

Make back-to-school gear last longer

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Most families are spending less this season on school supplies, and therefore don't want to waste money when things break due to normal use or rough handling by little hands.

More parents are making moves to protect the more expensive and most heavily used school purchases from failures—such as computers, musical instruments, sporting equipment and even the most abused item of all, backpacks.

The average family is expected to spend \$548.72 on school merchandise, and even more on college purchases, according to a survey from the National Retail Federation. That's a lot of money that could be wasted if products break down.

“We're seeing more parents taking advantage of service and replacement plans on school essentials, including computers, electronics and musical instruments, even pricey calculators and backpacks,” says Jamie Breneman, a spokesperson for N.E.W. Customer Service Companies, Inc. “It's about teaching kids to properly care for their most used items and making sure they're covered from unexpected repair costs.”

Manufacturers' warranties usually offer 90 days to one year of limited parts and labor. Take note of the word “limited.” Those warranties only cover manufacturers' defects. So if a key stops working on your kid's laptop, manufacturers could consider this wear and tear, which many don't cover. Most extended service plans cover such failures. Additionally, some cover accidental damage from handling. If you want peace of mind for those “oops” moments, opt for the extended service plan with accidental damage from handling.

No matter what, kids should be taught to take care of their things:

—Always transport or store laptops in protective pouches or bags. Keep cell phones in holsters or cases. If kids keep phones in pockets, make sure they can't easily slip out.

—Keep liquids away from computers, MP3 players, calculators and phones.

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—Don't throw backpacks on the floor. Hang them up or place them out of the way.

—Keep pens and pencils in a case so they don't leak in backpacks or puncture items.

—Clean musical instruments after use and put them back in cases.

Even the most well intentioned kids can be careless. So savvy parents have learned there are many service and replacement plans for school items:

—Computers and electronics are perfect candidates for extended service plans, protecting against costly repairs or replacement. The better plans protect against failures due to normal wear and tear, environmental factors (heat, dust and humidity), power surges or electrical failure, and even failure to perform at manufacturer specifications. Plus, reputable service plans will offer troubleshooting via phone or online portals where support is given around the clock. For college kids, access to free troubleshooting provides parents peace of mind knowing their kid's laptop is up and running.

—Musical instruments frequently suffer unintentional damage. Extended plans can be critical for the most popular band and orchestra instruments, like trombones, clarinets, flutes and more. Choose extended service or replacement plans that will either repair instruments or replace them.

—Even basic supplies can be covered, such as backpacks, pencil sharpeners and calculators. General coverage includes: 100 percent parts and labor, and protection against defects in material and workmanship, including those due to normal wear and tear. Backpack coverage also includes seam separation and zippers.

“No matter if students are working on reports on their computers, playing in football games or performing with the orchestra, parents are looking to sleep easier knowing their equipment is protected,” says Breneman.

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