



## How school shopping has changed in the pandemic era

Though hundreds of millions of adults and adolescents have now been vaccinated against COVID-19, there figures to be some lingering effects of the pandemic during the upcoming school year. That could affect which school supplies families buy in the weeks to come. Here's a look at some of the latest trends.

- A shift from physical stores: According to data from IBM's U.S. Retail Index, the pandemic has accelerated a shift away from physical stores to digital shopping by about five years. It's likely that school shoppers will turn to the internet for their supplies, which means local brick and mortar shops should increase their web presence and digital shopping capabilities to reach online shoppers. This includes omnichannel fulfillment, such as buy online and pickup in store (BOPIS) options.

- Reassessment of what's essential: The pandemic may have changed which items consumers consider essential. For example, clothing became less significant as a greater num-

ber of students were enrolled in virtual learning. Back-to-school shoppers may purchase less clothing and focus more on tech items, among others.

- Traditional supplies become less necessary: In 2020, Deloitte forecasted that a shift in preferences and intentions would result in parents buying fewer traditional supplies, such as notebooks and office supplies, as they chose to invest in digital resources to supplement children's education. That shift likely will continue into this school year.

- Support for local retailers: Community spirit grew in the early days of the pandemic and continues now. Many people prefer to shop in locally owned stores. Eighty percent of

customers surveyed feel more or as connected to their communities, according to the business industry consultant Customer Accentre.

- Customers are trying new brands and products: Shoppers are trying new products out of curiosity as well as necessity. Back-to-school shopping may include novel brands and other items that may not have been readily purchased in years past.

- Back-to-school shopping may continue to look a bit different than in previous years, spawning trends that may ultimately become the new normal. (MCC)



Back-to-school shopping sales have long been indicators that the summer vacation season is coming to a close. Students and their parents may visit area stores or browse online looking for items to make the coming school year a success. Those lists have looked similar for decades, but shopping for school supplies in the pandemic era may prove to be a unique experience.

After an unprecedented school year of remote learning and intermittent in-school experiences, the 2021 back-to-school experience is in a class of its own. There's even more anticipation and excitement than usual as students and parents prepare for a return to classrooms or virtual learning this fall. Despite the changes and challenges of this back-to-school season, students of all ages are gearing up for a new school year. Ready, set, learn.

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