Capital One survey: Canadian parents pivot to year-round planning to manage back-to-school budgets

School year expenses hit $9,080 per child in 2026, prompting families to focus less on last-minute deals in favour of dedicated savings and continuous budgeting.

(Toronto, ON) August 24, 2026.

For Canadian families, back-to-school spending no longer ends in September, it has become a year-round commitment. According to Capital One Canada's latest back-to-school survey, which polled over 1,000 Canadian parents, total annual education-related expenses, including food, school supplies and extracurriculars, have risen 18 per cent since 2024. Total annual expenses now average $9,080 per child (up from $8,836 in 2025 and $7,709 in 2024).

With 59 per cent of parents reporting that ongoing school expenses are higher than expected, 80 per cent have adopted year-round budgeting strategies to keep their household finances on track. Rather than relying on a single late-summer shopping trip, families are actively planning throughout the school year to handle recurring costs like lunches, extracurriculars, technology updates and mid-year supplies.

"Canadian parents are taking a proactive, year-round approach to back-to-school spending," says Becca Mintz, Managing Vice President, Capital One Canada. "Instead of relying on last-minute fixes, families are building sustainable financial habits with smart credit use. Setting aside funds in advance while using credit responsibly to manage expenses gives parents the control, confidence and flexibility to navigate the school year without financial surprises."

Shifting financial strategies

Although 51 per cent of parents report feeling stressed about back-to-school spending, families are moving away from last-minute, reactive tactics in favour of year-round planning. Many are already taking practical steps to plan ahead and manage spending:

- **51 per cent** of parents feel stressed in regards to back-to-school spending (up from 45 per cent back in 2025)
- **49 per cent** say improved budgeting has strengthened their financial situation compared to past years

- **59 per cent** of parents are actively looking for back-to-school sales or coupons this year, down 9 percentage points from 68 per cent in 2025
- **47 per cent** start saving well in advance for back-to-school purchases
- **45 per cent** maintain dedicated savings for back-to-school purchases

The evolving budget

While parents continue to plan for traditional back-to-school purchases, the survey found that recurring expenses are also shaping how families think about school-year spending.

Food represents the single largest annual expense, accounting for 40 per cent ($3,631 per child) of a family's average annual school-related spending. When looking specifically at upfront back-to-school costs, parents anticipate spending an average of $725 per child on lunches and snacks, $856 on sports and extracurricular activities, and $473 on technology.

Spending trends province to province

While back-to-school expenses are a shared reality nationwide, spending priorities vary significantly by region. Parents in Atlantic Canada report the highest annual food spend ($4,037 per child), while parents in Quebec report the highest expenditure on extracurriculars, daycare and school fees ($1,978 per child).

Percentage of parents who agree with the following statements	**British Columbia**	**Alberta**	**Saskatchewan and Manitoba**	**Ontario**	**Quebec**	**Atlantic Canada**
"I start saving for back-to-school well in advance."	39%	48%	50%	50%	44%	41%
"I use dedicated savings for back-to-school purchases."	41%	44%	45%	51%	38%	35%
"I use specific payment methods for back-to-school purchases." (rewards credit cards, buy now pay later services, points)	43%	46%	50%	51%	40%	47%
Avg. annual spending: food	$2,819	$3,298	$2,911	$2,937	$3,587	$4,037
Avg. annual spending: school/daycare/ extracurriculars	$1,481	$1,604	$1,793	$1,680	$1,978	$1,486
Avg. annual spending: toys/games	$349	$301	$338	$376	$452	$565

All annual spending costs are shown in CAD$.
Note: Regional base sizes vary (ON: n≈410, QC: n≈190, BC: n≈130, AB: n≈130, SK/MB: n≈80, ATL: n≈60). Results for SK/MB and Atlantic Canada should be interpreted as directional.

Back-to-school as a financial learning moment

Many Canadian parents (82 per cent) involve their children in back-to-school budgeting in some capacity, with 45 per cent specifically using these discussions to build financial responsibility. Back-to-school shopping serves as an ideal opportunity for families to instill positive money habits.

Capital One Canada offers practical tools and resources, like Credit Keeper and the Life & Credit Learning Hub, to help Canadians manage their money with confidence and make informed financial decisions.

For more information about Capital One Canada, please visit capitalone.ca.

Methodology

The survey was conducted online through Leger's LEO panel from June 15 to June 26, 2026, among 1,000 Canadians aged 18 or older who are parents with children under 18. No margin of error can be associated with a non-probability sample, such as a web panel. For comparison purposes, a probability sample of 1,000 respondents would yield a margin of error no greater than ±3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Results are compared to previous waves where applicable: 2025, n=1,003; 2024, n=1,005; and 2023, n=1,000. Significance testing was conducted at the 95 per cent confidence level.

Historical comparisons refer to previous survey waves conducted by Capital One Canada (2025: n=1,003; 2024: n=1,005; 2023: n=1,000).

About Capital One Canada