

Back to School



# Transitioning Back to School

The return to school brings excitement for many students, but it can also create stress, anxiety and adjustment challenges.

Experts say that helping students re-establish routines before classes begin can ease the transition and reduce the risk of burnout later in the semester.

One of the biggest challenges after summer break is rebuilding schedules. During vacation months, bedtimes often become inconsistent and screen time increases. Pediatricians recommend gradually shifting sleep schedules several weeks before school starts to help students adjust.

The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that adequate sleep supports learning, concentration, emotional regulation and physical health. Students who begin the school year well rested may have an easier time adapting to academic demands.

Teachers often see transition difficulties during the first few weeks of school. Younger children may experience separation anxiety, while older students may worry about grades, social relationships, extracurricular commitments or college prep-ration.

Mental health professionals encourage parents to talk openly with children about



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their concerns. Rather than dismissing worries, experts suggest listening carefully and helping students develop practical solutions.

Local counseling centers frequently report increased demand for services during the back-to-school season. Counselors recommend watching for signs of excessive stress, including changes in sleep patterns, irritability, withdraw-

al from activities or persistent anxiety.

For college students, the transition may involve additional challenges. First-year students are often adjusting to independent living, new academic expectations and unfamiliar social environments. College advisors recommend establishing routines early and becoming familiar with campus support

services.

Parents can help by creating consistent household schedules, encouraging healthy habits and maintaining open communication. However, experts caution against overscheduling children with too many activities immediately after school begins.

Educators also emphasize the importance of realistic expectations. Academic success

is built gradually through attendance, participation and consistent effort rather than perfection.

The beginning of a new school year presents opportunities for growth, friendships, and learning. By focusing on healthy routines, emotional support and balanced expectations, families can help students start the semester with confidence and resilience.

# Career Training Is Booming

As employers continue searching for skilled workers, trade schools, apprenticeship programs and workforce training centers are seeing growing interest.

Fields such as healthcare, HVAC, welding, electrical work, manufacturing, trucking and information technology continue to experience strong demand. Many of these careers offer competitive wages and shorter training timelines than bachelor's degree programs.

The New York Times dubbed the trend “the return of the apprentice,” noting that data from the National Student Clearinghouse shows that enrollment in two-year degree and certificate programs is growing at a faster pace than in bachelor programs.

Community colleges have become important hubs for workforce development. Many institutions partner directly with local employers to design programs that align with regional labor needs. Students often benefit from hands-on training, internships and industry certifications that can lead directly to employment.

Registered apprenticeships are also expanding nationwide. These programs allow participants to earn wages



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while learning valuable skills under the supervision of experienced professionals. Apprentices typically combine classroom instruction with on-the-job training.

Health care remains one of the fastest-growing sectors. Programs preparing nursing assistants, medical assistants, surgical technicians and other health care professionals continue attracting strong enrollment as health care sys-

tems face workforce shortages.

Technology careers continue to be in demand. Short-term certificate programs in cybersecurity, networking, software support and data management can provide pathways into rapidly growing industries.

Local workforce development agencies frequently offer career counseling, job placement assistance and tuition support. Some programs specifically target recent high

school graduates, career changers, veterans and displaced workers.

Employers increasingly value demonstrated skills and industry certifications alongside traditional educational credentials. As a result, many students are evaluating their career pathways based on return on investment, earning potential and job availability.

Students pursuing career training often cite affordability

as a major advantage. Many certificate and apprenticeship programs cost significantly less than four-year degree programs while providing direct connections to employment opportunities.

Education leaders emphasize that career and technical education is no longer viewed as a secondary option. Instead, it represents one of several valuable pathways available to students.

# What Parents Should Know

Many educators say a successful school year begins long before the first bell rings, and parents play a critical role in helping students start strong.

As another school year approaches, teachers across the country are preparing classrooms, reviewing lesson plans and organizing materials. Here's what they wish parents knew.

One of the most common messages from teachers is simple: attendance matters. Consistent attendance helps students build academic skills, establish routines and stay connected to their classmates and teachers. Even a few missed days can have a negative impact on student learning.

Teachers also encourage families to establish routines before school begins. Regular bedtimes, designated homework spaces and consistent morning schedules can help reduce stress and improve readiness for learning. Students who know what to expect each day often arrive at school more focused and prepared.

Communication remains another key factor in student success. Educators recommend that parents become familiar with school communication platforms, whether



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through email, parent portals or classroom apps. Responding promptly to messages and reaching out when concerns arise can help prevent small issues from becoming larger problems.

Technology continues to shape the educational experience. Many districts now rely on laptops, tablets and digital learning platforms for assignments and classroom activities. Teachers encourage parents to monitor screen time, discuss responsible online behavior and help

students keep devices charged and ready for school.

When it comes to homework, educators say the goal is support, not perfection. Parents can help by providing a quiet environment and encouraging students to complete assignments independently whenever possible. Struggling students may benefit from guidance and encouragement, but teachers caution against completing work for them.

Teachers also stress the importance of fostering a positive

attitude toward learning. Asking children about what they are studying, celebrating effort and showing interest in school activities can reinforce the value of education.

Social and emotional well-being matter just as much as academics. Students may experience anxiety about new teachers, classmates or academic expectations. Open conversations at home can help children express concerns and build confidence.

Veteran educators often remind parents that every child

develops at a different pace. Comparing students to siblings or classmates can create unnecessary pressure. Instead, teachers encourage families to focus on individual growth and progress throughout the year.

Many local school districts offer parent orientation nights, open houses and curriculum events before classes begin. Attending these programs provides opportunities to meet teachers, learn expectations and establish relationships that can benefit students throughout the school year.

# The New Rules of School Safety

As students return to classrooms this fall, school safety continues to evolve beyond locked doors and emergency drills.

Across the country, K-12 districts and colleges are adopting new approaches that combine physical security, mental health support, technology and community engagement.

Many schools have updated visitor management procedures, requiring electronic check-ins, identification scans and pre-approved visitor lists. Administrators say these systems help monitor who enters campus while minimizing disruptions to the school day.

Mental health has become an equally important component of school safety.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, schools increasingly recognize that emotional well-being and campus security are closely connected. Many districts now employ mental health response teams consisting of counselors, social workers, psychologists and administrators who can quickly assist students experiencing emotional distress.

Technology is also playing a larger role. Some districts are implementing artificial intelligence tools that monitor school-issued devices for signs of bullying, threats or self-



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harm concerns. Supporters say the systems can help identify students who need intervention before problems escalate. Privacy advocates, however, encourage schools to maintain transparency and clear policies regarding data collection and student rights.

School resource officers remain a visible presence in many communities. Today's SROs often receive specialized

training in adolescent development, crisis intervention and relationship-building. Educators emphasize that successful programs focus on mentorship and prevention rather than enforcement alone.

Emergency preparedness drills have also become more comprehensive. Schools continue to practice fire, weather and lockdown procedures while expanding training for

reunification plans, communication systems and crisis response coordination with local police and fire departments.

Colleges and universities face similar challenges. Campus police departments increasingly partner with counseling centers and student affairs staff to address concerns before they become emergencies. Many campuses

have also expanded anonymous reporting systems that allow students to share concerns about safety or mental health.

Experts caution that effective school safety involves more than physical protections. Students who feel connected to teachers, peers and school communities are often more likely to seek help when problems arise.

# What Students Bring to Campus

Move-in day remains one of the most anticipated milestones of the college experience, but what students pack for dorm life continues to evolve.

Today's college students are balancing comfort, technology, organization and practicality as they prepare for life away from home.

**Technology tops many packing lists.** Beyond laptops and smartphones, students are bringing portable monitors, wireless charging stations, noise-canceling headphones and smart speakers to help manage academic workloads and stay connected. Reliable internet access has become as essential as textbooks.

**Organization is another major trend.** Dorm rooms are often small, prompting students to maximize every inch of space. Under-bed storage containers, collapsible laundry hampers, hanging closet organizers and stackable bins help make the most of limited space. Multifunctional furniture and compact appliances also help students create efficient living spaces.

**Comfort has become increasingly important.** Many students pack mattress toppers, supportive pillows, blackout curtains and desk



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lamps designed to reduce eye strain. These items can make dorm rooms feel more like home while supporting healthy sleep habits and study routines.

**Sustainability is on trend.** Reusable water bottles, refillable coffee tumblers, energy-efficient appliances and secondhand furnishings appeal to environmentally conscious students looking to

reduce waste and save money.

**Personalizing your space.** Photos, posters, artwork and decorative lighting help transform institutional rooms into comfortable living environments. However, colleges continue to enforce safety regulations regarding electrical devices and prohibited decorations.

**Saving money is in season.** Local thrift stores, resale

shops and online marketplaces offer affordable options for furniture, storage items and dorm essentials. Shopping locally can also reduce shipping costs and support community businesses.

**Know the rules.** Colleges often provide move-in guides that outline what students should and should not bring. Reviewing these lists before shopping can help families

avoid unnecessary purchases and ensure compliance with residence hall policies.

**More than decor.** Resident assistants say roommate relationships often have a greater impact on student satisfaction than room decor. Establishing expectations early regarding guests, cleanliness, quiet hours and shared responsibilities can prevent misunderstandings later in the semester.

# Challenges of AI in the Classroom

Artificial intelligence has quickly become one of the most discussed topics in education.

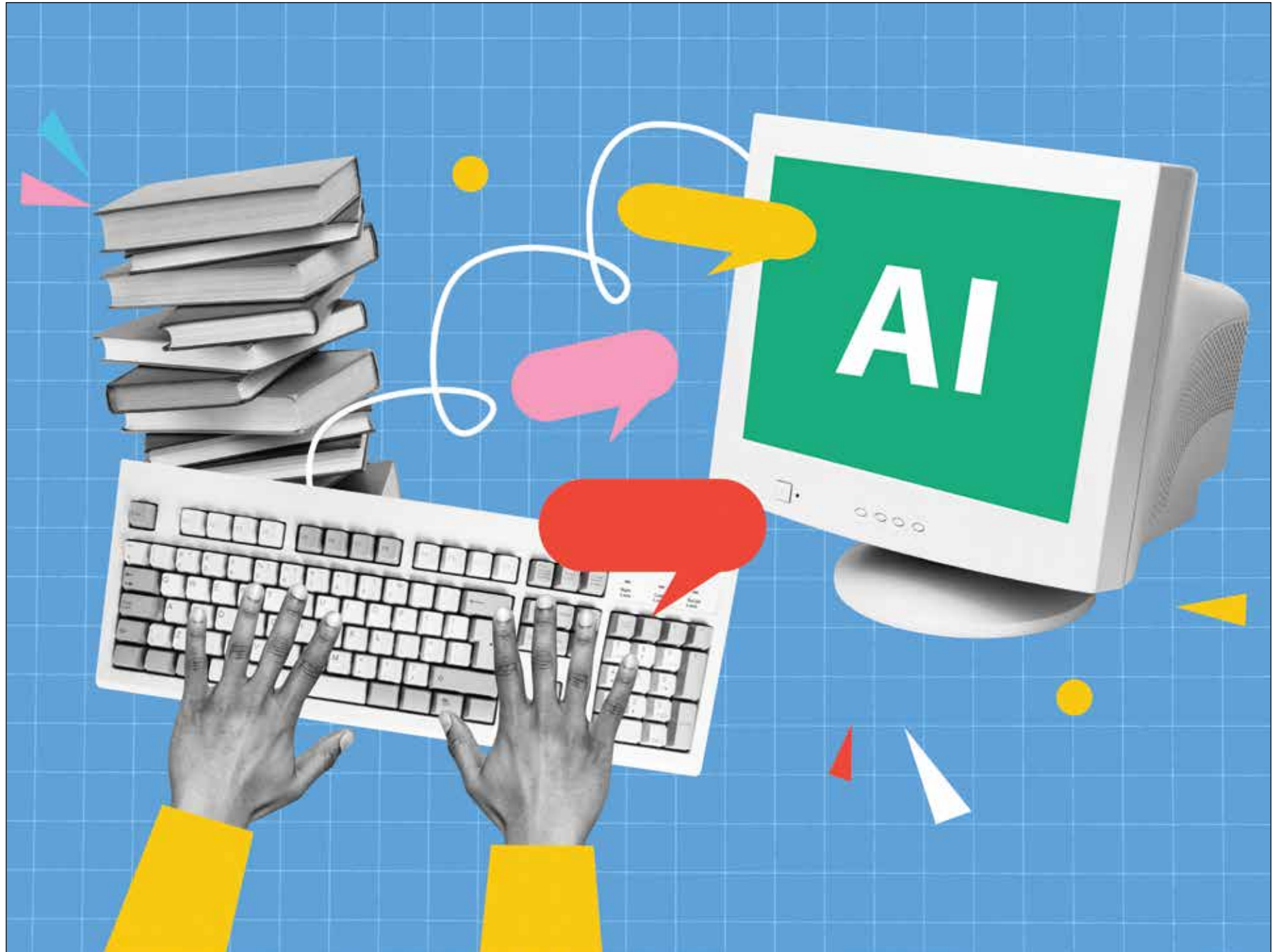
As students return to classrooms, schools and colleges are continuing to develop policies that encourage innovation while maintaining academic integrity.

Generative AI tools can help students brainstorm ideas, summarize information, practice writing and explore complex topics. At the same time, educators are grappling with concerns about plagiarism, misinformation and over-reliance on technology.

Many school districts and higher education institutions have adopted formal guidelines outlining acceptable uses of AI. Rather than banning the technology outright, educators increasingly focus on teaching students how to use AI responsibly and ethically.

Teachers say expectations vary depending on the assignment. Some instructors allow AI to assist with research and idea generation but require students to complete final writing independently. Others require students to disclose when AI tools were used during the completion of an assignment.

Digital literacy has emerged as a major educational priority. Students are learning how AI systems work, how to verify information and how to recognize potential bias or inaccuracies in generated



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content. Educators argue that these skills will become increasingly important in future workplaces.

Colleges face similar challenges. Professors are redesigning assignments to emphasize critical thinking, personal reflection and in-class participation. Oral presentations, project-based learning

and collaborative activities are becoming more common as institutions adapt to evolving technology.

Edutopia recommends that educators talk to students about AI by treating it as an open, judgment-free dialogue rather than a list of restrictions. Frame discussions around skill-building and transparency,

ask open-ended questions about their habits, and set clear boundaries for when AI is a helpful tool versus a shortcut.

Students often express mixed opinions. Some view AI as a valuable productivity tool, while others worry about fairness and academic honesty. Many educators aim to prevent confusion and misunderstand-

ings by having open discussions about expectations.

School administrators emphasize that AI should supplement learning rather than replace it. The goal is to help students develop problem-solving abilities, communication skills and subject-matter knowledge that cannot be outsourced to technology.

# Shop Local for School

The back-to-school season is one of the busiest retail periods of the year.

From clothing boutiques and shoe stores to bookstores and tutoring centers, merchants across the community are preparing for an influx of students and families.

As students prepare for another academic year, local businesses are ready to play an important role. Supporting local businesses offers benefits beyond convenience. Dollars spent locally often remain within the community, helping support jobs, tax revenue and economic development.

National surveys consistently show that families spend billions of dollars annually on school-related purchases. While large retailers capture a significant share of that spending, many consumers are choosing to support local businesses that offer personalized service and unique products.

Independent clothing stores report strong demand for school wardrobes, particularly versatile items that can transition between classroom activities and extracurricular events. Local shoe retailers are also seeing steady traffic as families search for comfortable footwear that can withstand daily wear.

Bookstores remain important destinations during the back-to-school season. In addition to school supplies, many



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independent shops are expanding their selections of educational materials, study guides, planners and reading enrichment resources.

Office supply stores are good places to shop for back-to-school. Notebooks, writing instruments, calculators, art supplies and technology accessories remain among the most popular purchases heading in-

to the school year.

Tutoring centers and educational service providers often experience increased interest during late summer as parents seek academic support during the coming school year.

Businesses located near colleges and universities also benefit from student spending. Coffee shops, restaurants, copy centers and convenience

stores often see increased customer traffic as students return and campuses become active once again.

Many local retailers are responding to economic pressures by offering promotions, loyalty programs and student discounts.

Store owners say consumers are increasingly focused on value, durability and affordability

when making purchasing decisions.

Financial experts recommend creating shopping lists before visiting stores and comparing prices when possible.

Families can often save money by purchasing essential items early, taking advantage of sales and considering gently used merchandise when appropriate.