

BACK TO THE COOP FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL SUPPLIES

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By Rosie Nisanyan

According to the Coop's Equity, Access and Community Committee 2025 Demographic Survey, about one quarter of survey respondents have children living with them. For these families, the end of summer means one thing: BTS! No, not the K-Pop band's World Tour, but back-to-school preparation and all that it requires.

While back-to-school supplies most often include notebooks, calculators and pencils, a big area of expense and consideration is groceries. Fortunately, shoppers can expect both types of Coop goods to ease their children's transition back to class.

A CHANGING GROCERY LIST

With children out of school during the summer, families find themselves with more time—to spend with friends, play sports and actually eat a nutritious breakfast. New Coop member Nicole Zeiss says, “We buy more fun food and snacks [during the summer] because the kids are home more and have friends over. Much more fruit and breakfast food, because they have more time in the morning and fruit is so much better in the summer. Yogurt, cereal, breakfast burritos, eggs, croissants, banana bread, bagels, cream cheese, chips, cheese and lots of canned seltzer.” Member Nancy Benoist, whose kids are heading into seventh and ninth grade this fall, says, “In the summer, I lean more on snacks that can be easily grabbed from the kitchen. This summer we are buying a lot of grapes, watermelon, lemons for lemonade, and taco fixings to have on hand.”

But when summer ends, things change.

“I BUY MORE BULK SNACKS AND PACKAGED ITEMS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR, THINGS THAT CAN BE TOSSED INTO A LUNCH BAG.”

NANCY BENOIST

A recent survey found that 61% of consumers say their daily routine becomes more structured as fall begins. Between school, work and extracurricular activities, families have less time to prepare meals and instead rely more on easy, on-the-go foods that provide the nutrition needed to keep their kids full and their energy up. According to Numerator, during the school year households spend more on packaged snacks and

meals, with the highest increases going to products like canned fruit (+23%), dried fruit and fruit snacks (+22%) and nutrition and wholesome bars (+20%).

The same is true for Coop members.

Benoist says, “I buy more bulk snacks and packaged items during the school year, things that can be tossed into a lunch bag.” According to Zeiss, her high schoolers “have no time in the morning and HATE school lunch, so they are starving when they get home. They both refuse to pack lunches, so we are at the mercy of savory things they can eat right when they get home so they don’t ruin dinner, which in our house is late. Grape leaves, breakfast burritos, protein bars, salami, olives, cheese etc.”

EASING BACK-TO-SCHOOL STRESS

While it’s common for students to experience first-day jitters, parents may also experience some back-to-school anxiety. Recent trends like “lunch shaming” and viral lunch packing videos can make parents feel intimidated and even more stressed when trying to plan for their children’s school lunches. At the risk of embarrassing their child, they might feel the need to over-pack or splurge on aesthetic lunchboxes.

According to a survey from Hello Fresh, 56% of parents stress over expensive groceries, especially when school is in session. Meanwhile, Coop members are “grateful for the prices year-round.”

In addition to saving money on groceries this school year, Zeiss is also excited about “knowing that everything at the Coop is sourced well and probably low chemical, if not organic.” Much of the Coop’s fresh produce comes from local suppliers like Lancaster Farm Fresh Co-Op and Gotham Greens. The Coop’s commitment to sourcing “local and little” therefore pays off for back-to-school shoppers in more ways than one.

MAINTAINING COOP SHIFTS

As families change their schedules and shopping habits from season to season, the Coop remains largely consistent.

General Coordinator of Membership Operations Matt Hoagland says, “Each summer we see a drop in sales, which points to a drop in demand for products; shift sizes drop in kind...Overall we have a very stable system in place that doesn’t vary much per season. Member labor is very consistent as we are typically getting over 90% of the work we want scheduled and completed.”

Even with sleepaway camps and family vacations, Coop members still find time to work their shifts during the summer (only special events seem to keep them away!). According to Hoagland, the data show that about 70% of working members are in the range of plus-or-minus one work credit, regardless of the season: “We have been averaging around 680 members on leave during the year, which increases during the summer. We expect to hit around 1,200+ for the second half of July into August. The numbers will steadily decline back to the average towards the end of September. The rough increase of around 540 members, however, is not a significant increase overall.”

The summer heat doesn’t keep Coop members indoors either. When it comes to the kinds of shifts that get filled, “Cart Return gets filled all times of year, including the summer. In 2024 it was 99.75% filled, in 2025 it was 99.87% filled. Lifting filled much more last summer than the rest of the year when it’s colder and darker and more needed.”

Therefore, an ask of members from Hoagland as we head into a new school year and new routines: “For those who are able/up for it *who don’t typically do it*, working at least one Lifting shift outside of the summer would be a great support to the morning staff and those who work morning Lifting shifts regularly.”

Meanwhile, buyers are ordering larger quantities of school supplies this month, ensuring that Coop kids start school with everything they need, be it notebooks and index cards or healthy snacks.

Rosie Nisanyan has been a Coop member since 2024 and is the Arts & Culture Multi-media Correspondent for The Armenian Weekly.