



BACK TO SCHOOL 2026



The Back-to-School Checklist

12 things to fix before next August, from six transportation leaders who just lived it.

Objects in mirror are closer than they appear. So is next August.

From the live panel series recorded September 9 and
September 23, 2026 · busright.com/backtoschool

Lessons learned from the back to school crunch

In September every director knows exactly what broke and why. By June some of that knowledge is forgotten, and the following year the back to school crunch turns into a mad dash yet again. The chaos is unavoidable, but we're doing our best to make the next year better than the last.

So we wrote it down. Across two live panels, six transportation leaders from six states compared notes on what actually worked in their districts. What follows is the distilled version, 12 practices you can reference now, next year and into the future to make back to school better.

THE DAY-ONE PRINCIPLE

Safety is the day-one scoreboard. If every student got to school and home safely, the first day was a success.

Wrong turns and late buses will happen. Stay calm, give it a couple of days, then adjust.

HOW TO USE IT

Work the list in order. The first items belong on your spring calendar, the middle belongs to summer and staff week, and the last two never come off the list. Check each box when the practice has an owner and a date, not when it feels done.

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

Twelve practices, *four phases*.

PHASE 1

Spring, before the rollover

- 01** Start the timeline in spring
- 02** Make transportation opt-in
- 03** Route rising students before rollover
- 04** Meet with special education early

PHASE 2

Summer

- 05** Set hard deadlines for families
- 06** Communicate early and on every channel
- 07** Align with enrollment and the SIS
- 08** Build a driver readiness plan

PHASE 3

Staff week and day one

- 09** Protect office focus time
- 10** Plan late changes safely

PHASE 4

All year

- 11** Treat retention as pay, speed and culture
- 12** Stop unneeded work and measure the rest





01

PHASE 1

Spring, *before the rollover*

☐ 1

Start the timeline in spring

Set dated deadlines for SIS rollover, routing, parent notices and a daily agenda for staff week. Working back from day one turns August surprises into May tasks.

☐ 2

Make transportation opt-in

Have parents flag in the SIS whether they need a bus so only riders go into routing. Open bus registration between spring break and the last day of school.

☐ 3

Route rising students before rollover

In May, map rising 6th and 9th graders onto existing routes and add stops where needed, so everything is ready when the July rollover takes effect.

☐ 4

Meet with special education early

Confirm placements, service needs, behavior supports and route details before day one, not during week one.

02

PHASE 2 Summer

-
- ☐ **5 Set hard deadlines for families**

Publish cutoff dates for registration, address changes, alternate stops and special service requests, and hold them.
 - ☐ **6 Communicate early and on every channel**

Start family communication in spring, repeat through summer and again right before school begins. Use the parent platform, email and text, social media, the district website and in-person events.
 - ☐ **7 Align with enrollment and the SIS**

Nightly downloads and connected systems, so student data reaches transportation accurate, complete and daily. If you are still on paper, start now and give yourself time to learn the tools.
 - ☐ **8 Build a driver readiness plan**

Route sheets, dry runs, device training and a clear escalation path for questions, so a driver running a route for the first time on day one is not guessing.
-

Working back from day one turns August surprises into May tasks.

03

PHASE 3

Staff week *and day one*

☐ 9

Protect office focus time

Send parent calls to voicemail for the two weeks before school and answer them in order. Once school starts, move school requests to shared sheets and chat instead of calls.

☐ 10

Plan late changes safely

Publish turnaround expectations for families and schools, and avoid last-minute route changes except for real emergencies. Give wrong turns a couple of days before you re-route.

04

PHASE 4

All year

☐ 11

Treat retention as pay, speed and culture

Run salary studies, answer applicants and book interviews right away and make hiring decisions together with your team. Partner tightly with HR and keep staffing needs visible to district leadership.

☐ 12

Stop unneeded work and measure the rest

Look for buses that overlap on the same roads. One district cut route mileage about 20 percent in 24 months and freed drivers to cover as subs. Track the data, get the most from the buses and drivers you have and share the team's workload, wins and needs with leaders all year.

THANK YOU TO OUR PANEL

Every practice in this checklist came from the directors who *joined us live*.

Recorded across two sessions of In The Rearview, September 9 and September 23, 2026.

SESSION 1 · SEPTEMBER 9

Marc Medina

Supervisor of Transportation,
Farmingdale SD, NY · NYAPT
President

Mike Satterfield

Chief of Transportation, Forsyth
County Schools, GA

Sarah Birdsong

Director of Transportation, Chapel
Hill ISD, TX

SESSION 2 · SEPTEMBER 23

Peggie L. Overton

Director of Transportation, Agua
Fria Union HSD, AZ

Dawnett Wright

Director of Transportation,
Peninsula SD, WA · NAPT Region 5
Director

Ben Bennett

Transportation Director, Emmett
SD, ID

*Moderated by Keith Corso, co-founder
and CEO, BusRight.*

Want the full conversations? Both replays live at
busright.com/backtoschool, along with highlight clips
from each session.



ABOUT BUSRIGHT

BusRight is the all-in-one student transportation platform districts use to build routes, help drivers navigate, account for student ridership, monitor fleet health and keep parents in the loop.

Directors, dispatchers and drivers run their whole operation in one place, from routing and driver navigation to student ridership and fleet health. We host In The Rearview so transportation teams can compare notes. See what we do at busright.com.