

Back-to-School Survey Reveals Safety is Biggest Consideration for Parents when Shopping

Retailer's survey of 1,200 parents and teachers demonstrates the "new normals" as preparation for the new school year begins

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., Aug. 18, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- In a year full of "new normals," Chicagoan Sharon Glovier continues to readjust her priorities when it comes to shopping for her family. This is especially true as the mother navigates the uncertainties surrounding the upcoming school year and how they may affect her children.

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"I've always been the type of mom who focuses on my pocketbook, especially for school supplies," Glovier said. "This year, I decided we are only shopping at stores that are highly sanitizing their carts and keeping public areas clean. Finding a deal for everything or saving a few dollars isn't more important than being careful for my kids."

She is not alone in her back-to-school shopping approach. A new survey from Grand Rapids, Mich.-based retailer Meijer documents how the pandemic has changed the ways in which both parents and teachers prepare for fall as school districts reveal return-to-learn plans for in-person and virtual learning. Among the results, the study reveals that nine out of 10 parents rate safety measures as a deciding factor when choosing a brick-and-mortar retailer to shop their lists of supplies.

"While price is always an important factor in shopping decisions, there are definitely 'new normals' when it comes to how customers are checking items off their lists for the upcoming school year," said Brandon Pasch, Director of Back-to-School Merchandising for Meijer. "We are seeing more customers mention the efforts we make regarding safety as they focus on the items most necessary as potential learning plans are determined by schools."

Based on results from the survey, which queried 1,200 parents and teachers in July, the "new normals" for the back-to-school shopping season include:

When are they shopping?

- **An early start:** Twenty percent of parents and teachers started their shopping earlier than last year. The past 3 years have seen shopping pick up after mid-August, but more than 60 percent are already focusing their purchases on basics and essential supplies that may have limited availability during the expected last-minute back-to-school shopping rush.
- **Waiting for the plan:** More than a third of parents and teachers surveyed are still waiting for learning plans from schools. As a result, they are waiting to start their shopping until there is more clarity regarding the school year.

How are they shopping?

- **Parents are not bringing kids shopping for back-to-school supplies:** The younger the child, the less likely parents will allow them to come shopping with them. Meijer stores have now added their selection online, so kids can still be part of the experience. That way, supplies are available via [Meijer Home Delivery and Pickup](#) and kids can be included in the shopping process.
- **Home delivery and pickup are on the rise:** From 2019 to 2020, the survey indicated a 550 percent increase in the use of home delivery or curbside pickup services as part of their online shopping. Meijer is currently offering [teachers an online coupon](#) through its mPerks program. They can receive \$10 off their order and get free *Meijer Delivery or Pickup* with the offer code for one online shopping trip through Sept. 6.

What are the top items?

- **The new No. 1:** In past years, personal protection equipment (masks, sanitizer and wipes) was not a big seller for students going back to school. But this fall, personal protection equipment is a back-to-school essential. Seventy percent of parents expect to buy these items, up from 2 percent last year. To help teachers adjust, Meijer is adding facemasks and hand sanitizers to its [annual 15% Off Teacher Discount](#).
- **Staying connected:** Thirty percent of teachers plan to purchase electronic items to help with virtual learning set up in their homes. Meijer expects to continue seeing increases in electronics purchases from

teachers (routers, mice, keyboards, headphones, etc.) in the coming weeks. Many parents already purchased tablets and other items for their students during the last school year.

- **The year of the white board:** As ZOOM calls and other virtual learning increases, white boards and markers are replacing blackboards and chalk as tools gaining prominence on back-to-school lists. Meijer expects to sell more than 200,000 white boards for teachers as well as students.
- **Increase in home workspace spending:** While parents plan to spend less on locker decor, backpacks, apparel and shoes for the beginning of the school year, they expect to spend as much as \$300 for bedroom and student workspace décor. That is a 66 percent increase over last year. Teachers are expecting to increase their spending for personal protective equipment while decreasing their spend on materials for bulletin boards and classroom décor.
- **No more sharing in class:** While past years have seen classrooms gather shared supplies used by multiple students, the single greatest shift among teachers this year was the recognition that shared resources are a thing of the past.



Finally, both parents and teachers are poised to expect the unexpected. More than 80 percent of parents and teachers expect the new normal for their students to be a mixture of virtual and in-person learning. As decisions are made based on the pandemic, they plan on not completing their school supply lists. The forecast, based on survey results, is that parents and teachers will adjust, refill and update their supplies multiple times in the coming months.

"We anticipate the back-to-school shopping season extending well beyond normal as parents and teachers adjust to new developments in their learning plans," Pasch said. "As a retailer, we are focused on doing our part to offer selection and shopping solutions to help them through these next few weeks and beyond."

About Meijer: Meijer is a Grand Rapids, Mich.-based retailer that operates 253 supercenters and grocery stores throughout Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky and Wisconsin. A privately-owned and family-operated company since 1934, Meijer pioneered the "one-stop shopping" concept and has evolved through the years to include expanded fresh produce and meat departments, as well as pharmacies, comprehensive apparel departments, pet departments, garden centers, toys and electronics. For additional information on Meijer, please visit www.meijer.com. Follow Meijer on Twitter [@twitter.com/Meijer](https://twitter.com/Meijer) and [@twitter.com/MeijerPR](https://twitter.com/MeijerPR) or become a fan at www.facebook.com/meijer.

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