

# US back-to-school ecommerce sales will grow more than 13% this year

Article

**The news:** Even after last year's spike, US back-to-school ecommerce sales will grow another 13.3% this year to **\$41.26 billion**, according to our **latest estimates**.

## By the numbers:

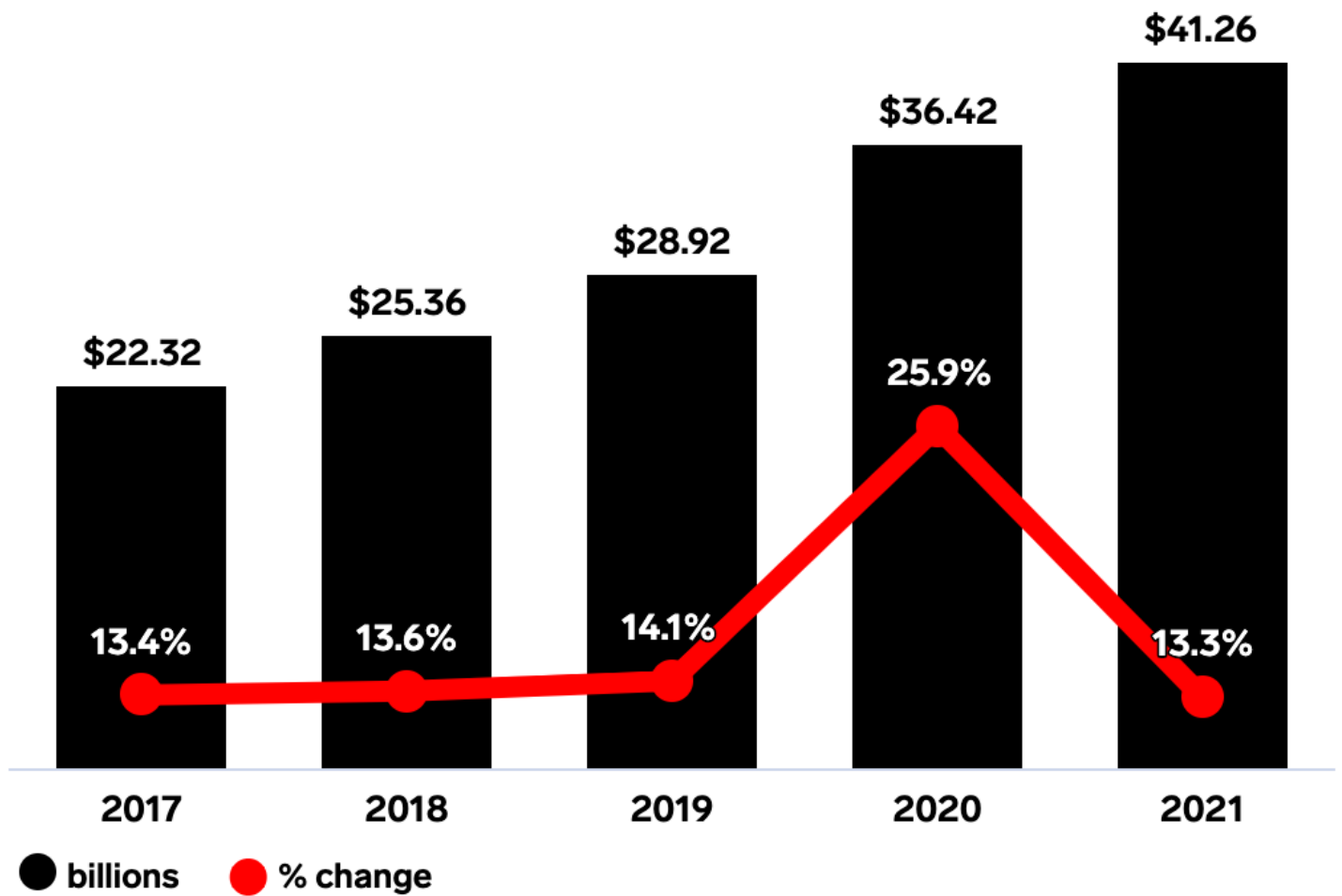
- We expect a strong rebound in back-to-school sales overall in 2021. After declining by 4.6% last year, **total back-to-school sales will grow by 9.3% in 2021 to reach \$95.83 billion**. Our estimates align with a **May 2021 survey from KPMG**, which found that this year's average back-to-school spending will be **\$268 per child** among US consumers who plan to buy school supplies. That's up nearly 9% from similar polling in 2020. Diving further, the survey found that **spending for preschool and college students will see the largest increases**, up 32% and 13%, respectively. High school and middle school students, meanwhile, will see more modest increases in spending, at 4% and 3%, respectively.
- The shift toward **online shopping over the past year will continue to push back-to-school sales online**. Notably, Amazon Prime Day, which took place in June this year, may have pulled forward some back-to-school spending, but we still expect the bulk of sales to occur in July and August. Ecommerce as a whole will grow its share of total back-to-school sales, increasing from **41.5% in 2020 to 43.1% this year**, per our forecast. That's a gain of more than 10 percentage points compared with 2019 (31.5%).
- **Apparel is expected to see particularly strong growth** as many students prepare for a return to in-person classes. Another May survey, from Shopkick, found that **60%** of US back-to-school shoppers said most of their budgets will go toward apparel this year, while only **10%** expected to spend most on technology. **Electronics will likely see less demand** this season compared with 2020, as the return to in-person classes lessens the need for such products. That said, the use of hybrid models in many classes will likely keep demand above pre-pandemic levels.

## Two challenges facing this back-to-school season:

- **Rising prices.** Disruptions to supply chains and the resulting shortages are sparking some concerns about **the rising costs of school supplies**. The **KPMG survey** found that among US consumers who expected to spend more per child this season, **39%** said it was because sticker prices are going up. This expectation among shoppers may lead to **a greater focus on price comparison and bargain hunting** this year. These activities could be made slightly easier if consumers choose to do more of their shopping online.
- **The mental health of students.** A March poll from Navigate360 **found** that **the majority of 16- to 17-year-olds in the US feel unprepared to handle their anxiety** about returning to the classroom in the fall. It's important to remember that many students under the age of 18 are

still **not vaccinated**, as the US only recently expanded vaccine eligibility to those ages 12 and older. Marketers should be careful about the tone of back-to-school ads that may exacerbate some of the concerns students have about returning to in-person learning in the fall.

## Retail Ecommerce Back-to-School Season Sales US, 2017-2021



Source: eMarketer, May 2021

eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com