

Back-to-School Sustainably - Save money & the planet!

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Ah, the end of summer is a bittersweet time. We bid farewell to the leisurely days of summer when kids are out of school, college students are free to pursue other projects, and teachers can take some well-deserved time off to get back to the business of learning and growing. Getting back in the classroom can drive many parents and students to feel that they need to purchase new versions of everything for the year, which has the unfortunate consequence of negatively impacting our environment.

It might be nice to get a bunch of new outfits for the year, but if those clothes are coming from a **fast fashion** company, chances are that they won't hold up through the whole year. During this busy season when consumerism is pushed heavily on parents and students, this edition of our monthly newsletter dives into some recommendations about how to thoughtfully prepare for back to school, and as always, provides actions you can take in your life to apply these recommendations.



Does everything need to be brand new?

Teachers often provide back-to-school lists at the beginning of the year. Many of the items on the list are indeed essentials that need to be purchased new each year - things like notebooks, pens, pencils, and art supplies are indispensable for many classes, and can't be reused after they're used up.



Perhaps not everything from last year might have been fully used up. It **IS** ok to check last year's gently/partly used notebooks, folders, and binders for additional life. **Family time activity** - sharpen last year's pencils, check the pens and markers for additional life and sort what needs to be recycled. Discuss with your children how we can all make a difference by using up some of these supplies before opening the brand new items.

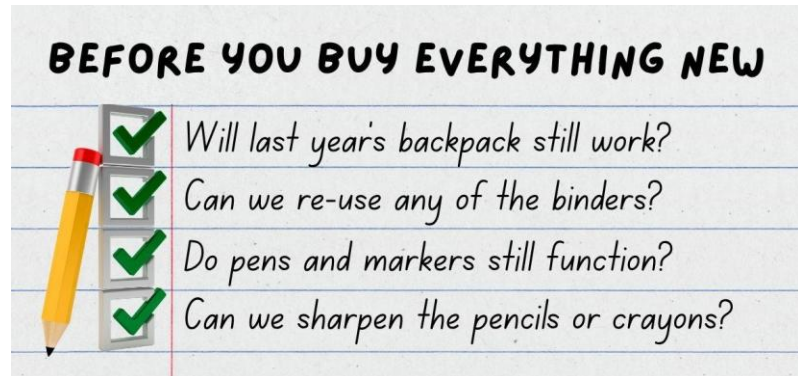
There will be some items on the list that you don't *have* to get brand new. Items like calculators and textbooks can often be purchased second-hand for far less than what they would cost new. For younger students, parents should consider reaching out to other parents, a Parent-Teacher Association forum, or even resale sites like Facebook marketplace to seek out items that older students don't need anymore. For college-aged students, especially those who are on a

budget, renting textbooks for the semester can be a great way to save money while avoiding demand for more paper products.

Potential Resource: [click to compare textbook rental companies](#); Other great used book resources: [Better World Books](#) & [Thrift Books](#)

Backpacks are definitely essential school items, but they also don't need to be brand new every year. Keep an eye out for backpacks throughout the year at Goodwill and other resale stores.

Ask neighbors, friends, and family members if they have any their students (or even adults working full-time) don't need. Branded backpacks are often given as a swag item at professional conferences and university events, and then end up sitting in a drawer collecting dust. As often as possible, try to assess which items are truly essential and which should be less high priority, and seek out existing items that you could reuse from another student who doesn't need them anymore.



New Year, New Outfits?

While we all love getting a new outfit and many kids grow out of items quickly, buying a whole new wardrobe for each student in your household every year is very unsustainable. Cheap clothing produced by **fast fashion** companies may be easy to come by, but the items often deteriorate in the laundry and will quickly need to be replaced.



Fast Fashion: inexpensive clothing with a high cost to the planet... Fast fashion has a rapid turn-around from design to finished product creating constant turn-over and excitement for inexpensive-new styles. The harm comes when garments are mass produced and rely on cheap materials that tend to wear out quickly. Add in concerns over production in countries with low wages and poor working conditions, chemical pollution, high water use, textile waste, etc., and the costs to people and planet add up quickly. [Click for more information](#).

Instead of filling up on fast fashion items, parents and students should prioritize seeking out well-made basic items that they can easily mix and match from companies with meaningful sustainability commitments and plans. If this idea sounds familiar, parents, it's because you've probably heard of **capsule wardrobes**!

A **capsule wardrobe** is a collection of clothing that makes it very easy to mix and match to create outfits. The main ideas are:

1. The number of items in your closet should be limited.
2. All the items can be used in multiple outfits and in endless combinations.
3. Most of the wardrobe contains basics with only a few pops of color or less versatile accessories.

And capsule wardrobes aren't just for adults! Just imagine less decision fatigue and clutter-free closets!

Check out [this guide](#) from the folks at My Green Closet that provides specific recommendations about how you can build a capsule wardrobe for your kids. *The idea is you spend a little extra time up-front but save a LOT in the year to come!*



While investing in higher-quality, sustainably-produced capsule wardrobe items will cost more upfront, they will be easier to patch and repair should they get damaged, meaning they will last longer. Some of our sustainable clothing brands include [Pact](#), which produces a wide variety of organic and fair trade cotton garments for adults, and [Hanna Andersson](#) for children's clothing. Hanna Andersson even has a page for [reselling pre-loved items](#), allowing parents to recoup some of their original investment in the clothing and keeping textile waste out of landfills!

As always, the most sustainable action you can take is to use everything you have until it is completely unusable. Making the items we have, including clothing items last as long as possible and repairing them before replacing them, is key. Once an item truly needs to be replaced, or once you've had a chance to assess any gaps in your student's wardrobe, consider thrifting a replacement item or investing in a higher-quality piece that will last longer.

What about Trends? Trends among school-aged and college kids will always come and go. While it may be exciting to kids to keep up with the latest fashion trends, it doesn't do anyone any good if those items they begged for six months ago end up collecting dust in their closets after only a few uses. This includes specialty items like Homecoming and prom dresses or Halloween costumes.

There are sites that specifically provide prom dress rentals for those who wish to attend and dress up for the occasion ([Rent the Runway](#) has amazing and very affordable options!), and it's often possible to make creative Halloween costumes or school spirit day costumes without buying new clothes. Sticking to the fundamentals of a capsule wardrobe



and not buying single-use trendy or specialty items is a mindset shift, but one that will help your wallet and the planet in the long run.

No students at home but you still have usable supplies?

When shopping deals at the beginning of the school year, it can be helpful to stock-up, but what do you do with all those extra items that are no longer needed? *How long do you let these still new items sit in your closets?* Where should you take them?



A great place to start is with local schools. Give the office a call and ask if they have a use for new or gently used items that still have life. Many local elementary, middle, and high schools appreciate the donations. Check with local food pantries. Look online for a 'School Supply Swap' in your area. It is a lot better to get those supplies out of your closet and into the hands of those who can use them before they get too old!

School Supply Donation and Recycling Resources:

- **New/Unused Supplies:** Kids In Need Foundation <https://www.kinf.org/how-to-help/donate-product>
- **Gently Used Items:** There are many online resources, including: <https://donationtown.org/#items>
 - If you are in the Wisconsin area, check out - <https://ezop.com/blog/water-cooler-talk/where-to-donate-office-supplies-and-equipment/>
- **Recycling old/broken products? Special drop-off bins:** Bring old pens & MORE to [Staples recycling programs](#) which accept all brands of writing instruments. Check out all they take through the online link: <https://www.staples.com/stores/recycling>

Actions to Take

At Wading In, we're all about meeting you where you are and providing actionable solutions that fit into your life. This newsletter is loaded with ideas for learning and doing small things that will help. Amplifying your individual actions, choose changes that work for you, and start today!

Earth Friend

- Patch an item you would have replaced.
- Go through old notebooks from last school year to see if any pages can be used for this year.
- Rent a college textbook rather than buying one.
- Purchase a gently used book from a site like [Better World Books](#) & [Thrift Books](#)

 Green Defender

- Take an inventory of your closet to start a capsule wardrobe.
- Thrift a backpack for this school year.
- Offer up some of the items your students no longer need to others.
- Learn more (read an article or two) about Fast Fashion.

 Environmental Warrior

- Start a hand-me-down chain in your community - as kids in one age group outgroup their clothes, pass them on to another family whose kids can use them.
- For high school and college students, go digital - avoid buying any paper textbooks or notebooks, and take notes on a school-issued piece of technology.
- Plan for zero-waste lunches with 100% reusable silicon snack bags and sandwich bags, and meal prep healthy lunch options for students.

Individuals have power and can make a difference to positively change the world. Every day presents new opportunities to learn and grow. Not everything is within our control – but we can control our own actions and can inspire others to make positive change.

Wishing you a fabulous Back to School season!

Sources/Resources:

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