

Best in class

Wondering which backpack to get for your kid's preschool or kindergarten debut? We recommend you skip the Minions and Princess Poppy rucksacks — and opt for one of these awesome options, chosen for their long-term durability, comfort/ergonomics and enduring designs (guaranteed to outlast your child's latest cartoon-character obsession).

BY RACHEL GUYAH



The Carry All

L.L.BEAN EXPLORER

Popular for its many pockets and storage capacity — plus its ability to endure a lot of mileage over multiple years — this pack is also equipped for after-school adventures, thanks to its durable, weatherproof exterior. In addition to a spacious main compartment, it boasts a front-zip pocket with pencil slots and a key clip, a front stuff pocket for sweatshirts or other items, and two side mesh pockets for beverage bottles. Did we mention it has a lot of pockets?

Downside: It's a bit larger, so it may not be ideal for shorter or more petite kindergarteners.

Where to buy: Llbean.com or L.L.Bean retail stores

Ages: 6 and up

Cost: \$39.95



The Hiker

REI CO-OP TARN 12

If your kid likes to hit the trails as well as the books, this posture-friendly pack from REI is worth trying on for sure. The chest strap and hip belt help redistribute the bag's weight away from the shoulders, while the back panel's airflow channel helps keep your kid cool during those hotter spells during the school year (or summer travels).

Bonus: An exterior front stretch pocket is perfect for stashing a light jacket or sweatshirt.

Downside: Kids have only a few solid colors to choose from (no patterns or designs).

Where to buy: Rei.com or REI retail stores

Ages: 5–8

Cost: \$34.95



The Cutie

LANDS' END CLASSMATE

Durable, comfy and cute to boot, this baby is built to withstand the wear and tear of kindergarten (and beyond). The outer fabric has a water-repellent finish to combat spills from the sky (or juice box), while the sturdy, thick base keeps the pack upright when it's set down. Padded shoulder straps and an adjustable chest strap keep the fit comfortable and secure on your wiggle worm's body. And it comes in a variety of fun designs as well as solid colors.

Bonus: Custom monogramming and embroidery are available online.

Downside: It's low on pockets and zippers.

Ages: 4–7 (size small)

Where to buy: Landsend.com or Lands' End retail stores

Cost: \$34 (\$12.99 on sale)

The Eco-Hipster

ERGOBAG

Combining the ergonomic design of a hiking backpack with the everyday needs of a school bag, this award-winning backpack from a German startup is loaded with savvy features. The wide, padded hip belt moves the bag's weight from your kid's shoulders to the much stronger pelvic area, while the breathable back panel molds to the curve of the spine. Nearly everything is ultra-adjustable, ensuring a custom fit as your child grows.

Bonus: Reflective material in the fabric — made with 100 percent recycled PET plastic bottles — helps keep your kid visible.

Downside: It's got the highest price tag of all the bags listed here; and in the U.S. it's available only at select online retailers.

Where to buy: sportique.com

Ages: 3–5 (Mini), 5–9 (Prime)

Cost: \$54.95 (Mini), \$129.95 (Prime)



The Lightweight

THE NORTH FACE YOUTH RECON SQUASH

Weighing in at less than a pound (14.46 ounces to be precise), this ultralight pack boasts a trifecta of durability, comfort and purposeful storage. In addition to the main compartment, it features a zippered outer pocket to secure smaller items, plus two side mesh pockets for water bottles. The chest strap takes some of the weight off your kiddo's shoulders, while the padded back panel cushions the spine.

Downside: You won't find a lot of interior pockets. Larger kids may outgrow the bag's narrow profile.

Ages: 6–10

Where to buy: thenorthface.com or authorized dealers such as The North Face, Macy's, Dicks Sporting Goods and REI

Cost: \$50

Rachel Guyah is a Twin Cities-based writer, editor, and mother to an adorably dimpled energizer bunny (cleverly disguised as a preschooler). Learn more about her work at rachelguyah.com



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