

# Backpacks, Bargains, and Buying Local For Back to School Savings

Amanda Clasen- Community Vitality Agent  
July 2025

**K-STATE** | Southwind District  
Research and Extension

Back-to-school season seems to arrive faster each year, and with inflation affecting everything from pencils to backpacks, families are finding creative ways to shop smarter. While big-box stores may seem like the go-to for deals, shopping locally can be just as cost-effective and even more rewarding. Local businesses not only offer unique products and personalized service, but they also invest in your community. For every \$100 spent at a locally owned store, about \$68 stays within the community, supporting essential services and local programs.



As you prepare your student for the school year ahead, here are some practical ways to cut costs and support your hometown:

## 1. Shop Local First

Small businesses often have lower overhead and more flexibility, which allows them to offer competitive prices or even negotiate with loyal customers. Many local shops carry school supplies, clothing, and backpacks, and they often have sales or consignment options that rival national retailers. Plus, you're supporting the businesses that sponsor school programs, youth sports teams, and community events.

## 2. Take Inventory

Before hitting the stores, check your home for leftover supplies from last year. Items like scissors, rulers, and even colored pencils might still be in great shape. Don't feel pressured to buy everything new; reuse where you can.

## 3. Set a Realistic Budget and Watch for Sales!

Establish your spending limit before you shop and leave some wiggle room for unexpected expenses, like school events or mid-year supply restocks. Be sure to include clothing, technology, lunch containers, and activity fees in your planning. Back-to-school sales start early, but you may find even better deals after school begins. Stock up on items you'll need later in the year when prices drop. Some stores also match competitors' prices, which can save time and gas money.

## 4. Plan Ahead for Next Year

Back-to-school shopping is an annual expense—so start preparing early. Take the amount you spent this year, divide it by 12, and save that amount each month. Set up a dedicated savings account or create a labeled envelope to make it automatic and stress-free.

Beyond the savings, shopping locally has a long-term impact. Sales tax from local purchases funds critical services like police, fire departments, and road maintenance. Local businesses often stock unique, one-of-a-kind products and offer exceptional customer service rooted in personal relationships. They're more likely to adjust inventory based on your needs and support community initiatives that enhance our schools and neighborhoods.

Your dollars matter—and when spent locally, they do double the good. This school year, think beyond the price tag. Support local. Save smart. Strengthen your community. For more information, contact Community Vitality Agent Amanda Clasen at any Southwind District office or [amclasen@ksu.edu](mailto:amclasen@ksu.edu).