

HERE'S HOW TO GO BACK TO CLASS IN STYLE

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It's too soon to know if Britney Spears will be able to get her career back on track, but at least the midriff-baring fashion trend she made so popular appears to be derailed for this back-to-school shopping season.

"Thank God, there's length back in everything, as opposed to the midriff look, which is completely gone," said Diane Jones, sales manager for the women's division at JCPenney at Westfield Franklin Park.

Instead, stores are stocked full of cleaner looks.

"I'm happy to see a lot of the sloppiness going away and lines becoming cleaner, tailored, more feminine," explained Betsy Carr, a professor in the fashion design and merchandising department at Kent State University who is originally from Sylvania Township. She specializes in women's wear.

For junior high students and older, she said a close-fitting jacket is really important. Animal prints will continue to be popular, but there's a surprising return, too, of lighter jewel tone colors, such as cobalt blue.

Those looking for back-to-school fashions this month won't be alone. Last August, Americans spent \$7.1 billion at family clothing stores, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

A perennial favorite of school-aged youths at those stores, of course, remains denim.

"The number one thing with back-to-school that we noticed — that we see year in and year out — is the denim," said Mark Herman, manager-in-training at the American Eagle store at the West Toledo mall.

Last year, the "destroyed look" was huge but circumstances have changed since then.

"We try to focus on uniforms now in Toledo, and they don't allow for holey jeans," Mr. Herman said. "We see a lot [of] people are buying a bunch of khakis and polos, just because that's what they need for uniforms in school."

At Toledo Public Schools, high school students cannot wear hooded clothing, and jeans and sweat suits are prohibited as well. Dress pants may be in solid colors of dark blue, khaki, or black, and females may wear skirts, jumpers, slacks, shorts, skorts, or capris as long as they are knee length or longer.

Regarding tops, females are allowed to wear blouses and traditional polos with collars and turtlenecks while males can have dress shirts, polos, oxford button-down shirts with collars, and turtlenecks. Any solid color is OK, but there cannot be any logo or insignias on them.

Complete uniform information for all grade levels in the district is available at www.tps.org.

Target stores also have uniform basics for school that vary from store to store. Ana Williams, a spokesman for the company from Minneapolis, said that layering is a key fashion trend these days.

For women and girls, mixing a cotton blazer with a long tank top — maybe in a moss green or slate blue — would be a nice look. Or pairing a jumper dress with leggings.



Kyle Gray models jeans topped with a long sweater. (THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY)

At American Eagle, Mr. Herman said sweater vests are back, and they're especially good for layering with polos or button-downs for guys and tank tops for girls.

"We're going to notice a huge jump in the sweater vests as soon as it starts cooling down now," he said.

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