

## Still Weighty: The Long Road to Lighter Packs

**Looking like Himalayan porters,** kids stagger off to school carrying packs and bags that burst with up to 20 pounds of textbooks, electronic gear, gym clothes, even musical instruments. And since school lockers are limited or banned in many places, some states are hoping to ease the load.

It's not easy, though. California has passed legislation, which went into effect in July, to set limits on the weight of textbooks in core subjects. Tennessee has passed similar legislation, and at least six other states are debating comparable bills. California schools won't have to worry about weight limits until new math textbooks are ordered in 2007, but even then, kids won't get much of a break.

"The California legislation is going to do little to address this problem," says Stephen Driesler, executive director of the school division for the Association of American Publishers. Lighter textbooks, he says, are likely to be more expensive to manufacture, lightweight paper can be harder to read, and softer covers are less durable. Other options, like having a set of books for the classroom and another for home, would cost more, too.

Meanwhile, according to research by the California State Board of Education, the combined weight of textbooks in the four core subjects of history, math, reading, and science alone typically exceed the recommended weight limits. (Pediatric and chiropractic organizations recommend that the weight of a backpack not exceed, at the very most, 20 percent of a child's body weight.)

Partially to keep up with standardized tests, schools are trying to cover more subject matter than before, which makes books big-



ger, Driesler notes. Locker bans don't help, nor does the fact that no legislation in the world would convince kids to adopt dorky solutions like wearing pack straps on both shoulders or pulling a wheelie bag.

Driesler says that his organization's publisher members are not "wedded to print and paper." But until technology is so cheap and ubiquitous that every student can carry a dedicated wireless laptop loaded up with courseware, kids will be toting bags loaded down with heavy books. —Karen Epper Hoffman

**Books Banned** Just outside Phoenix, Arizona, a whole school is being designed around the idea of banishing the book. Every student at Empire High School, due to open next year, will be issued a laptop, and the facility and curriculum are being designed with one-to-one computing in mind. Students won't just be lazily served textbook material that has been slapped onto a CD-ROM; teachers will be expected to "steep themselves in curriculum, modify it, and put it in a package of their own creation," says Wayne Gritis, the school's site-technology coordinator. The program's initially higher costs will equal those of traditional textbook-based instruction after about four years, and there's a bonus. "We'll be able to keep curriculum up to date and relevant," says Gritis. "We won't be stuck with a book that's mainly for Texas." And kids won't be stuck with book bags the size of the Lone Star State. —Sarah Fallon

# Online Applications Click With College Hopefuls

**High school seniors** applying to college this fall are much more likely to have used electronic applications than the college seniors they're chasing out the door. Electronic applications used to be favored by only the "innovators" and the "techies," says Dr. Frank Burnett, former CEO of the National Association for College Admission Counseling and current president of Education Now, a firm in Springfield, Virginia, that does educational consulting and training. "Now the more mainstream student is seeing the time and task benefits of doing all this electronically," he says.

The Princeton Review, for example, reports that online applications through its Web site have grown 80 percent, from 215,558 between July 2000 and June 2001 to 388,509 for the period ending this past June. Individual school systems also report a surge in online-application usage. Students applying to multiple colleges have to input basic information only once when they use online applications. And they get instantaneous confirmation of delivery in lieu of a just-in-time postmark, thus avoiding the ritual mad dash to the post office. This method can give students an advantage in first-come-first-served rolling application pools and can save them money: Some colleges short on qualified applicants periodically waive the fee for online applications.

Tech-savvy students might also create their own college-application Web site, an easy way to showcase their work, particularly clips of performances. "Certain activities, such as participation in sports, theater, or a dance group, lend themselves to electronic applications," says Lisa Rosenberg, associate director for the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. But the process is still far from completely virtual. The Rosenberg says applicants who snail-mail their materials should include printouts of their Web pages. E-application boom or no, students still can't assume members of the admissions committee review applications within arm's length of a computer. —Russell Shaw

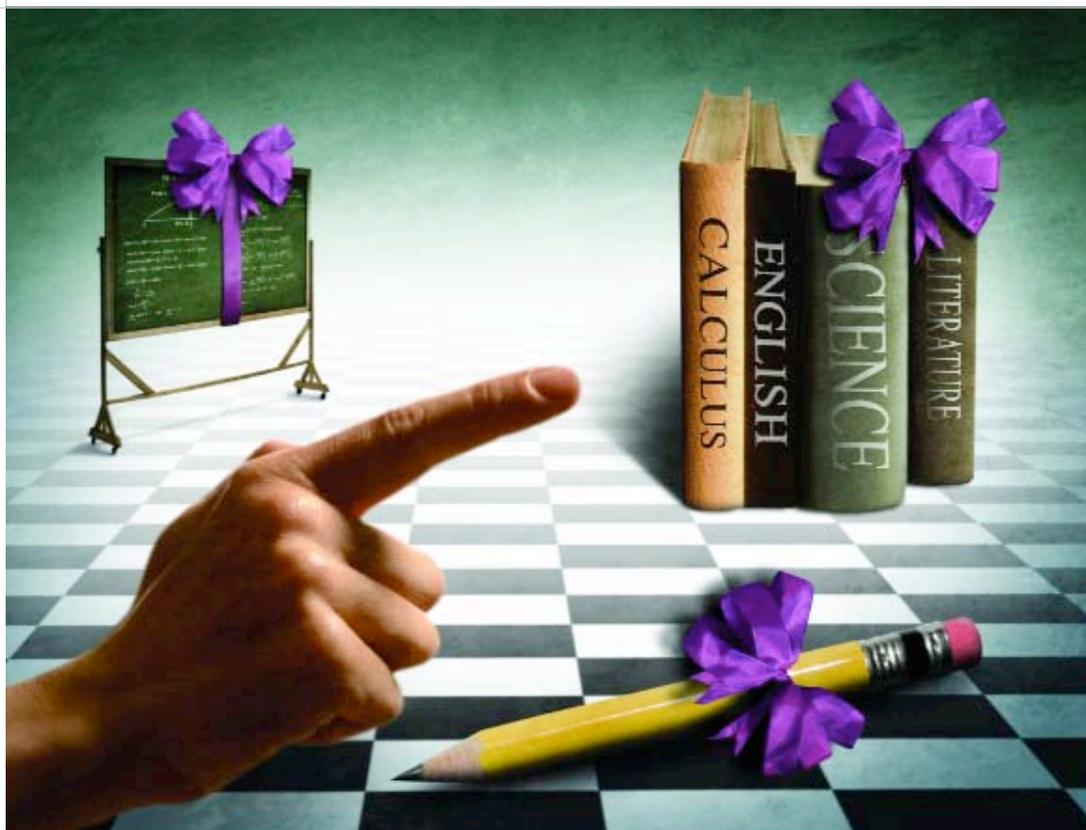
**HOT LINK**

• [www.princetonreview.com/apply](http://www.princetonreview.com/apply)

## Secretarial Pool

**Each executive branch has its archetypical officeholder. Secretaries of state tend to be diplomats; secretaries of defense spin round the revolving door between the Department of Defense and the military-industrial complex. Secretaries of education are often midrange politicians parked between career moves. Some have made changes to public schools that still reverberate today, while others are best known for their outside-the-office antics. Here's the scorecard.** —Geoffrey James

Name	Administration	Prior experience	Will be remembered for	Current gig
Shirley Hufstедler	Carter	Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit	Being the first secretary of education	Board member of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Terrell Bell	Reagan	Head of the Utah System of Higher Education	Encouraging public schools to focus on academics rather than socialization	Deceased
William J. Bennett	Reagan	Conservative writer who, while in college, dated singer Janis Joplin	Writing <i>The Book of Virtues</i> , a paean to traditional values and morality	Attempting to reestablish credibility after gambling away millions of dollars
Lauro Cavazos	Reagan, George H.W. Bush	President of Texas Tech University	Being the first cabinet member of Hispanic descent	Professor of family medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine
Lamar Alexander	George H.W. Bush	Governor of Tennessee from 1979 to 1987	Two attempts to secure the Republican presidential nomination, and red-and-black plaid shirt worn during gubernatorial attempt	Republican senator from Tennessee
Richard Riley	Clinton	Governor of South Carolina from 1978 to 1987	Creating the E-rate program, offering schools discounted Internet and telecom services	Law professor at Furman University and the University of South Carolina
Roderick Paige	George W. Bush	Superintendent of the Houston Independent School District	Acting as the main spokesman for the No Child Left Behind Act	Still in office and touting the benefits of No Child Left Behind



## A Better Way to Give. And to Receive.

Yes, it's the thought that counts. (Remember that when you get yet another set of cutesy guest towels from your mother.) But it counts a whole lot more when giver and givee are thinking the same thing. DonorsChoose.org makes charitable giving—and receiving—a little more seamless, and it's about to expand its operations to benefit a lot more educators.

The nonprofit Web site allows teachers to post requests for projects or supplies that potential patrons can then select to fund. When Cynthia Rosado, a first-grade English as a

Second Language teacher at P.S. 169 in Brooklyn, gave it a shot two years ago, she asked for \$1,200 for two sets of guided readers. She got the funding (and the books) in a matter of days.

Since then, Rosado has had more than 40 proposals funded—for things from books to art supplies, from Legos to a laminating machine. And personalized philanthropy can get even more personal. Several of the people who have contributed to DonorsChoose projects at her school have come to visit the classrooms. "They

want to know that their money is really getting to the kids," says Rosado.

Benefactors donate by check or major credit card to DonorsChoose, which then buys the goodies and sends them to the teachers. About half of the proposals get funded within 60 days, and, overall, 75 percent are backed.

DonorsChoose gives contributors of every tax bracket greater control over their largesse and a closer relationship with their benefactors, who are encouraged to send thank-you notes. "Even though you might have only \$50 to give," says Ilana Goldman, the company's vice president, "we're going to treat [our donors] the way the Ford Foundation treats someone who has \$1 million to give."

Until recently, this eBay for educational philanthropy was available only to teachers in the New York City school system, where it has channeled more than \$2 million (more than 60 percent of which came from outside the Big Apple) into over 1,400 classrooms. Now, however, schools throughout North Carolina can participate, and San Francisco Bay Area and Chicago teachers can get on the gift list this winter.

No need to send that letter to Santa Claus after all. —Karen Epper Hoffman

### Jargon 101

*synthesize constructivist curriculum integration  
harness thematic niches  
disintermediate metacognitive enrichment  
visualize constructive outcomes*



Weary of educational clichés? Generate your own at chemistry teacher Andy Allan's Educational Jargon Generator, which he adapted from existing computer code. He created the page (with vocabulary submissions from other teachers), he says, "when we were feverishly engaged in writing voluminous reports brimming with baffling BS," but spends most of his time working on ScienceGeek.net as a resource for students and teachers. Try your hand at jargon generation at [www.sciencegeek.net/lingo.html](http://www.sciencegeek.net/lingo.html). —Sarah Fallon