



Pointers For Parents

Cut Costs, Not Corners For Back-To-School

(NAPSA)—According to the National Retail Federation, parents of school-aged children estimated they spent nearly \$600 on back-to-school purchases last year. How can you cut back this year without cutting corners? Consider these tips for making smart choices:

Host A Swap Party

Instead of organizing a yard sale for strangers, have friends over to trade gently used items you no longer want or use. Swap parties are an inexpensive, social and eco-friendly way to stock up on clothes, shoes, books, athletic equipment and anything else your kids might need in exchange for things they've already outgrown. Invite friends with similar school-aged children and tastes, and ask them to bring items in good condition they're willing to swap in exchange for something someone else brings. Let guests know in advance if there's a particular theme, such as children's clothing, or if anything goes.

Do Your Homework On School Supplies

Your child's teacher will likely send him or her home with a laundry list of school supplies, but before you hit the stores, do a little homework and shop around to get the best value. For example, did you know print shops sometimes have large quantities of misprinted promotional pencils? They'll often unload these for pennies and the erasers usually last longer than on bargain pencils. Consider online auction sites for



Savvy parents have learned to save on supplies when sending their offspring off to school.

higher-ticket items such as scientific calculators that high school students need. You might be surprised by how discounted these items are once the required semester of precalculus is over. If you have several children, keep a large plastic tub at home and stock up on supplies when you see sales at drugstores, closeout shops and thrift stores. After all, you'll need pens, paper and folders again.

Invest In Technology

Think all "must-have" PCs and printers also come with a side of sticker shock? Think again. Some of this year's products are designed to work together seamlessly so compatibility isn't an issue. For example, products from HP include the latest software so your kids can stay ahead of the curve and are backed by industry-leading service and support. The latest lineup features a shiny, piano-black finish that makes them a stylish fit for any home or

dorm room—with PC/printer pairings available at about half the price of some notebooks. The 16-inch HP Pavilion dv6 (starts at \$649) and the wireless HP Photosmart C4780 All-in-One (\$129) offer style, performance and value to meet the entire family's computing and printing needs.

Carpool To And From School

Though carpooling is not a new concept, it's one of the easiest ways to save money, fossil fuels and time. Instead of lining up behind your neighbor in the school drop-off zone or alongside all the other parents after soccer practice, organize a friendly car pool and take turns transporting the kids. Organizations such as Divide the Ride (www.dividetheride.com) can help you coordinate car pools with others you know and trust. That way, the kids get where they need to go, helping you "go green" and save some green along the way.

Plan Ahead When Packing Lunches

To help keep lunchtime budgets and unhealthy habits at a minimum, buy commonly eaten and long-lasting items such as apples, carrots, pretzels and juice boxes at club stores to keep costs low. Use coupons and stock up on family favorites such as chicken when it's on sale, freezing some if necessary. Tonight's baked chicken could be chicken wraps tomorrow. Throw in a piece of fruit, a granola bar and a thermos of milk and you can keep your kids healthy and your budget in check.