to Ms. S. First they passed over their laptops. Then they handed over their notebooks. The pile in Ms. S.'s arms was up to her chin. Then they handed over their books. The pile in Ms. S.'s arms began to tremble. Then they handed over their pens. The pile began to slide. Then they handed over their calculators, slide rules, erasers, rulers.

"Stop it, this is ridiculous! I can't carry all this stuff!" Ms. S. howled.

"Maybe we should get our backpacks?" one girl asked with an innocent look on her face.

"Maybe you should go to the office," Ms. S. said.

This reporter ended up in the office as well that day. The facts will show that there were fourteen eighth graders there by the end of first period. Nine were backpack-related infractions. That's almost 20% of the eighth grade class. Clearly something needs to be done.

A surprise ending came later that day. "Come, girls, I want to speak with you," Ms. S. said at lunch. Needless to say, the students were anxious. No one can know exactly what went on in each of their minds, but their pulses were probably racing. Then . . . "I've decided to speak up on your behalf about the backpacks," Ms. S. said. She was like Wonder Woman appearing in her real self all of sudden. She explained that there was a faculty meeting that afternoon, and that she would be raising the issue. No one knows yet what will happen there—but these students learned that the teachers and kids might be able to work together after all.

Next time you see a kid struggling to carry all her school supplies, you might ask her if there is a reason she is not allowed to carry a backpack. Next time you have a conversation about this rule, please speak up for the kids, like Meredith, who simply want to have their things with them, so they can do the work they need to do. Ban the Ban Backpack Rule!

Layla X, Backpack Carrier