



1250 SHOPS + 2022 Parents
8.3M x 7.1M (x) + 24.7 x 1.9M (x)

General

Retail

Uncertainty

Economic Uncertainty Fuels Early Back-to-School Shopping For Nearly 3 in 10 Shoppers

Image Credit: Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

Civicscience contact@civicscience.com · Published: July 1, 2025

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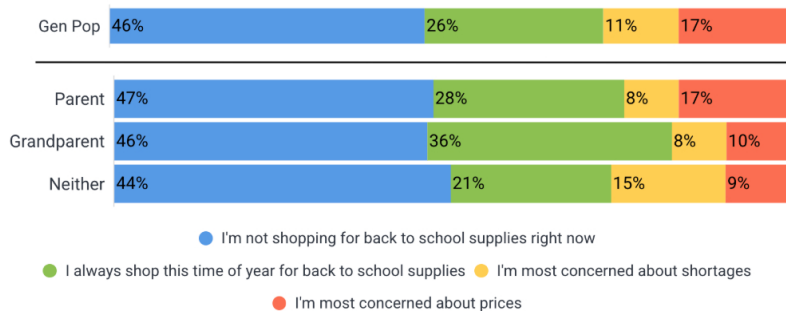
school shopping. An early start to shopping is one way consumers are combating economic uncertainty, just as they are [making changes](#) to their summer plans and shifting other priorities. What exactly is fueling the early start, and what trends can we expect when the traditional season picks up?

Answer our Poll: [How ready are you for back-to-school season?](#)

More than half of back-to-school shoppers have already begun filling their carts with notebooks, clothes, and essentials for the 2025-2026 school year. For more than one-quarter of back-to-school shoppers (26%), this is simply a normal time to get started. However, a similar percentage (28%) cite concerns about cost and supply shortages as the reason for their head start.

Back-to-school shoppers can be parents, grandparents, or even the student, depending on age and level of education. The motivating factors for these segments differ: Typical parents – likely those of school-age children – align most closely with the Gen Pop's motivations for shopping for school supplies early. They're also most likely to be concerned about costs. Grandparents, meanwhile, are the most likely to say they are shopping now simply because they always buy school supplies this time of year. People who are neither parents nor grandparents (e.g., students, guardians, older siblings) are shopping now primarily out of concerns about shortages of back-to-school supplies.

If you're shopping for back to school supplies for the 2025-26 school year already, which of the following best describes your most significant reason why? by Parental Status



917 responses from 06/11/2025 to 06/18/2025
Rebased to exclude 'Does not apply'
Weighted by U.S. Census 18+
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Weigh In: [Should kids go to school year-round?](#)

Back-to-School Deals Are Slightly Less Important This Year

While early back-to-school shoppers may appear less reliant on sales and discounts, deals remain a significant motivator. Recent polling shows that the importance of promotions has dipped slightly—down two percentage points from last year—but this doesn't necessarily signal waning interest. Instead, it suggests a growing share of consumers are adapting to higher prices and shopping earlier to manage costs over time. Most shoppers anticipate buying about the same or less than they did last year.

A large percentage of people buying school supplies now say they have observed the impact of tariffs on their

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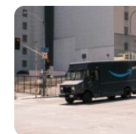
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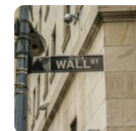
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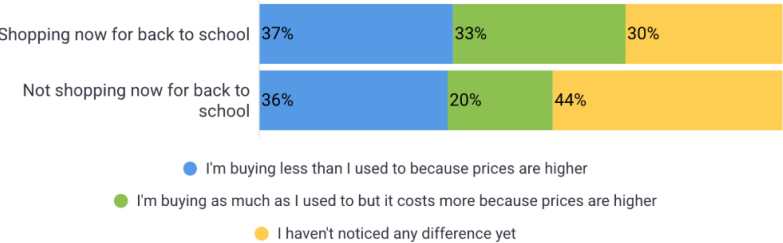


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Slightly
Declined at
the End of Q2

household spending, but have yet to alter shopping behaviors. The people shopping now out of price concerns are small in number, but they report feeling the tariffs and in turn reducing their overall spending.

Back-to-school shopping status compared with *How have recent trade policies and tariffs impacted your recent household spending?*

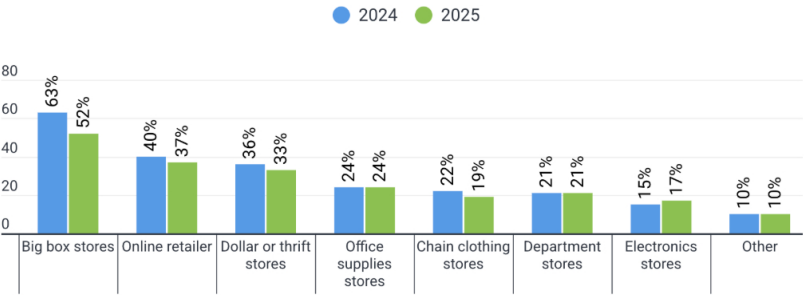


418 responses from 06/11/2025 to 06/18/2025
Rebased to exclude 'Does not apply'
Weighted by U.S. Census 18+
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The last year has also seen significant changes in where consumers are buying school supplies, and it's not because there are [fewer dollar stores](#) around. **Early CivicScience polling reveals big box stores are less popular this year—a 17% decrease.** While that was the most significant shift, most back-to-school shopping destinations also experienced a decrease year over year. Electronics stores increased two percentage points, hinting more students could be using devices or just getting upgrades for the 2025-2026 school year.

What kind of store(s) will you purchase back-to-school supplies from this year? Select all that apply.



934 responses from 07/12/2024 to 07/17/2025
832 responses from 06/17/2025 to 06/24/2025
Rebased to exclude 'NA'
Weighted by U.S. Census 18+
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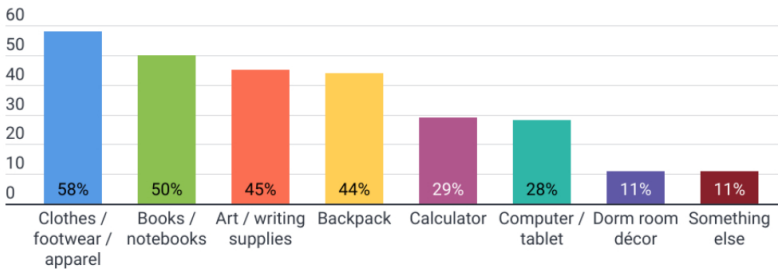
Use this [Data](#): CivicScience clients have access to real-time insights like these, allowing them to stay ahead of the curve and have a pulse on seasonal shifts.

What's in the Cart: Clothing and Apparel Take Priority

While shopping locations continue to shift, purchasing priorities are also taking shape. Clothing, footwear, and other apparel rank as the most common items back-to-school shoppers plan to buy this year—outpacing traditional school supplies. Still, around half expect to purchase books and notebooks, keeping core classroom essentials in the mix.

Which of the following back-to-school supplies do you intend to purchase for you / your child(ren) this year? Select all that apply.

Among shoppers



717 responses from 06/15/2025 to 06/22/2025
Excluding those who don't plan to do any back-to-school shopping
Weighted by U.S. Census 18+
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Many back-to-school shoppers are already checking items off their lists, motivated by more than just a rush for deals. Whether driven by habit, cost concerns, or fears of supply shortages, consumers appear more willing to accept current prices and spread out their spending rather than hold out for last-minute markdowns. As the season progresses, understanding these motivations will be key to anticipating what's next for retailers and families alike.

Economic uncertainty is casting a shadow on back-to-school shopping

plans, and it's impacting your customers. See how — we're already tracking it.

Turn Uncertainty Into Opportunity

START ANSWERING QUESTIONS



Do you prefer to use Google or Amazon to search for something you want to buy?

- ☐ Google
- ☐ Amazon
- ☐ No preference

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