

Parents expect to spend less on school supplies

By Megan Kowalski, USA Today

Despite higher prices for back-to-school needs, students and parents will spend nearly 8 percent less this season than in 2012, according to a survey out Thursday from the National Retail Federation.

Parents will save by shopping earlier for sales, shopping online and by having children re-use items bought in last year's booming back-to-school season, the NRF says.

Average back-to-school spending will be \$635, down from last year's average of \$689, the NRF says. Back-to-college spending also will shrink this year, the NRF says, to an average of \$837 for supplies – including apparel, electronics and dorm furnishings – down from \$907 last year. It estimates total U.S. spending will be \$26.7 billion.

The back-to-school drop comes despite a 7.3 percent increase in the cost of school supplies, fees and activities estimated by Columbus, Ohio-based Huntington Bank's annual "Backpack Index," also out Thursday.

The cost of back-to-school shopping could increase 36 percent from last year if students add a midprice \$300 tablet to purchases, according to the Backpack Index.

A new study from educational services company CourseSmart found 35 percent of college students now own a tablet, up from 7 percent in its 2011 survey.