

“Back to School”

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It's back to school time. Can you hear the collective sigh of relief from parents across the country? Can you hear the draining of wallets as we replace clothes and shoes, backpacks and lunchboxes, school supplies and books, ID cards, class planners and yearbooks, then buy student picture packages, join the PTA, and pay for parking passes? Did I mention paper towels and tissues?

When I was a kid, we went to school with a pencil and a pen. Eventually in the 70s, I got a backpack. Lunch was in a brown paper bag. How did we ever survive?

Back to school has become crazy big business and the pressure is on to keep up with the Joneses. You don't want your kid being the one without the supplies the teacher says they have to have. School is hard enough. Do you know how many half used highlighters and pencils I own after two kids in public schools for the last ten years?

The notion that kids have to start the year with never before used supplies, especially spiral notebooks -- these are my biggest pet peeve -- *never* have my kids used more than 20% of the pages in these books, well this notion is based on nothing more than the fact that businesses tell us we need them and schools promote it.

Kids grow. They need new shoes, new clothes. I get that. They don't need all new school supplies. How many of these half used or barely used supplies end up in the trash I wonder? How many of the photos in those packages are left in the original photo sleeves and are never cut out and mailed to grandparents? I now scan one photo and e-mail it to anyone who is interested. And frankly, how interesting are those photos? How many sixth-grade yearbooks are never opened again once the children grow up to be adults? Does anyone really need 12 yearbooks?

Ironically, the one supply that never lasts, the one that should last and has been a staple in school since the cave man, are three-ring binders. They are smashed into over-stuffed back packs and smooshed into too-small lockers, and opened and closed hundreds of times yet constructed seemingly without any of this in mind. I've actually resorted to duct taping them. We go through an average of six binders per child, per school year. Can somebody work on this? Use a material that stays together for a school year and doesn't harm the environment? Is there a company out there willing to take all these old supplies, supplies the schools could collect at the end of each school year, clean them up a bit and give them to kids? Gently used supplies they could be called.

Schools need to green up. To rethink this process. To be role models and educate our kids .. not just about the ABC's .. but about the importance of reusing and recycling. That includes rethinking things, like schedule pick-up day when you have to turn in multiple forms and checks in order to receive your schedule. Consolidation would work well here. I personally just wrote 11 checks for this privilege – count 'em - 11. Most of these could have been combined into two. One for each child. This by the way had nothing to do with all the other supplies I needed to purchase. If every parent did this, wrote 11 checks on schedule pick up day in every state across the country, well, it gives new meaning to the concept of paper-trail.