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By Jennifer Altman for USA TODAY

Making selections: Chris McCoy and her daughter, Octavia, shop at a J.C. Penney in the Manhattan Mall in New York on Aug. 16.

Pencils, books and cool looks

Back-to-school teens like midtop sneakers and striped T-shirts

By Jayne O'Donnell and Hadley Malcolm
USA TODAY

Back to school doesn't just mean students are hitting the books again — they're also hitting the mall, looking for an updated wardrobe filled with the latest jeans, shoes and shirts.

What are they buying?

Super-faded and ripped jeans are large-
out, and the midtop (rather than low or

high-top) sneaker reigns, according to an interactive style game presented to shoppers ages 14 to 24 for USA TODAY by predictive analytics software company First Insight.

And stash the T-shirts with the "silly girl humor," recommends off-price fashion website Ideeli, echoing First Insight's findings that the "statement tops" aren't a top pick anymore.

Clothing purchases helped boost July's better-than-expected retail sales numbers, out last Tuesday, and teen shoppers — and their parents — are helping lead the charge.

"Teens are spending," says retail analyst Jennifer Black, adding that it's because



See photos of what's hot and what's not among students this year at money.usatoday.com.

they like to regularly update their outfits.

"Teens don't make investments in clothing," says Black, of Jennifer Black & Associates in Lake Oswego, Ore. "They're more apt to move on to the next trend."

Often, a new teen trend is the opposite of the one that preceded it.

"Everything is a reaction to the last thing that's cool," says Greg Seikoe, founder of the clothing and accessories website Karmaloop, which caters to fashion-forward young people.

The current coolest purchases:



PacSun

They're a go with women: But men are moving away from skinny jeans.

► **Jeans.** Medium to dark blue and brightly colored jeans are the most popular, according to First Insight and several retail experts. Skinny jeans remain popular with young women, but boot cuts are hottest for young men, who have all but abandoned skinny jeans, the data show.

But the bold colors won't be in for long. Teens who are "more fashion forward will get tired of colored jeans first" and go back to "distressed, faded washes," says Catherine Moelner, executive vice president of trend consulting firm Tobe. It's like a "return to the '90s."

Animal-print jeans were a low-ranked style on First Insight's survey, but flash-sale site Ideeli says they're still very popular with its shoppers.

"They are on fire," says Marie Ivanoff, Ideeli's merchandise director.

Khaki and camouflage, sometimes in animal prints, are selling even better than jeans at Karmaloop.



First Insight

Might not be seeing this: Love of bright colors and prints for tops may be fading.

► **Tees.** First Insight says graphic and striped tees will be popular with young men, while young women favor a classic, plain tee. The striped tank was ranked second most popular by young women, according to First Insight.



PacSun

Runner-up: The striped tank ranks just behind the classic tee among women.

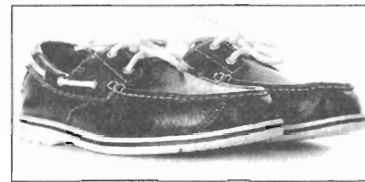
On the outs are shirts with sayings, First Insight's data show. "The feel-good-slogan-and-statements-on-tees trend is saturated," says Raquel Quimones, J.C. Penney senior manager in divisional trends for juniors, which caters to ages 18 to 23.

But Julia Diamond, a high school sophomore from Crafton, Md., says some kids still wear them even though "they're not as big." The 15-year-old says she has several, including one with a "periodic table of texting" and another that says, "I love British boys."



PacSun

Still in step: Wedge sandals remain high in the running as a likely purchase.



First Insight

Walking the plank? More men are just saying no to boat shoes.

► **Shoes.** A few years ago, boat shoes were popular even with some of the edgiest urban streetwear shoppers, Selkoe says. While they're still a favorite with many teens, First Insight found them among the least popular footwear styles for young men. Midtop sneakers were the top pick.

And after a few years with sneakers in wild colors and styles being hot, Selkoe says Reebok and Nike running shoes are now more preferred.

Flat sandals are most popular with young women, Ivanoff says.

"They are comfortable and appropriate for everyday wear, but they still make a fashion statement by incorporating colors and hardware," she says.

Wedge sandals are a close second, according to First Insight.

To parents weary of having to buy new clothes that teens are likely to grow out of, Selkoe insists the fashion industry is just "allowing them to express themselves." At least it isn't the morose, darker looks of the recession, he says.

"Clothing trends are impacted by the mood of the nation," Selkoe says. "There's a little more hope now."