

Top 25 Most Requested School Supplies for Back-to-School



**WE ARE
TEACHERS**

As summer winds down and **50 million school kids** get ready for their first day in a new grade, families are stocking up on notebooks, pencils, new clothes, lunchbox snacks, and much, much more.

What are the most requested school items across the country? Do any brands reign supreme?

We Are Teachers analyzed 72,000 school supply lists between August and September of the 2022 school year. These lists came from more than 54,000 elementary schools across the country for a total of 1.2 million items!

The following insights reveal trends across schools, creating a backpack full of opportunity for brands and businesses to get in front of eager buyers.



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HOW BIG IS THE MARKET?

According to several sources, American parents, guardians, and children will spend an estimated total of \$41.5 billion on 2023 back-to-school supplies. That equates to roughly \$890 in school supply expenses per American household. Teachers spend nearly the same amount of their own money each year.

Not only are teachers big purchasers of the supplies, they are also the supply list decision-makers and gatekeepers, creating 70% of the school supply lists. Every year, beginning in March and continuing through the summer, individual teachers and grade-level teams compile the list of products they need and distribute wish lists requesting supplies from parents and guardians. Even Arizona and California, which require public schools to provide funds to cover the basic supplies needed for academic success, distribute optional supplementary lists to families.



Teachers create **70%** of the school supply lists.

The old classics—pencils, markers, crayons, and glue—are still at the top of the list, but we are seeing other items, like technology, trending upwards. We also notice a few surprises and quirky requests. Here's what we found in this year's major data scrape of school supply lists.



BILINGUAL LISTS

We are seeing more bilingual lists. Here are the top 25 most requested items listed in English and Spanish—the two most popular languages. Marketers may want to consider adding Spanish to school supply packaging and advertising to expand reach.

Top 25 Most Requested School Supplies

1. Pencils
2. Glue
3. Markers
4. Dry-Erase Markers/Boards
5. Tissues
6. Crayons
7. Folder
8. Paper
9. Scissors
10. Erasers
11. Plastic Bag
12. Composition Book
13. Headphones
14. Hand Sanitizer
15. Notebook
16. Cleaning Supplies
17. Highlighters
18. Binder
19. Wipes
20. Pens
21. Backpack
22. Sticky Notes
23. Water
24. Container
25. Bag

Los 25 Útiles Escolares Más Solicitados

1. Lápices
2. Pegamento
3. Marcadores
4. Marcadores/Pizarras de Borrado en Seco
5. Tejidos
6. Crayones
7. Carpeta
8. Papel
9. Tijeras
10. Gomas de Borrar
11. Bolsa de Plástico
12. Libro de Composición
13. Auriculares
14. Desinfectante de Manos
15. Cuaderno
16. Suministros de Limpieza
17. Resaltadores
18. Aglutinante
19. Toallitas
20. Bolígrafos
21. Mochila
22. Notas Adhesivas
23. Agua
24. Contenedor
25. Bolsa

The Top 6 Items Are Requested by Brand

Teachers are brand-loyal when it comes to certain items. The top six most requested item categories map to the top six most requested brands. When teachers find a high-quality item that they like, they ask for it by name.

By Category

1. Pencils
2. Glue
3. Markers
4. Dry-Erase Markers/Boards
5. Tissues
6. Crayons

By Brand

1. Crayola
2. Ziploc
3. Expo
4. Kleenex
5. Ticonderoga
6. Elmer's

What About Supplies for Classroom Pets?

Supplies for fish and furry friends did not make the list even though about 17% of elementary teachers have classroom pets. What did make the list? Birdseed! If watching birds visit a feeder outside a classroom window sounds soothing and instructive to you, you are not alone. Those benefits and more are also realized when classrooms have a pet to love and care for. According to [Pets in the Classroom](#), teachers overwhelmingly cite positive experiences with classroom pets and thank their use in the curriculum for increasing student attendance, decreased anxiety, more empathy and compassion, increased social skills, better test/academic performance, and a higher sense of responsibility, engagement and self-esteem. Those classrooms that do have pets surely need supplies for them—an opportunity for marketers and brands in this space.



SURPRISE!

Items We Weren't Expecting

You expect to see pencils and markers on every school supply list, but occasionally other, dare we say, random items pop up too!

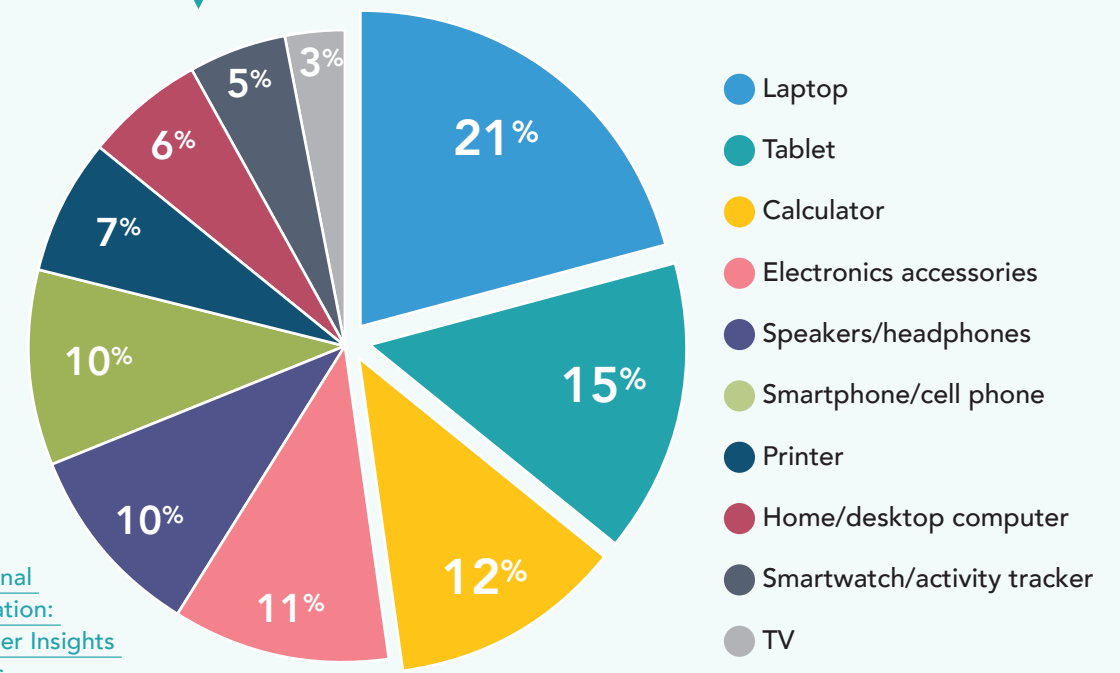
- Miniature Pumpkin
- Badminton Birdies
- Pool Noodles
- Sand Buckets
- Lotion for Kids' and Teachers' Hands
- Chewelry (knit jewelry meant to be chewed on)
- Bingo Dabbers



When we see more of these items show up on school supply lists, it means that teachers need families to help provide those supplies for today's digital learners.

Total spending on electronic gadgets for school, as well as computer and hardware goods, is expected to reach about **\$15.2 billion this year**. According to Statista, "the number of people buying school-necessitated electronics has increased significantly: on average, about 70 percent of parents in the United States planned to buy computer-related equipment in 2023, an increase of nearly 15 percent compared to a decade earlier."

About **70%** of parents in the United States planned to buy computer-related equipment in 2023.



Source: [National Retail Federation: NRF & Prosper Insights and Analytics](#)

Closing the Digital Divide

There has been an increase in requests for tech tools, such as tablets, earbuds, headphones, and laptops. Teachers and administrators know that integrating technology into classrooms makes the learning more accessible to students, increases engagement, and adds to the fun factor that is so important in keeping students engaged in learning.



Warm and Fuzzy Requests

Nap supplies, blankets, and a family picture—awww!



Clean Up, Clean Up. Everybody Do Your Share!

We are seeing a return to pre-pandemic buying trends for disinfecting products with a strong demand for classroom supplies. As funds from the CARES Act and ESSER end in September 2023, educators will increasingly ask parents to help stock classrooms with wipes, sprays, and hand sanitizers. Our analysis showed lots of hand sanitizer requests and more than a handful of different spellings (santizer, samitizer, santizitrers, sanitizier, eanitizer, sani0Zer, sanditizer). We also saw a request for “Bottles of Liquid Hand Soup.” Sounds messy!

Cleaning Items on the Top 20 List

#14 Hand sanitizer

#16 Cleaning supplies

#19 Wipes

Also on the list: Swiffer/Swiffer Supplies, Sprays, Gloves, Soap, and Sponges



Appeal to Their 5 Senses

Teachers are experts at engaging students by appealing to their five senses. Take a look-see at the supplies they are asking for to ignite the sense of sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing in their students.

Sight: Sunglasses and ... googly eyes?

Smell: Essential oils/diffusers, air fresheners, and coffee (that one is just for the teachers)

Taste: Snacks and candy. The only request for an Apple was for the tech not the fruit.

Touch: Kinetic sand, chewelry, shaving cream, bath foam, fidget toys, slime, Play-Doh, and other sensory tool requests

Hearing: Music supplies, headphones, earbuds



CA\$H Is Always Appreciated!

By some estimates, teachers spend more than \$800 of their own money each year on supplies for their classrooms and students. (Source: <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/out-pocket-spending-school-supplies-adds-strain-educators>) That amounts to more than \$20,000 in a 25-year career, which is a staggering amount on a teacher salary. When crafting your back-to-school marketing strategy, consider creative ways to put cash directly in teachers' hands to spend on supplies—rebates, discounts, gift cards, and purchasing points.

Cash (#68), Gift Cards (#69), and Donations (#41) all made it onto teachers' lists.

Teachers spend more than **\$800** of their own money each year on classroom supplies.

Best Item Listed—a Great Attitude!

Hands down the most important item on the list for any classroom is a great attitude. Every single person needs to bring this with them every day. When a great attitude is in short supply, learning suffers.



As we analyze the details of what teachers are asking for and students and their families will be looking for during this hot back-to-school shopping season, it is clear that marketers need to leverage opportunities to reach the key decision-makers—teachers, administrators, and support staff—to make sure that their product or product category makes the lists as a must-have item. It's never too late to influence the lists that teachers distribute—supplies run out mid-year, new needs emerge, and next year's lists will be compiled beginning in the spring.

Sources

U.S. school enrollment: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/183826/us-school-enrollment-for-all-levels-of-public-and-private-schools/>

No. of kids in school: about 50M: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=55#:~:text=Overall%2C%2053.9%20million%20K-12,were%20enrolled%20in%20public%20schools>

Amount spent on back-to-school: \$41.5 billion: <https://nrf.com/insights/holiday-and-seasonal-trends/back-to-school>

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/286432/average-back-to-school-spending-in-the-us/>

$\$41.5B / 50M = \830 per student

Schools spend \$\$ per student
<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cmb/public-school-expenditure>

Classroom Pet stat: [Wikipedia](#)
"Despite these results, survey research shows that only about 17% of elementary teachers have classroom pets."

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