

## MONEYWISE – Back to School Shopping on a Budget

It is officially back-to-school season. Many retailers have started running back to school shopping ads and with less than 30 days before the first day of school in many school districts, it is time to start planning for your back to school needs. According to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), \$7.2 billion was spent at family clothing stores in August 2009, second only to the holiday shopping months of November and December. If you have children in school, you know to plan for back to school expenses; however, these may not be part of your regular budget, since it is not a reoccurring monthly expense. Similar to holiday shopping, you can reduce your back to school stress and expenses by developing a budget prior to heading out to your local retailer. Planning in advance gives you time to shop for the specific items that you need at the right price.

Start with the class supply list. Inventory any items that you may already have at home or remaining from last school year, such as backpacks, folders, paper, and so forth. Identify the items on the list that you will need to purchase, look for retailer sale ads in your local newspaper or on the internet. Many retailers will have large discounts on class supplies to entice you to visit the store, take your class supply list with you and only purchase those items on the list. If there is a summer reading list, talk with students who recently completed the grade your child will be entering, they may be willing to let you borrow or purchase their books at a reduced rate.

Back to school is also a good time to inventory your clothes closets. Identify clothes which have been out grown or your children will no longer wear. Consider taking clothes which are in good condition and still in style to a local children's consignment shop. Selling clothes at a consignment store may earn you a few extra dollars and many consignment retailers offer buying discounts to sellers. Check with your child's school to determine if the school has a dress code, then make an inventory of the items that your child will need to start the school year. Identify if certain items can wait until later in the school year, for example, you probably do not need to purchase a winter in August. By dividing your school clothes shopping over several months, you are spreading out the expenses.

Prioritize your school shopping list in order of importance, while talking to your children about the difference between needs versus wants. Develop a budget based on your needs; if you still have additional funds available then you can allocate some money to wants. While you are doing your back to school shopping you are less likely to overspend if you pay with cash, as opposed to using your credit card. Shopping with a credit card is very convenient, but since there are no immediate consequences for using your credit card, you are more likely to overspend. If you are using cash, once all of your cash is gone, you are finished with your back to school shopping. Spending cash makes you much less likely to overspend if you cannot afford it.

If you are looking for additional money tips, educational materials may be found on [Moneywise](#).

Compiled by Jennifer Hunter, Extension Specialist Family Financial Management,  
[jhunter@uky.edu](mailto:jhunter@uky.edu)

