

In Fashion: Back to school must-haves

by Sharon_Mosley

When millions of kids head back to school this fall, many parents (and kids) feel overwhelmed with all the choices out there - the shopping lists seem endless - sneakers, jeans, T-shirts, backpacks, etc. Whether you've got a little kid in preschool or a tween who loves Hannah Montana or a high schooler who's into the High School Musical groove, it's a great idea to do your homework says Bradley O'Brien, vice president of design for Lands' End Kids.

BACK IN CLASS - Topping the shopping list of back-to-school fashion items are sneakers. Shown here are Sport Excursion tennis shoes from Lands' End. CNS Photo courtesy of Lands' End. "The key is to narrow in on the most important items on the back-to-school list," says O'Brien.

To help kick-start the autumn shopping spree, here are some must-haves for girls and guys:

The top priority?

Sneakers, according to O'Brien, who says this season's focus is on athletic sneakers that are comfortable and stylish. He suggests looking for special features including reflective material to help with visibility, good-gripping soles for plenty of traction and antimicrobial insoles to help fend off odor. For girls, the classic Mary Jane is a favorite shoe in styles from suede to patent leather with embellishments.

Backpacks have also become a necessity for back-to-schoolers. While kids are most interested in what color backpack they carry, parents are interested in durability. Wheeled backpacks are becoming a big trend for heavy loads; smaller children will enjoy carrying easier loads by selecting junior-size packs. A great tip: monogramming initials will make identifying backpacks easier for everyone.

Denim. It's a back-to-school tradition. From the classic five-pocket silhouettes to loose-fitting carpenter jeans

for boys and boot-cut and flares for girls, there is a denim style for every child. Darker washes are popular for fall, but colored denim is also a big hit.

T-shirts and polos. Another traditional favorite for back-to-school and the perfect topper for jeans. Bright and bold colors are back for tees and polos. The big news: layering. Girls love to layer tees in vibrant colors and patterns; boys are into layering polo shirts in both short and long sleeves.

Sweaters. Do you need them in August? Probably not. But when it starts to get cool, those cotton sweaters are a favorite fashion item. Easy-to-layer cardigan sweaters, ribbed crew necks and the preppy sweater vest will be a must-have for girls; for boys collegiate-inspired V-necks and half-zip styles will be tops on the shopping list.

Cargos. When it's not jeans they reach for in the morning, it's a pair of cargo pants for guys. In denim, twill and corduroy, the guys love to pack their stuff into those big pockets.

Skirts and skorts. Playing on the monkey bars just wouldn't be the same in a skirt, so "skorts" - those half shorts, half skirts - are popular options for little girls; bigger girls love shorter skirts in denim, corduroy and cotton, especially when detailed with ruffles, appliques, embroidery and pleating. Add tights later in the fall.

Coats. We all know it's coming - the beginning of school is a prelude to autumn's cooler weather. And many retailers offer lots of savings on coats early in the fall. Look for fleece jackets and pullovers for the early days of fall. Down vests are another big trend for fall and a great layering piece.

One big tip: note antipilling and antistatic finishes for better performance.

Sharon Mosley is a former fashion editor of the Arkansas Gazette in Little Rock and executive director of the Fashion Editors and Reporters Association.

Â© Copley News Service

In Fashion: Back to school must-haves by Sharon_Mosley