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WAKE UP!

Great back-to-school breakfasts to keep kids going all day



**FUN NEW
LUNCH BOXES**

**EASY GRILLED
CHICKEN
AND BEEF**

**PIGS IN A
BLANKET!**

SCHOOL Daze

THE HOST OF FOOD NETWORK'S TEN DOLLAR DINNERS EMBRACES THE BACK-TO-SCHOOL SPIRIT

Last year, I saved all my back-to-school shopping for the last day of summer vacation. By the time my four daughters—then ages 7, 6, 5, and 5—and I hit our third store of the day, I was overwhelmed. I surveyed the packed Old Navy and imagined the worst: the five of us squashed into dressing rooms made for one; flagrant violations of the garment maximum; me rehanging clothes like a madwoman.

Trying to corral my shoppers (who—unlike their mom—just love the mall), I announced, “Sales rack first!” But my girls weren’t listening. They were in a huddle, the older ones giving the twins a pep talk, explaining the major privilege of starting elementary school: shopping in “a store with a dressing room.” The little ones listened as intently as if the wisdom were coming down from Mount Olympus.

Watching the girls delight in this coming-of-age ritual reminded me that back-to-school time is not just a date on the calendar. For kids, it’s like New Year’s Day, a chance to reinvent themselves. (“This year, I want to be great in math!” my 7-year-old announced.) It’s their opportunity to hit the restart button. And that begins with fresh backpacks, more grown-up shoes (goodbye, Velcro), and cool new lunch boxes. Why had I dreaded this?

It’s true, school shopping can be a hassle. But our yearly pilgrimage to multiple stores to track down that clearance backpack or 10-cent glue



Melissa's four daughters, from left: Margaux, 5; Valentine, 8; Charlotte, 7; and Océane, 5.

stick provides an annual yardstick of my daughters’ growth, like the pencil ticks on the wall registering their changing heights. As the supplies we stock up on—from shoes to sports equipment—change grade by grade, they make for a time capsule of my children’s lives.

This year my oldest girl told me she needs narrow-ruled instead

of wide-ruled paper, and we’ll buy more ballpoint pens than crayons or chubby markers. For the first time in d’Arabian history, not one princess will make an appearance on any item of clothing, backpack, or lunch box.

Get Melissa's money-saving tips and recipes in her Ten Dollar Dinners cookbook and stay in touch with her on Facebook, Twitter, and her website. melissadarabian.net

I just bought all four girls a calculator, and soon enough the oldest will need one that doesn’t come from the dollar bin but can actually calculate

exponents. Another tick.

Years ago, someone gave my husband and me some good advice: Don’t let the inconveniences of your kids’ infant years dictate the family you create; instead, be guided by the family you imagine sitting around your future Thanksgiving table. My greatest challenge is not letting small daily hassles obscure the big picture—the glorious mess that is life.

That doesn’t mean I’m going to enjoy every minute. But embracing the chaos can be a great coping mechanism for parenting. Or a ridiculously long checkout line. Note to self: Shop earlier this year.

5 WAYS TO MAKE BACK TO SCHOOL SPECIAL

- 1 Donate good-quality school supplies from last year (backpacks, lunch boxes) before buying new ones.
- 2 Have a special lunch while school shopping, even something as simple as a picnic on a mall bench.
- 3 Let your child pick one new item that is just for fun. (I love the dollar store or bin for this!)
- 4 In the first few weeks, invite the families of your children’s classmates over for coffee and muffins. Kids love to connect with peers in their own home.
- 5 Have your child write three questions on a note card to give to his or her teacher—What is your favorite meal? Do you have pets?—to develop a personal connection.