



BACK-TO-SCHOOL PRESSURES & STRESSORS REPORT

2023

A deep dive into the pain points experienced by moms as they prepare their families for the new school year

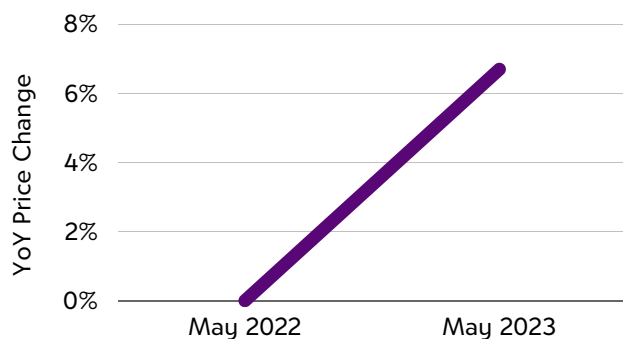


INTRODUCTION

The old adage runs true: mother knows best. The more than 85 million moms in the U.S. call the shots when it comes to household spending, controlling 85% of their family's purchases, with a spending power of \$2.4 trillion.¹



But such purchasing power comes with immense stress. Moms grapple with endless to-do lists, mounting societal pressure, and maximizing their budgets amidst record-high costs of essentials. Grocery prices alone have risen 6.7% from May 2022 to May 2023 — and they're projected to keep rising.²



As moms prepare for the upcoming school year, these anxieties will be top of mind. Last year, U.S. consumers spent an average of \$661 per child and \$36.9 billion in total on back-to-school purchases.³

When considering these costs, coupled with the stress that comes with prepping lunches and planning ahead for kids' rapid growth spurts, it's no surprise that 55% of parents agree that back-to-school shopping is more stressful than the holiday shopping season.



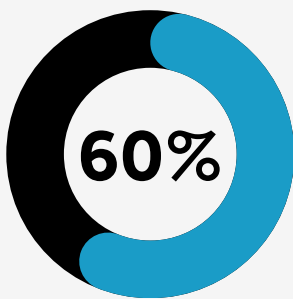
For moms, the pressure to find ways to save on back-to-school shopping is greater than ever. To better understand the pressures and stressors affecting families as they prepare for the back-to-school and -college season, online retailer [Zulily](#) partnered with [Wakefield Research](#) to conduct a survey among 2,000 U.S. parents.

BACK-TO-SCHOOL = BACK TO STRESS FOR MOMS

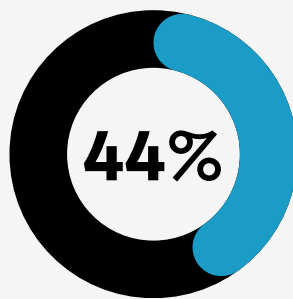
The back-to-school season marks new beginnings and excitement for kids. But as inflation drives up the prices of back-to-school essentials, it ushers in financial stress for moms.

Flourishing minds need the proper nutrients to learn and grow. On average, kids sprout 2.5 inches each year, and gain about 4-7 pounds per year until puberty starts.⁴ Grocery lists grow alongside kids' growing appetites, requiring moms to purchase larger clothing sizes – and at a quicker frequency.

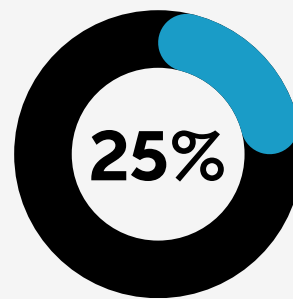
Unfortunately for moms' budgets, food prices at schools have increased threefold.⁵



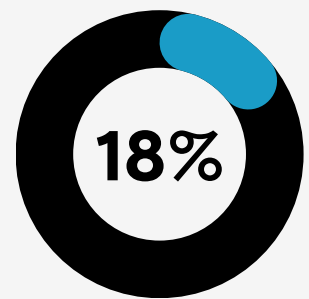
The average price of eggs has increased by nearly 60%



Margarine has increased by nearly 44%



Lettuce has increased by almost 25%



Canned fruits & vegetables have increased by more than 18%

Food prices aren't all that's on the rise. Sixty-eight percent of back-to-school and -college consumers report higher prices on back-to-class items, with 38% of shoppers reportedly trimming their budgets in other areas in order to afford higher costs for back-to-class.⁶

It's clear families are feeling the pinch of inflation. Over the last six months, consumers have been the most price-conscious about groceries (55%), followed by utilities (36%), and clothing and shoes (35%).⁷ Inflation also impacts how parents are thinking about their back-to-school budgets.

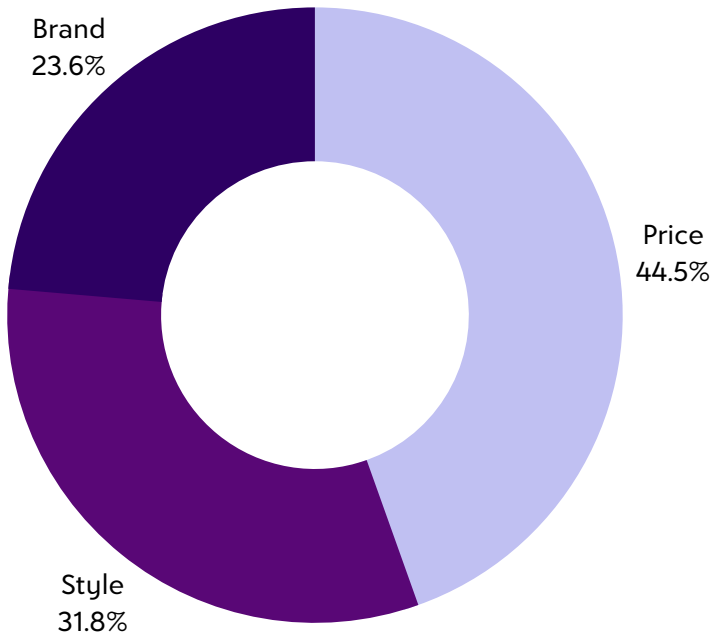
Twenty-nine percent of parents would feel comfortable spending \$26-\$50 at most for a back-to-school item. Undoubtedly, parents have their sights set on savings, in hopes they can stay on budget, lessen stress, and save time – all while ensuring their kids are ready for the opening bell.

\$26-\$50

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BACK-TO-SCHOOL SHOPPING

Back-to-School Blues

Back-to-school shopping can sometimes feel like a tug-of-war between the mom with the checklist and the kid who wants everything. For moms, it can be difficult to strike a balance of needs versus wants — and dressing room debacles are oftentimes the result.



From Changing Room to War Zone

Back-to-school shopping can often turn into a fight, adding to moms' stress. More than 4 in 5 parents (81%) have gotten into an argument over back-to-school shopping, especially over the price (49%), style (35%), or brand (26%) of an item.

Toughest Age

Certain grades are more challenging to shop for than others. Back-to-school shopping is toughest on parents of middle schoolers, as well as younger parents. In particular, parents under 40 (63%) and parents whose oldest child is 10-12 (61%) or 13-15 (63%) are most likely to feel the grind.

Parental Guidance

Back-to-school shopping can be a minefield for parents trying to maintain a respectable dress code. Nearly 1 in 4 parents have had arguments over items that were too immodest (23%) or had an inappropriate or obscene design (23%). Arguments over modesty are particularly common among parents whose oldest child is aged 16-17 (35%) or 13-15 (27%).



GENERATION INFLATION

It All Adds Up

It's no secret that inflation has forced consumers to think twice about budgets and what they're spending their money on. The consumer price index (CPI) for May 2023 reports inflation is up 6.7% from a year ago – indicating that consumers are continuously feeling the strain of the increased price of goods.⁸ As a result, cost is often the deciding factor when making a back-to-school purchase.

Sticker Shock

To avoid a back-to-school blow out, 46% of parents advise checking the price tag of an item before showing an item to a child. A wise decision, as kids often ask for back-to-school items that are outside parents' budgets, averaging a pricey \$143 per item. Checking a tag could be the key to avoiding an unwelcome temper tantrum.

Generation Inflation

It turns out, the older a parent gets, the less they want to spend. While parents under 40 are willing to spend an average of \$147 on a back-to-school clothing item, their older peers are only willing to go as high as \$107.



PRESSURE FOR PARENTS

A Key Ingredient of Pressure: FOMO

A new backpack and fresh first-day outfit are not enough these days. In the age of social media, kids are under immense pressure to embrace trending styles to keep up with their peers. A Pew Research Center study found that the pressure to look “good” (29%) and fitting into social peer groups (28%) are some of the top pressures experienced by teens aged 13 to 17.⁹ Often, this anxiety extends to parents as well.

Kids These Days

More than 4 in 5 parents (83%) agree kids today are under way more pressure than they were to keep up with the latest fashion trends. Nearly 3 in 5 parents (58%) admit they’re persuaded to buy expensive back-to-school items when kids bring up social pressure, especially wanting to fit in (40%), keeping up with the trends (36%), or avoiding bullies (20%).

Keeping Up With The Joneses

Three-quarters of parents (75%) feel pressure to purchase back-to-school items that other kids or parents would envy—and the list of gear is as long as the car drop-off line. The most common items parents prioritize are school clothes (61%) and school shoes (58%), followed by the right backpack (49%), lunchbox and related supplies (39%), and water bottle (32%).

I’m Trying My Best, Okay?

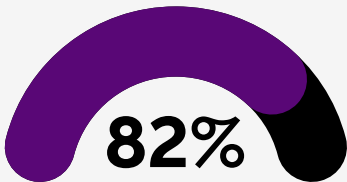
Parents are also feeling the heat when it comes to making a good first-day impression. Nearly 3 in 10 parents (28%) say they face more pressure to be fashionable on the first day of school than kids. In fact, 15% of parents feel pressure to ensure they have a “drop off” wardrobe other parents and kids would envy, including nearly 1 in 5 dads (19%).



DADS

Please, Dad?

Moms aren't the only ones feeling the pressure during the back-to-school shopping season. Dads are also susceptible to back-to-school pain points, particularly when it comes to social pressure.



Dad Swag

Dads are more likely to feel pressure to purchase back-to-school items that other kids or parents would envy (82%, compared to 70% of moms), especially lunchboxes (42% vs. 36%) and water bottles (37% vs 28%).



Dad Deluxe

If kiddos want the high dollar clothing item, go back-to-school shopping with Dad. Dads are comfortable paying an average of \$162 for a back-to-school clothing item for their kid, with dads under 40 open to paying \$195 on average. Moms, on the other hand, are more conservative, targeting \$97 for a back-to-school clothing item — and it seems their kids are aware of this discrepancy.



Kiddos Know Their Audience

Dads report the highest priced item their kids have asked for is \$170, on average, while moms say the highest priced item the kids have asked them to buy is \$121. Dads under 40 have been asked for items costing \$205, on average, compared to the \$138 items their older counterparts have been asked to buy.



Let's Make a Deal

Kids ask for a lot, but they might be leaving money on the table. More than 2 in 5 parents would spend as much or more on a back-to-school clothing item than the highest priced item their kid has asked for (41%). All the kids have to do is ask.



Haggling for Kids

How can kids angle to get the gear they want this back-to-school season? Turns out, mom and dad are easy to persuade: More than 9 in 10 parents (91%) admit kids can come up with some pretty persuasive arguments when they want an expensive item for back to school.



Honor Roll

The most persuasive argument is the classic Report Card Negotiation: Nearly half of parents (45%) would be persuaded to buy an expensive item in exchange for a promise to get good grades.



You Scratch My Back...

Kids can also negotiate a trade, such as doing chores to pay for the cost (40%) or counting the item as their birthday or holiday present (37%). Younger parents are particularly pushovers for a good investment: nearly 1 in 3 parents under 40 (32%) say long-term value is a persuasive argument to buy an expensive item (compared to 23% of their older peers).



NEVER-ENDING GROWTH SPURTS

WEARING LUNCH

As kids get older, messy lunches are (hopefully) less of a concern for parents, but that doesn't mean parents are in the clear when it comes to buying spares of their kids' favorite items.

In fact, parents are nearly three times as likely (73%) to buy doubles of their kids' favorite clothes or shoes for school due to their endless growth spurts than for their love of messy food (27%). And, more than half of parents whose oldest is 9 or above (55%) say their kids' growth spurts are the more likely reason for buying doubles of their kids' favorite clothes or shoes. Meanwhile, 45% say this is more likely to be caused by their kids' love of dirt, sweat, or paint-laden after school activities.



Too Big For Your Britches

As many parents have learned, growth spurts often come at the most inconvenient times. Nearly 3 in 4 parents (72%) say their kid has outgrown a favorite item of clothing and then thrown a fit when it was no longer available in the next size up. More than 2 in 5 (43%) say this has happened more than once, including 56% of dads under 40.

Buying in Bulk

More than a third of parents (34%) advise other parents to buy multiple sizes when their kid falls in love with an item of clothing. This is especially useful if you're one of the 78% of dads or 68% of moms who have had their kid throw a fit when they outgrew an item that wasn't available in the next size up.

Patient Parents

Dealing with growth spurts has taught parents the virtue of patience. Nearly half of parents (47%) would advise other parents not to buy clothes a season ahead because it's unclear what size their kids will be wearing by then. Parents heed their own advice, with nearly 2 in 5 saying the month before school starts (37%) is the absolute earliest it makes sense to start back-to-school shopping. Only 9% believe the week before school starts is the earliest it makes sense to kick off shopping.

BACK-TO-COLLEGE

A Home Away From Home

Parental pressures don't end once kids head off to college. More than 4 in 5 parents (81%) agree they have a duty to make sure their kids have a comfortable home even when they move out.

When I Was Your Age...

Parents feel a duty to their kids leaving the nest because they can remember when they moved out – and had no idea what to do. More than 4 in 5 (82%) didn't feel completely prepared when they moved out for the first time, including 13% who didn't feel prepared at all.

Doing It Their Own Way

But when parents do go out of their way to help their kids feel comfortable when they move out, it's important to remember their kids' own push for independence and individuality. While 51% of parents say they treated their first living space when moving out of their parents' home as an extension of what they were familiar with to make it seem like "home," the other 49% treated their first living space as a blank canvas to do something completely new.

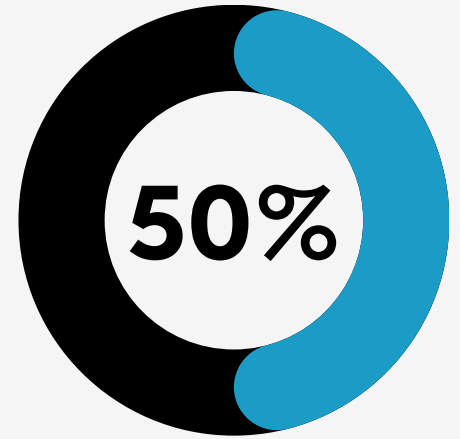


CONCLUSION

The Early Bird Gets the Worm

When it comes to getting ahead of back-to-school stress, the early bird gets the worm. Fifty percent of moms begin back-to-school shopping at the start of summer break, or a few months before school starts.

By shopping early, setting a back-to-school budget and aligning on the essentials ahead of rush hour, moms can stay on top of higher prices and give their kids the brands they love, without breaking the bank.



To help moms shop early and save on all things back-to-school, Zulily opened its virtual [Back-to-School Shop](#) in mid-June — earlier than ever before — with up to 65% off brands kids love. Plus, limited-time deals launched onsite and Zulily’s mobile app daily, further helping moms reduce the chore of shopping, get a win for their wallet, and ensure the entire family goes back to school in style.



Methodology

Findings are based on a survey conducted by [Wakefield Research](#) among 2,000 nationally representative parents of kids ages 4-12, between April 25th and May 7th, 2023, using an email invitation and an online survey. Data has been weighted.

Sources

¹Source: Forbes, [Meet The Company Decoding How To Market To Millennial Moms](#), (2017).

²Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Consumer Price Index Summary](#), (2023).

³Source: Deloitte, [2022 Deloitte Back-To-School Survey](#), (2022).

⁴Source: Kids Health, [Growth and Your 6- to 12-Year-Old](#), (2019).

⁵Source: Motley Fool, [Here's How Much Prices for 20 Essentials Have Increased This Past Year](#), (2023).

⁶Source: Capital One, [Back-to-School Shopping Statistics](#), (2023).

⁷Source: YouGov, [Are consumers feeling the pinch of inflation when it comes to buying furniture?](#), (2023).

⁸Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Consumer Price Index Summary](#), (2023).

⁹Source: Pew Research Center, [Most U.S. Teens See Anxiety and Depression as a Major Problem Among Their Peers](#), (2019)