

Have your school supplies?

From levitating globes to eco-lunchboxes, here's the latest in cool school gear.

BY LAURA HOXWORTH

IT'S BACK-TO-SCHOOL time again, and with it comes, inescapably, the Shopping List. All parents want to outfit their students with the right gear, but it can be a struggle to find exactly what you need in all the back-to-school marketing hoopla. Here's a rundown of the newest updates to back-to-school basics you'll want on your list:

Calculator. A good calculator is a necessity for the teenager who's entering upper-level math classes. Texas Instruments' newest TI-Nspire graphing calculators (starting at \$143 on amazon.com) have a touchpad and software to link the calculator to a computer, among other new features. Will the calculator do the job for your child now and in coming years? Planning ahead is good,



The Swiss Gear Ibex has padded pockets for laptops up to 17 inches.

but so is avoiding spending for unnecessary features.

Backpack. It's the mother of all school supplies, so this is where you want to invest. Choose a sturdy version that will last for years and hold all your kid's books while minimizing back strain. For older students, consider one of the new laptop backpacks with cushioned pockets designed to keep electronics safe, like the Swiss Gear Ibex for laptops up to 17 inches (\$63.49 at amazon.com).

Globe. It may not be the coolest new gadget out there, but nothing beats a traditional globe for hands-on learning and perspective your child can't get from the Internet. The newest National Geographic globes come in several variations that talk, glow and even levitate. (Levitating Globe, \$45 at shop.nationalgeographic.com.)

Lunchbox. New stainless steel containers



The stainless steel Eco Lunchbox snaps together.

Even the basics, such as notebooks and binders, feature fun prints and stylish new designs.


are not only eco-friendly and free of plastic toxins like BPA, but they're also super-durable and easy to clean. The three-in-one version from Eco Lunchbox (\$22 at ecolunchboxes.com) has separate snap-together containers for a sandwich and two sides.

Software. Microsoft Office Home and Student 2010 (\$149.99), released in June, is an upgrade of the 2007 version that includes all the core applications — Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote — with the latest features to keep your student up-to-date in the classroom.

USB drive. The easiest way to transport and share important documents, flash drives now come in fun designs for teens. Ativa 4GB drives at Office Depot are available

in more than 40 patterns, from butterflies to argyle to skulls (\$17.99), with three new styles this season designed by No Fear (\$19.99). The Action Sports 4GB Santa Cruz SkateDrive from Target looks like a mini-skateboard, wheels included (\$13.99).

Notebooks. The latest prints and stylish designs make this back-to-school basic anything but boring. This season, Gwen Stefani expands on her Tokyo-inspired Harajuku line of notebooks and binders, at Office Depot starting Aug. 18 (\$1.49-\$2.99).

Planner. Help your student learn organizational skills with a planner such as the Notebook Reference Student Planner, 2nd edition (\$3.95 at amazon.com). Made for fourth- through eighth-graders, this one has study tips and reference information to help kids stay organized and develop good study habits. 

It may look like a skateboard, but it's actually a USB drive.

