



Zonar Releases 2026 Back-to-School Readiness Report, Finding Large Readiness Gaps

New survey finds only 15% of transportation leaders are ready for the school year with 18% carrying meaningful readiness gaps.

SEATTLE, WA, UNITED STATES, July 23, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Zonar](#), the leading provider of smart fleet management and safety solutions, today released the 2026 [Back-to-School Readiness Report](#), a survey-based benchmark of how student transportation leaders are preparing fleets, drivers and budgets for the new school year. Conducted with [School Transportation News](#), the survey gathered responses from 128 superintendents, transportation directors and fleet managers nationwide. The report surfaces more than 80 unique data points and looks at readiness levels, budget pressures and technology investment plans heading into the 2026-2027 school year.

District leaders are entering the fall with more pressure and less room to adjust. Diesel prices spiked in 2026 while 41% of districts report flat technology budgets and 19% report budgets that shrank. There is not a lot of wiggle room and it shows in how prepared people are feeling as they go into the new year. Among respondents, only 15% call their fleet fully prepared with all systems confirmed, with 18% say they're carrying meaningful gaps into the new school year. That is a lot of districts with open questions for the first day of school.

"The first day of school is unforgiving," said Rachel Trindade, Chief Marketing Officer, Zonar. "One open route, one missing driver, or one unresolved operational issue can disrupt students, families and staff. Readiness isn't a checkbox, but the outcome of hundreds of decisions made across people, processes and technology. This report gives transportation leaders a benchmark for where the industry stands and where districts invest to support drivers and simplify day to day processes."

Key metrics in the report

Driver staffing and route coverage rank as the top challenge for 77% of respondents heading into the school year.

Purchase approval sits largely outside the transportation department: only 24% of transportation directors hold final purchase authority, while superintendents approve 31% of

purchases, school boards 21% and finance departments 14%.

Nearly a third of districts, 32%, report procurement cycles of six to 12 months, a timeline that puts pressure on any technology decision tied to the new school year.

Overall, 36% of districts plan no new technology investments this year. Among those investing, routing software leads at 20%, followed by student ridership tracking at 16% and driver coaching at 14%.

The transportation leaders navigating these pressures most effectively tend to share a patterns: they build the safety and ROI case before the budget conversation starts, they invest in tools their drivers find supportive rather than intrusive and they look for technology that reduces system overhead rather than adds to it. Getting more out of the technology available instead of inflating their budget.

The 2026 Back-to-School Readiness Report gives school fleets a benchmark for where their fleet stands against similarly sized peers. To download the full report, visit <https://www.zonar.com/reports/2026-back-to-school-readiness-report/>

Join our webinar on the 2026 Back-to-School Readiness Report, register at <https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/c0fb9bf8-36f0-4106-92fb-8577dec0dc0e@048bb902-9f89-4f71-bba6-5a70675981c2>.

About Zonar

Zonar combines a unified fleet management platform with reliable telematics hardware and always-on human support, giving mission-critical fleets precise, trustworthy data to improve safety, ensure compliance and reduce operating costs. Proven every day in student transportation, where it safeguards millions of children, Zonar's technology and partnership deliver the trust, transparency and confidence public-sector, field service and vocational fleets need to perform when it matters most. To learn more, go to www.zonar.com. To learn about Zonar Bus Suite's routing optimization, student ridership tracking, and parent communications, go to <https://www.zonar.com/solutions/bus-suite/>.

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