



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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## **Spend less on school supplies**

An estimated 5 million students (from pre-school to secondary school) are to splurge on new school uniform and other items when school reopens next year, parents could easily spent more than RM2 billion just for this period alone.

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) urges parents not to buy entirely new sets of uniform and other school supplies when school reopens if the existing uniform and school supplies are still usable.

We are very concerned about the economic uncertainties and it is time to exercise restraint on our expenditure. With the prices of goods going up, it is important that our spending should be need-based rather than splurging on things that you may not need now.

Why do we spend hundreds of Ringgit on school items that those been used last year are still in relatively good condition? With the money saved, it is possible to put it into better use such as providing more nutritious food for the family, or for paying school, library and sports fees. We should not forget that there may be school bus and tuition fees to be paid as well and every Ringgit saved can ensure that our budget will go a long way.

It is a financially draining experience to shop for children's school supplies. The uniform together with bag, stationery and shoes can cost almost RM200 and those do not include sports apparel, books and other necessities.

Another worrying turn of events is the announcement by the Deputy Education Minister Teo Nie Ching at the Dewan Rakyat on 6 December 2018. She said that starting from 2019, lower secondary students will be able to bring computer devices to school to substitute traditional textbooks.

If this is implemented, it is going to polarise students according to their economic background. Students and parents from poor families feel will feel pressured. Moreover, has the Education Ministry given it a thought about students losing or damaging their computer devices? It is going to stress the parents financially.

Even with a 'modest' 30 per cent increase in expenditure, a parent would have to spend an additional RM45 for each child as compared to what he/she had spent for the item last year and this amount is highly significant as it can easily tip over a family budget. This amounts to a huge sum of money to fork out during the beginning of the year.

Concerning uniforms, since most children have at least two sets of uniform to wear, the chances for the uniform to be threadbare coinciding with the end of the year is less likely and thus they can still be worn.

If 70 per cent (3.5 million) of the students are to refrain from buying two sets of uniform per person basing on needs basis and a bag, then RM1.2 billion would have been saved nationwide. This amount excludes the cost of other miscellaneous items.

With the education system's emphasis on a student's participation in co-curricular activities, parents would have to buy club/society uniforms that can cost about RM100 each and it depends on how many clubs and uniformed societies the student joins.

Parents should not subscribe to the idea of acquiring new items for the start of a new school session. Such ideas have been highly commercialised. Children should also be taught to appreciate the value of money and to continue to use items that are still in good condition. In the case of uniforms, it is unless they outgrew the uniform or perhaps if they are going to school for the first time.

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) should work with parents to dismantle such unhealthy 'culture' which can cause undue stress and worry to parents and students who cannot afford. Moreover, it is not the new uniforms that will determine the academic success of the students and this is the value that has to be ingrained in the parents' mind. It causes a divide between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

CAP also calls on the government to urgently check on the quality of the uniform available in the market. The uniforms should be of an acceptable quality to last the students a decent duration.

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