



When you ignore the signs **YOU ENABLE**

- [Home Page](#)
- [Site Index](#)
- [Celebs](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Personal Finance](#)
- [Cartoon](#)
- [Frame Games](#)
- [Stickdoku](#)
- [Trickledowns](#)
- [Special Reports](#)
- [Home & Family](#)
- [Classroom](#)
- [Talkin' Shop](#)
- [Back Issues](#)
- [Make A Difference Day](#)

- [About USA WEEKEND](#)
- [Media kit](#)
- [Local newspapers](#)
- [Contact columnists](#)
- [Order back issues](#)
- [Jobs at USA WEEKEND](#)

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BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

Back to school

Bargains that'll put a smile on their face

It happens every year just around now: the mad scramble to gear up with the newest, coolest paraphernalia for the coming school year. But in these tough economic times, just the thought of shelling out the dough for all that stuff can make you lose sleep.

To help, we sorted through myriad choices to find a selection of really great items we think kids will love and will help parents rest easy (they're all under \$30).

Enter the "green" zone

This fall, it's hipper than ever for kids to be green -- and affordable for parents. Yup, school supplies of all sorts have gone eco- and wallet-friendly. Carolina Pad's Sasquatch line includes **recycled notebooks, folders, binders and divider tabs** in earth tones and with eco-themed interactive challenges and games. A two-pocket folder starts at just under a buck. Rebel Green's lunch totes (\$24) ("bad habits are disposable" is one catchy slogan here) are made from organic cotton, come with reusable cotton napkins and feature hip designs that are made from low-impact ink materials.



Can you make both your kids and your wallet happy? Yes!

Play it smart with video games

We all know that tearing kids away from their video games can be nearly impossible. So why not load up their high-tech toys with fun *and* educational **video games**? The handheld Nintendo DS' "Personal Trainer: Math" (\$19.99) is a game for all ages featuring "Professor Kageyama," who decides whether you're ready to advance to a higher level. Kids can compete with up to 15 of their friends in various math challenges. "My Virtual Tutor: Reading" (\$29.99) targets reading comprehension with clickable animations and interactive quizzes for readers pre-K to second grade. A "paint" play mode allows young users to illustrate scenes while they listen to a story.

Discover free homework help

Cyberspace really can help kids keep up at school. **Scholastic.com** now offers an entire line of learning sites, including **Homework Hub**, which provides research articles, study tips, grammar and writing guides, and test-taking hints. Kids in grades 3-6 can improve their math and science skills with **StudyJams!**, which uses cartoons, karaoke songs and interactive tutorials as teaching tools (\$5.95 a month after free trial period). **Schoolwaxtv.com** offers free videos that help kids with their homework and school projects. And **shmoop.com** provides homework help with a spin: It's designed by doctorate students who load it up with plenty of pop-culture references and fun 'tude. (Sample from a plot summary of "Hamlet": "Welcome to Elsinore, Denmark, land of the recently deceased king who likes to chill out in ghost form at night on the castle battlements ...")

We looked for all the coolest stuff, but we had a firm rule: Nothing could cost more than \$30.

Make school supplies your own

Welcome back, student DIYers! Kids now can make their own **schedules, backpack tags and locker clings**. Think of HP's **Creative Studio** as a free art workshop online, allowing you to decorate these and other items with lightning bolts, solar-system images and personalized messages. **PakNaks** (\$3.99), are another source of personalized pizzazz for backpacks, lunchboxes and other school stuff. Choose from 40 different designs that stick to just about anything with a Velcro-like attachment. **Verymeri** is a new trend-setting fashion line that lets kids design their own clothing. Our fave is the "Be Buddies, Not Bullies" T-shirt (\$24). The non-profit group Free Arts for Abused Children gets 3% of the sales. And a bonus: Kids who create a winning design also pocket 3% of sales!

Go mobile with prep for the SAT

The iPod has gone educational, too. Now kids can brush up on vocab and math on the fly with downloadable SAT test prep. Kaplan's SAT

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Flashcubes **vocabulary kit** is available at iTunes. At \$4.99, it features a 3-D flashcard system. Princeton Review has the SAT Vocab Challenge app for iPhone and the iPod for \$4.99. Get smart with the most commonly tested words on the SAT.

Carry on with these backpacks

Here's a tongue twister: Cool new back-to-school backpacks can break the bank. But not these: For \$29.99 (solid colors only), **eBags' Downloader Laptop Backpack** was rated best overall and best value among backpacks by "The Wall Street Journal" for a reason. It boasts special compartments for a laptop, cables, accessories and lots of techno-gadgets. Another great option: Lands' End has a new **ClassMate StudyHaul Backpack** (\$29.50) that is equipped with a pocket for your MP3 player or cellphone on the shoulder strap and glow-in-the-dark zipper pulls.

Bookmark like it's 2009

These fun gadgets let families log reading time. **Mark-My-Time digital bookmarks** (\$8.95) sport a built-in stopwatch -- and maybe even create a digital incentive to up their count each time!

Phone home in style

When it comes to those must-have accessories -- cellphones -- cheap doesn't have to be boring. The **Motorola EM330** is available for free when purchased online with a two-year service agreement, and it comes with a 1.3-megapixel camera, FM radio and AT&T Mobile Music player. And the **Motorola MOTO W233 Renew** (\$9.99 with a two-year service contract) comes with music player and text messaging.

Try clothes with 'tude

Add spark to your kids' wardrobe with shirts and hoodies from **BustedTees** that read "That's How I Roll" or "More Cowbell," priced between \$12 and \$20. American Eagle's 77kids line features playful striped hoodies from \$24.50 to \$29.50 and T-shirts that sport Olympic themes from \$16.50 to \$19.50.

Stay hydrated, drink clean

Parents might want to grab this one for themselves: **Clear2Go** looks like a standard water bottle, but it has a twist. The bottle comes with a replaceable filter, which is good for up to 100 gallons of water -- or the equivalent of 640 20-ounce water bottles. (Bottle and filter packages are available for less than \$25.)

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