



# IN 6TH GRADE, WHEN MY SON WEIGHED ABOUT 80 POUNDS, HIS BACKPACK WEIGHED 22 POUNDS—ABOUT THE SIZE OF A SMALL TODDLER.



So, just because a few irresponsible, disorganized 13-year-olds can't get their act together means all parents until the end of time need to overbuy specialty graphing calculators at \$50+ a pop? Uh, not gonna happen, even if this means deducting 20 points from my son's "classroom participation grade."

## ☒ Fundraisers, football games, and lunch accounts, oh, my!

I need a full-time job just to pay for the onslaught of wallet-draining expenses in a typical school year. From extra lab fees to uniforms, from art supplies to testing fees, from field trips to coach's gifts, from game tickets to lunch accounts, school fees add up quicker than a two-year cell phone contract. And if, on top of all these extra fees, schools still decide to do several fundraisers. Why don't they sell things that parents might actually use, like a Wine of the Month Club?

## ☒ Crazy-early start times.

I can almost hear the collective snore of my neighbors when we leave the house for school in the dark at 6:45 am. Does anyone on the school board know anything about teens, adolescent development, brain functioning, or sleep patterns? Teens don't

do mornings, but hey, let's just throw them into lit analysis first period.

## ☒ Pictures

What photography think-tank got together to price these portrait packages and write and design an order form that only Sherlock Holmes can decode? The cheapest package, which includes 24 fingernail-size photo stickers that I will never use, a photo magnet, and 2 3"x5" photos, costs \$28. I can literally get a 20"x30" poster at Costco for \$10. And the order form is like a shell game, leaving parents bewildered with confusing-but-similar options that require a Ph.D. in logic to figure it out. Package one includes two 3"x5" photos, a photo magnet, and 24 photo stickers, while Package 21 includes all of Package one plus four large wallets and basic retouching (does this mean only 1–3 pimples?) plus digital downloads, and Package 7 includes all of Package one plus Package 21 plus premium retouching (perhaps pervasive acne scars?) plus personalization.

## ☒ Drop-off/pick-up lanes

From the get-there-first parents who park in the carpool line two hours before school lets out to the parents who double-park their cars, block all thru-traffic and run into the front office "for just a sec," this free-for-all drop-off/pick-up process simply stinks on all levels. (And no, rebel mom, that safety rule doesn't apply to you—you just drop your kids off on the main highway in busy morning traffic so you don't have to weave through that safe, slow-moving car line like everyone else. It's all about you.) While I'm still working on a danger-free, beat-the-system drop-off procedure that could shave 15 minutes off my morning, I did finally wise up for the after-school pick-up plan by arriving 10 minutes after classes end in the back of the school.

## ☒ Backpacks

In 6th grade, when my son weighed about 80 pounds, his backpack weighed 22

pounds—about the weight of a small toddler. The brilliant architectural planners of his newly built middle school decided not to put any lockers, so the kids must carry around a quarter of their body weight on their backs all day long, with oversized notebooks and college-sized textbooks for every class. Throw in a jacket, umbrella, and lunchbox, and the kids practically tip over in a gentle breeze.

## ☒ Dress codes

I'm all for kids expressing themselves, and I am not pro-dress code, but I do think a little common sense needs to prevail, as kids head to school with butt-crack-baring low-rise jeans and see-through crop tops. While kids don't need to go all Amish, they (and their parents) do need to use good judgment so school districts don't need to adopt four-page dress code manifestos that prohibit the weirdly inappropriate "slippers, pajamas, trench coats, bathing suits, bike shorts, dog collars, and chains that connect one part of the body to another." Because of a few extremist, overly self-expressive, head-shaving, eye-brow-piercing, gang-symbol-wearing rebels, my kids can't even wear a baseball cap or sunglasses on campus.

## ☒ Bomb threats

Like my teen doesn't have enough to worry about in high school—pimples, gossip, bullying, SAT, homework, tests, learning to drive, club meetings, breakups, fitting in, soccer tryouts, AP classes, fighting with parents, peer pressure, and the frenzied high-school-to-college pipeline. Throw a bomb scare into the mix (which literally happened in my 10th grader's third week of school this year), and you've set the stage for some major-league teen angst to rival *The Breakfast Club*.

So, while I'm thrilled with seven teen-free hours of quiet, uninterrupted writing time five days a week, these school hassles are almost enough to make me yearn for summer break. Almost. #

editor's picks:

# School Cool

**Building Block Pencil Cases** Separating compartments will keep school accessories organized. Durable and cool. \$14, [coolpencilcase.com](http://coolpencilcase.com)



**ECOLunchbox** It protects your children from being exposed to harmful chemicals found in plastic tupperware. Made from lightweight, non-toxic, dishwasher-safe, stainless steel. \$26, [ecolunchboxes.com](http://ecolunchboxes.com).



**Dabney Lee for Blue Sky** Modern patterns in bright colors, accented with Dabney Lee's signature cursive script—It's a fun and colorful way to organize your day! Tabbed weekly and monthly calendar views allow for detailed scheduling and offers ample writing space. \$15+, [officedepot.com](http://officedepot.com).

**Drink in the Box** A revolutionary, patented, reusable drink box made from near indestructible Tritan. It's BPA- and phthalate-free. Easy to clean and has an 8 oz. capacity. 5.25" H x 2.25" W x 1.5" D. \$12, [drinkinthebox.com](http://drinkinthebox.com).



**Bixbee Backpacks** Cover-flap-pocket opens to a main compartment with plenty of space for books, binders, and notebooks. A padded sleeve pocket protects a laptop or tablet. Three interior organizer pockets hold small necessities like pencils, pens, crayons, and an mp3 player. Even when it's packed to the brim, this backpack feels comfortable on kid shoulders, thanks to contoured shoulder straps with cushy padding. Five exterior pockets (including a lunch money pocket and water bottle holder) plus an ID holder, helps kids stay organized. Made of durable, water-resistant, 600-denier polyester, this backpack is made to last, and cool-looking, too. Shown in Sparkalicious & DinoCamo. \$45+, [bixbee.com](http://bixbee.com).