



SCHOOL DISTRICTS HARD HIT BY ENERGY COST INCREASES

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School districts are considering dramatic steps such as four-day weeks, colder classrooms and fewer field trips to deal with rising energy costs this winter.

While rising energy costs will affect many households, some school districts may pay double or more for gas and heat bills.

Plymouth school district in Massachusetts reported that it will likely go more than \$600,000 over budget this year. The superintendent recommended that staff and students ask for warm sweaters for Christmas. He was only half-kidding, the Enterprise of South of Boston newspaper reported.

Last year, Abington School District in Massachusetts spent \$7,000 on gasoline. This year it expects to pay \$18,000.

Conservation Efforts

Homeowners across America have been advised to dial down the thermostat and check their doors and windows for insulation leaks.

Big, drafty schools expect to do the same.

One school district in Hanover, Mass. plans to lower classroom temperatures as far as comfort permits, and many other schools in surrounding districts have said they will begin covering their windows with plastic sheeting to lessen the draft.

In order to save on gas, Ohio's Princeton School District canceled most field trips, will pool athletic teams for competitions and send only the pep band, not the full band, to away games.

Some students said they are disappointed with the changes.

Brenda Dinsdale of Reinbeck, Iowa told the WCF Courier that her seventh-grade daughter, Tessa, was unhappy to learn that the annual seventh-and-eighth-grade chorus field trip to Adventureland for the spring was canceled.

“It is something they look forward to, and now they can’t because of gas prices,” she said.

But others understand the pressures schools are under.

“The things that are the most important are the basics,” Chelse Garvey of Freedom, Wis. told the Post-Crescent. “A field trip is nice, but heat is necessary.”

The Greencastle-Antrim School District in Greencastle, Pa. considered canceling classes for the month of January when heat is most expensive and weather is its coldest, but then schools would not meet the state required 180 class days.

Schools in Jackson County, Kentucky will shorten the school week to four days, the Record Herald reported.

Madeira, an Ohio district, is working to consolidate its school bus routes, making students wait longer, but reducing the number of high school buses from six to four and saving over 500 miles of travel daily.

"I think that was needed, because the high school busses are not even half-full most of the time," Madeira PTA President-elect Candy Hopewell Caesar told the Cincinnati Enquirer. "I think priorities should be saving taxpayers money because I don't think they've done that up until now."

Paying the bill

Even with these conservation measures, questions of how to pay bills loom over the heads of many administrators.

The costs of heating the schools could fall to the taxpayers, forcing residents to pay more to heat both their homes and their local schools.

Avon, Mass. District Superintendent Margaret Fierswyck said she may have to call a special town meeting to ask for more funds.

Officials in Brockton, Mass. said their office heating bill will probably be an extra \$200,000, but they will wait to see how exactly how much before deciding what programs to cut.

Plymouth residents are waiting to see if their new "green" school -- an energy-efficient building with solar panels and motion-sensor lights that shut off to save electricity -- is the antidote to unpredictable fuel prices.

-- *Compiled by Siobhan Boland for NewsHour Extra*

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