



Back-to-School REPORT 2026

The New School-Year Reset ➡



Back-to-School Isn't Just a Stock- up Trip, It's a Full Reset Moment

While the start of a new year is often used as the moment to reset goals, routines, habits, and identity. For kids and teens, this reset happens at the start of the new school year. A new grade brings a new schedule, new social dynamics, new expectations, and a renewed sense of how they want to show up, making Back-to-School shopping more than a stock-up trip; it's a key step in helping kids and teens prep for the transition ahead.

Replenish essentials

Backpacks, school supplies, lunchboxes, basics

Upgrade routines

Tech, headphones, phone accessories, snacks

Following several years of growth, **Back-to-School spending is expected to increase again in 2026**. Covering higher costs likely plays a role, but the shopping list itself is also evolving. Growth in sportswear, sneakers, tech, and accessories points to Back-To-School becoming a broader reset moment where families refresh what kids and teens wear, use, carry, snack on, and rely on to feel ready for the school year ahead.

It's rarely just one person driving the shopping cart. Kids, teens, and their parents are all negotiating their own choices and are active in this moment - each with their own agenda, priorities, and version of what "ready" looks like.

Refresh identity

Fashion, sneakers, sportswear, beauty, personal care

Reassure parents

Value, durability, usefulness, comfort, readiness

Back-to-School 2026 in 3 Essential Stats

Bigger budgets, earlier shopping, and digitally shaped wishlists show that BTS decisions are starting sooner and stretching beyond school essentials.

1.

Budgets are booming

\$524

The average US parent spend is up 15% year-over-year giving brands more room to drive premium purchases, bundles, upgrades, and add-ons

2.

The window opens early

84%

Of parents shop in early or mid-summer, meaning brands need to build consideration long before the school year ends

3.

Wishlists are born online

46%

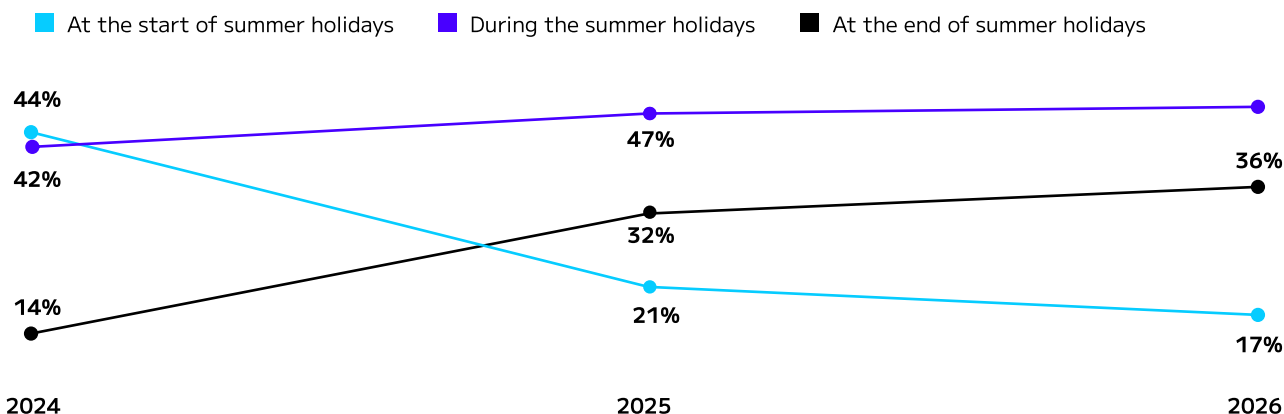
Kids say online video helps them decide what to buy for BTS, up from 37% in 2025



Source: SuperAwesome, Family Influence Tracker, K4-18, Parents of kids 4-18, USA, April 2026, Base: N=544, Base Parents: N=544. Parents answered on behalf of children under 7.

The BTS Shopping Window Continues to Expand

As families move away from last-minute shopping, brands need to shape consideration before early-summer carts start forming.



Most families are checking off Back-to-School shopping from their lists early, with 84% shopping in early or mid-summer. Meanwhile, end-of-summer shopping has dropped sharply compared with 2024. That means August is no longer the starting line, and by the time families start shopping, decisions have already been shaped by what kids and teens have seen, saved, watched, or asked for in early or mid-summer.

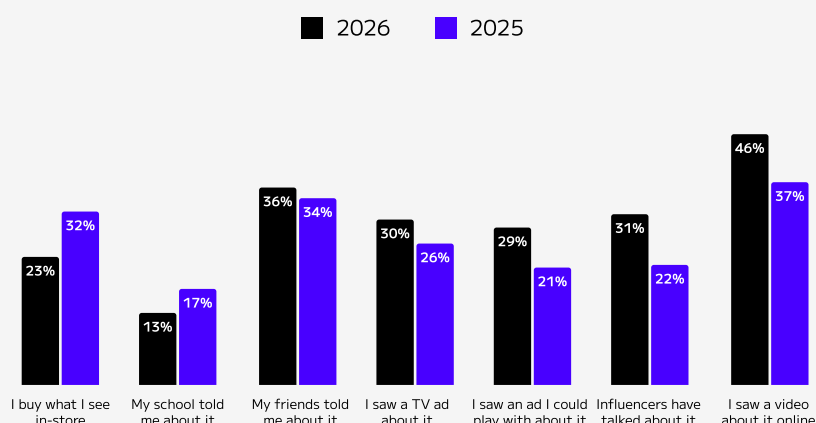
Brands that want to win Back-to-School need to show up before families begin active shopping.

Build awareness and consideration ahead of the summer break and use early and mid-summer campaigns to convert demand into purchase.

Source: SuperAwesome, Family Influence Tracker, Parents of kids 4-18, USA, April 2026, Base: N=544.

Kids Kickstart the Purchase Journey

Kids and teens build wishlists through video, creators, friends, and interactive digital experiences, which in turn influence parent purchase decisions.



CHANGE VS 2025

- ➔ Saw a video online: **+9pts**
- ➔ Influencers talked about it: **+9pts**
- ➔ Saw an ad I could play/interact with: **+8pts**
- ➔ Buy what I see in-store: **-9pts**



Online video is now the top way kids and teens decide what to buy for Back-to-School, surging from 37% in 2025 to 46% in 2026, while influencers and interactive ads also saw major year-over-year growth. At the same time, in-store inspiration has dropped sharply, suggesting last-minute decisions are less common among savvy young consumers. Instead, they're making informed decisions and their preferences are being shaped by their digital spaces.

Kid and teen influence impacts parent purchase behavior, with 56% of purchases parents make for their kids starting off with a request, and 36% of parents saying they buy exactly what their child asked for.

For brands this means that speaking to kids and teens directly is not only an awareness play, it's a strong demand and purchase driver.



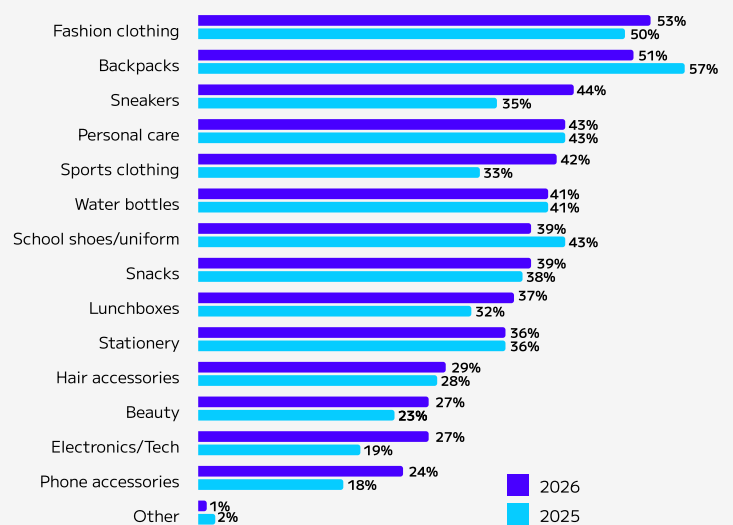
New (School) Year, **New Me**

For kids and teens, BTS is the perfect opportunity to reinforce or completely reset how they look, feel, move, and connect.



Back-to-School shopping is about more than replenishing school supplies. The categories kids and teens expect to shop highlight a broader reset in how they want to show up: what they wear, how they move, what they use, what they snack on, and how they express themselves day to day - items that will help them feel ready for school socially, emotionally, and digitally. We see growth across categories tied to comfort, active lifestyles, tech access, and personal expression.

To resonate, brands should treat Back-to-School as an important seasonal reset.

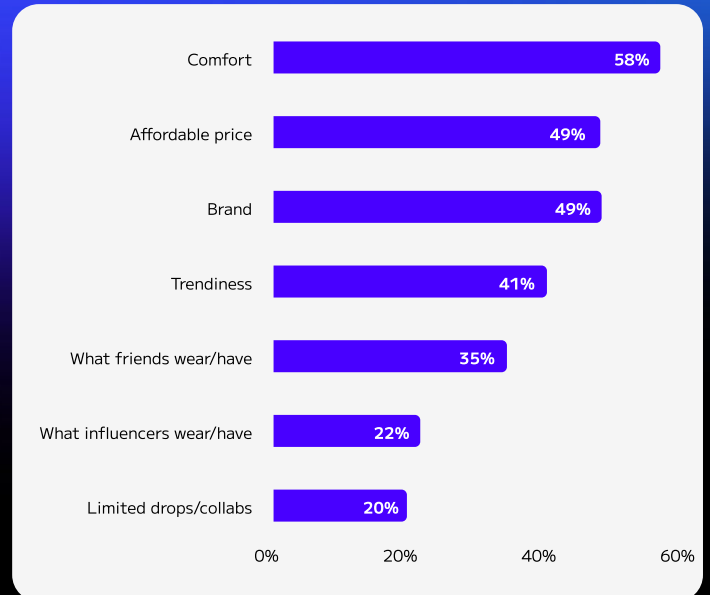


Comfort Is the New Style Currency

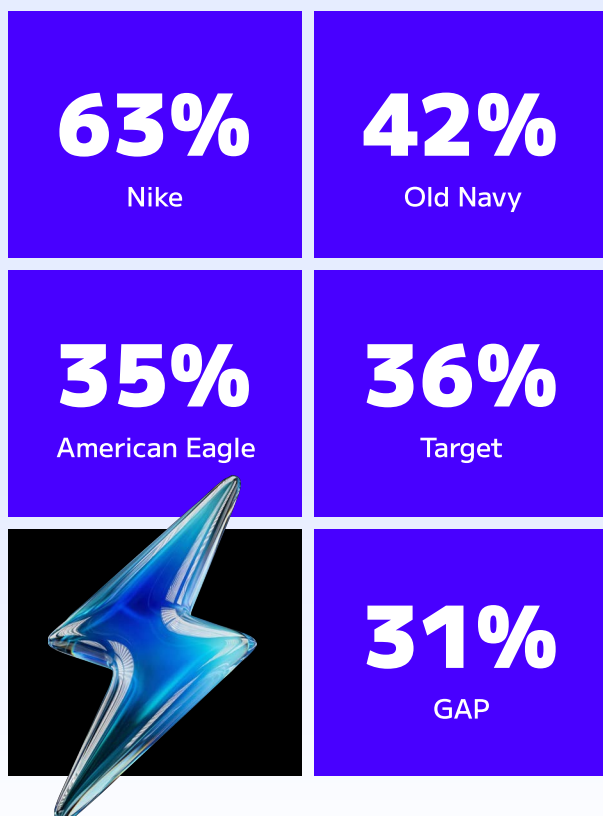
Kids and teens are redefining their style around how clothes feel, move, and fit into their full day.

Comfort is the top priority for Gen Alpha when choosing what to wear for school, with 27% naming it their absolute #1 priority outranking brand names, price, trends, friends, and influencers. The most appealing pieces and outfits this BTS season will not only be those that look good, but ones that feel good and are comfortable to wear all through class, lunch, after-school activities, and everything in between.

Apparel and fashion brands looking to activate for Back-to-School should make comfort visible, showing clothes in motion across different school-day moments.



Source: SuperAwesome, Family Influence Tracker, K4-18, USA, April 2026, Base: N=544. Parents answered on behalf of children under 7.



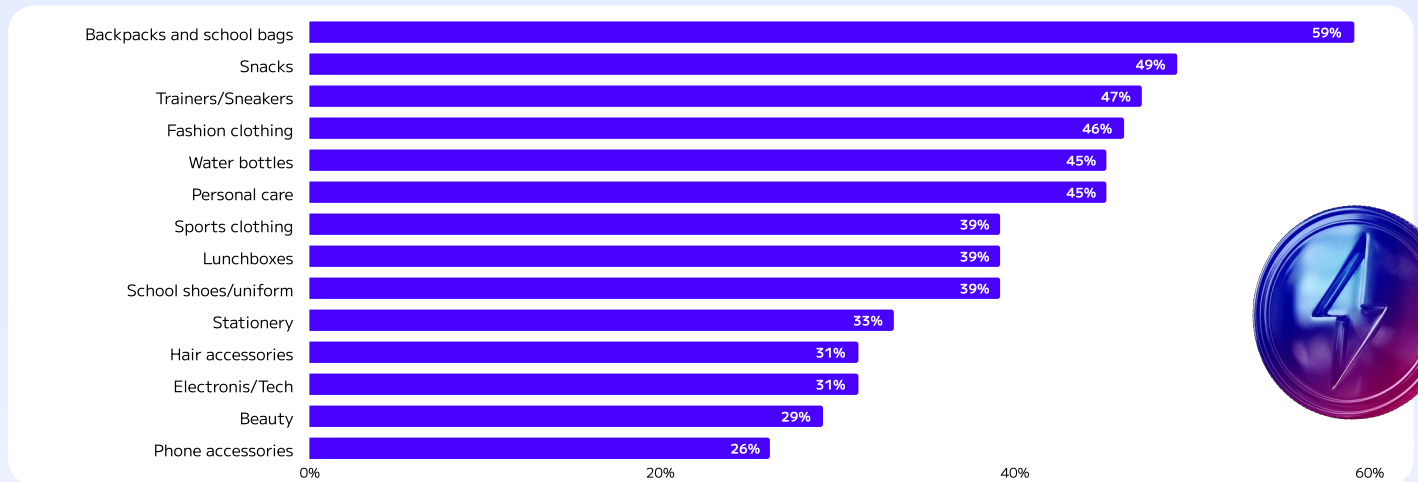
Brands That Offer Sportswear and Elevated Basics Win with Kids and Teens

Accessible style, value and familiar shopping destinations are poised to win this BTS season.

Nike's lead highlights the importance of sportswear and active style, but accessible retail also matters. Over 1/3 of kids and teens are likely to shop at Old Navy, Target, American Eagle, and GAP for the Back-to-School fit, suggesting they're drawn to familiar destinations that combine style, value, and parent-approved practicality.

Parents Are Shopping for Readiness Beyond the Classroom

Parents are buying across supplies, clothing, snacks, tech, and everyday items that support the full school-year routine.



While parents still approach Back-to-School through a practical lens, their shopping isn't limited to just classroom supplies. Clothes, snacks, sneakers, and electronics all show up on their lists, suggesting parents are preparing their kids and teens for the daily routines and social moments that come with the new school year.

Brands should aim to help parents see lifestyle categories as practical basics that will support their kids and teens throughout the school year, rather than as discretionary extras.

Source: SuperAwesome, Family Influence Tracker, Parents of kids 4-18, USA, April 2026, Base: N=544.

BTS Essentials: Two Different POVs

Kids and teens are more likely to think of BTS shopping as self-expression, while parents are more focused on routine, replenishment, and utility.

Parents	Kids & Teens
Backpacks (59%)	Fashion clothing (53%)
Snacks (49%)	Backpacks (51%)
Sneakers (47%)	Sneakers (44%)
Fashion clothing (46%)	Personal care (43%)
Water bottles (45%)	Sports clothing (42%)

Kids and teens are more likely to see fashion as central to Back-to-School because clothing is tied to how they show up. Parents are more likely to tie it to routine-based purchases like snacks, lunchboxes, backpacks, and other school essentials. However, given over half of parents' purchases are driven by their child's requests, there is a need for messaging that speaks to both audiences' wants and needs.

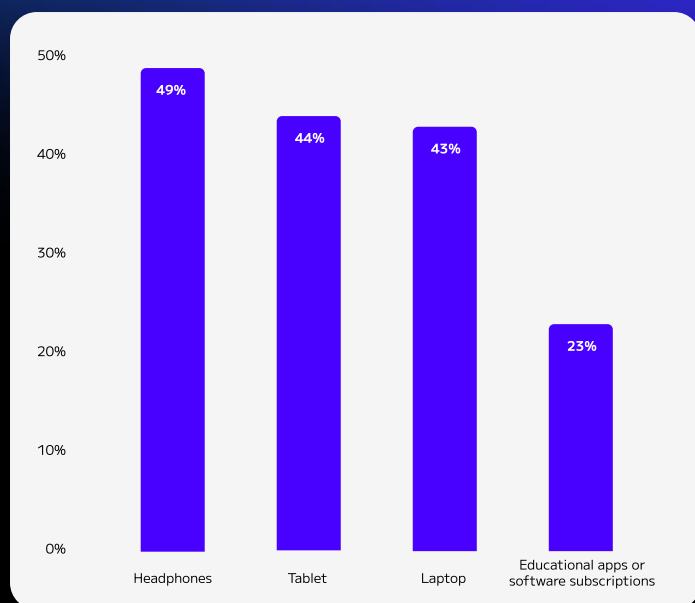
The opportunity isn't to choose one audience over the other, but to translate kid/teen desire into parent logic. Brands should aim to inspire kids and teens with style, comfort and self-expression while reassuring parents with utility, value, durability, and routine support.

Source: SuperAwesome, Family Influence Tracker, K4-18, Parents of kids 4-18, USA, April 2026, Base Kids: N=544, Base Parents: N=544. Parents answered on behalf of children under 7.



BTS Gives Permission for Tech Purchases

As tech becomes more embedded into kids and teens' learning and daily routines, the new school year creates a natural moment to refresh devices and accessories.



Parents' expected tech purchases are one of the clearest signs that Back-to-School is expanding beyond traditional supplies. Whether parents feel excited or pressured by it, digital tools are now deeply woven into how Gen Alpha learn, connect, and unwind. In the US, parents are buying high-ticket items like headphones, tablets, and laptops at meaningful rates, often viewing hardware as an upgrade for an old item.

Kids and teens are also bringing tech into their own Back-to-School lists, with expected purchases for electronics (+8 pts) and phone accessories (+7 pts) both growing year-over-year. This makes Back-to-School a practical permission moment for tech: the device may be necessary, but the accessories and upgrades can still feel personal.

Over **1 in 2** hardware purchases are purchased as an upgrade for an old item

Over **2 in 5** are net new hardware purchases



Winning the BTS Reset

Families aren't just restocking supplies, they're refreshing routines, wardrobes, tech, snacks, and the everyday items that help kids and teens feel ready. To win, brands need to show up early to drive demand, using digital environments to create consideration and desirability among kids and teens, and give parents practical reasons to approve the purchase.



Inspire before active shopping starts (awareness)

Use Video (YouTube/Shorts), Ads, and to reach families before and during early BTS planning.

Reinforce value and utility with parents

Use Family Creators and YouTube/Shorts to reinforce value, utility, durability, comfort and readiness.

Drive kid consideration and demand

Leverage creators and gaming to make products feel relevant, interactive, and connected to kids and teens' everyday lives.

Match message to category need states

Apparel: comfort + self-expression

Tech: readiness + justified upgrades + personalization

Snacks: routines, convenience

Retail: value + ease

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