



# Parents' Perspective on Back-to-School Shopping

Does this quote by children's writer Bill Dodds ring true for you?

*"Labor Day is a glorious holiday because your child will be going back to school the next day. It would have been called Independence Day, but that name was already taken."*

Although, for some parents, there is a bit of relief at the thought of having your child return to a regular school routine, there is another feeling that strikes many parents as summer winds down. It is the familiar feeling of back-to-school panic, which stems from the laundry list of things to buy and do, to get your child ready for that first day back.

At Ipsos, we wanted to school ourselves on what parents are thinking as they prepare their children for the new year ahead. Whether it's a first-time school experience with a pre-kindergartner or sending off a seasoned college senior, we found out what parents think as they prepare for the start of school.

## When to Buy

In the U.S., 83% of households with children under 18-years-old will have kids going to school this year. 25% of those parents say they had already purchased some back-to-school items by mid-June. Surprisingly, men were more likely (37%) to get a head start on back-to-school shopping than women (15%).

Despite this eagerness by some parents, only 10% usually finish their shopping by July 4, while most (67%) normally finish a few weeks before school starts. 18% will wait until the last minute and finish their shopping right before the first day of school. Meanwhile, 5% admit they wait until after the school year starts to complete their shopping.

## What to Buy

Purchasing back-to-school supplies can be a tricky task with some schools requesting more items with specific brands or attributes. Despite the growing supply list, most parents feel schools provide a comprehensive list with needed items which will be used by their child throughout the school year. However, this sentiment is not shared by all parents.

### Feelings on back-to-school shopping list\*

Comprehensive list/my child will use	58%
My child may not use all items/supplying for others	32%
Items shouldn't be child's responsibility/ requested due to lack of funds	27%
Requiring expensive supplies/not necessary	23%
None of above	7%

\*Multiple responses allowed

Regardless of their feelings about school supplies, most parents hold their child's teachers in high regard. In fact, three-fourths say they are happy to provide the requested items because teachers are working hard to instruct their child. However, the remaining one-fourth say everyone is working hard, not only teachers. They say they are struggling to understand why supply lists are so long and specific.

Perhaps to make the process a little easier for parents and teachers, some schools offer pre-packaged back-to-school kits. Although they have become a popular option, only 2 out of 10 parents say they have or plan to order them for the upcoming school year.

## Price or Preference

When purchasing these supplies, it appears your child's preference (46%) is almost as important as getting the best price (54%). If your little one prefers a SpongeBob SquarePants backpack, or your college student wants wireless earbuds, chances are these items will end up in your shopping cart. This may contribute to why parents shop for individual supplies rather than ordering pre-packed supply kits.

Given that parents can feel a bit overwhelmed with the longer and more complicated supply lists, combined with wanting to accommodate their child's tastes, the back-to-school shopping process is not an easy one.

### Back to school shopping is something that\*:

Is fun and exciting	43%
Causes frustration – can't easily find all supplies needed	32%
Usually causes arguments	14%
Normally ends up with someone shedding tears	7%
None of the above	22%

\*Multiple responses allowed

## Who Pays?

Among U.S. parents who have a child going to school this fall, 56% have one attending either high school or college. We asked those parents if their child is likely to help pay for any of their back-to-school supplies for the upcoming year. 37% said yes, their child will pay for at least some of their back to school items. Six out of ten high school/college students do not pay for any supplies. Among the children who do contribute, approximately half pay for all or most items, one fourth pay for about half their supplies and the remaining fourth will pay for a few things.

Of course, not all supplies are textbooks and backpacks. New clothing is included in back-to-school shopping. With that in mind, we wondered if parents secretly wished their kids wore uniforms to school. We found parents were split over the school uniform debate. 53% prefer to have their child wear their own clothes versus 47 % favoring school uniforms.



## Cause to Celebrate?

As parents prepare themselves for their child's moans and groans about the end of summer holidays and the return of bedtime, homework and schedules, they may not be alone. Some parents are not too keen about the change either. When asked which day they enjoy most, the first day of summer vacation or the first day of school, there was an overwhelming winner. Most parents (61%) favor the first day of summer vacation over the first day back to school (39%).

After checking with parents across the U.S., one thing is clear. No matter where you live, how many children you have, or what grades they are going into, getting ready for the new school year is chaotic and stressful. Hopefully you are one of the prepared parents who finished their school shopping months ago, and are now simply enjoying the final days of summer. If you are not prepared and plan to do a lot of last-minute shopping, don't worry, you will not be alone. You will have a lot of company at stores near you.

## What Ipsos Does

Each week Ipsos U.S. eNation omnibus completes five national surveys. Ipsos Omnibus offers a variety of services, including overnight or custom studies. To receive complimentary access to this Back-To-School study or to learn more about eNation omnibus, please contact:

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